



**Plumb**



# **Plumb**

David Sprecher





Now I live Ashima Shiraishi's future. At the time of this writing, Ashima Shiraishi is fourteen years and 289 days old. I am now her, aged thirty-two years, 295 days. With the exception of some muddy plots of recent time, I remember my life as her from the day I first climbed Rat Rock when I was six to this shared present, alone in a vacant museum.

I remember the details of my youth as Ashima through language foreign to my other past. I remember, for example, when I was eight years old sending a V10 graded climb called Power of Silence and being told that I possessed a rare talent for bouldering. I, the narrator, was ignorant of all climbing terminology prior to living Ashima's future. I only know from being her that "sending" means "completing," that bouldering problems are graded from V1 to V15, and that sending a V10 is indeed a rare achievement for an eight year old.

I should also note that these memories are distinctly embodied and are indigenous to a body very unlike my own. As Ashima, I can feel my climbing achievements in my limbs. When I recall sending Crown of Aragorn during my tenth year, I can feel the route replay inside me. I feel

the slinking rhythm of my breath and movement together, evenly and continuously renegotiating my place on the rock. I can feel the pain of gripping a shallow hold, while projecting my next two moves, anticipating the reward of the more generous hold above. Most of all, I recall the complex amalgam of fingers slipping, stomach dropping, moving air and disappointment, behind and beneath all my memories of success.

In the interest of conveying events essential to Ashima's character, I will briefly summarize these successes. When I was thirteen I solved two different V14s, Golden Shadow and The Swarm, and was only the second woman ever to do so. That same year I also became the first woman and youngest person to complete a 5.15a sport climb. In 2015, 2017, and 2018 I won the IFSC World Youth Championships for lead and bouldering and in 2020 I took silver for lead at the Summer Olympics in Tokyo.

For the next four years I was decisively one of the three strongest climbers on the planet. I completed the two most difficultly-graded sport climbs in the world, La Dura Dura (5.15c) and Palindrome (5.16a), and won six international competitions (including the World Cup for lead and the World Championships for bouldering in 2022). Two feature-length documentaries were made about me, one in the US and one in Japan, and I was the first climber in the world to become a household name comparable to Roger Bannister, Serena Williams or Duncan Vidal. I can still feel the squirmy pride induced by my grinning image tiled across a facade of Wheaties boxes.

Now keep in mind that Ashima would never be so boastful. I, the narrator, am simply reciting the memories I possess as Ashima. I, Ashima, remember these events but would never parade them in the above manner. As the narrator, though, I'd like to convey that being Ashima feels like being

a superhero. As her, I possess an extremely refined sense of how my body moves through space that changes the way I see. Every feature of my environment is seen through the lens of how it affords itself to me, what kind of passage it provides. In memories of walking through the city, I'm often accompanied by a projected avatar, scrambling over garbage trucks, weaving through scaffolding, or edging cornices. I move through dense crowds untouched, always stepping into a foreseen emptiness in my avatar's wake. I'm five-one, 108 pounds, but my strength and agility make me feel unmarkable.

My climbing career ended when I shattered my left wrist in a fall the day after my 24th birthday. I couldn't climb at all for six months, and my carpal bones, particularly my capitate and lunate, so crucial to gripping, have never fully recovered. I was shocked and depressed by the sudden turn in my life. It took a year of grieving to reorient away from full-time climbing. But by my twenty-fifth birthday, the serenity of relative anonymity, and a wealth of time and curiosity, liberated my thirst for new kinds of problem solving.

I made my first work of art from the final hold on the 2020 Olympic wall, which I received as a trophy alongside my medal. The object resembled two enlarged bananas, fused together, spooning along the length of their curves. Tight to the surface of this form, I sewed and glued the pelt of a white stuffed bunny that I'd coveted through childhood. Though I never exhibited it, I always intended to bolt it high enough on a gallery wall that I could jump and touch it but not grab on. I secretly titled the work "High Past" and never spoke of it to anyone.

My career as an artist apparently began with a show at Golden C Gallery, though these years are far hazier than the years of my early youth. I'd had a studio for some time by then but my work was not exceptional, so I suspect I

leveraged my celebrity to get the show. The largest but most subtle work was an alteration to the square back wall of the gallery. I hired two carpenters to build a convex armature over the face of the entire wall that was then shelled with masonite and painted to match the other walls. At its center, the surface bulged four and a half inches into the room. It was evenly domed as if the back wall had been removed, and a white ball, bigger than a city block, plugged the resulting hole. The lighting was subtle, and the wall's pregnancy revealed itself slowly. I think that piece was called "Bad Hold," but it might have been called "Good Suck." The rest of the show consisted of miniature models of the fourth, fifth, and sixth tallest mountains in the world, and a wall text describing in great detail how to advance around the perimeter of the gallery without touching the floor.

That show took place in 2028. I, Ashima, and I both feel it was very bad. Nonetheless, and for no good reason, I'm now confident that I'll make something better. It's 2034 and I'm sitting on the floor of an empty museum. I have little else to contextualize my existence in this space. I don't know what museum I'm in, nor what I'm supposed to be doing here. I have a mottled recollection that it's my duty to produce art here, but under what timeframe, or budget, or auspices, or with what materials, I do not know. I'm clothed in a black cotton gi. I'm holding a plumb bob and I'm not wearing shoes.





The floor is red. After standing and turning to face one of this gallery's two exits, I take three confident strides but my fourth doesn't land. Something invisible and unflinchingly anchored in space stuns me between my breasts. *Fffffff...* My sternum bounces, the motion of my torso is starkly reversed, and my left foot is returned to its place of departure. The blow of surprise is as violent as the collision and I bray, wet and powerful, with disbelief. Snot flies. My nerves crescendo and fade, and I gather my vision around it, my snot, poised in space, dangling from a chest height... *absence?* I'm confused. This museum is less empty than it looks. With wide eyes, and my right hand, I reach out.

The invisible volume that hangs the mucus, the density that struck me, is felted and firm. It feels like a tennis ball. I can feel the seams. I lean into my palm and the ball yields only a slight distortion, as if the center of the air inside is fixed to space. I grip it and lean back. The muscles that wrap my ribs and upper back contract to secure my shoulder. The ball doesn't budge. My strained fingers around the unseen thing look absurd and the disparity between what I'm seeing and feeling makes me giddy. Holding firmly, I walk clockwise around it with my whole body angled centrifugally away. The felt chafes my snotty fingers and I'm surprised that the ball doesn't rotate. There must be immobile rays radiating between the central anchor and the ball's hide on which the air molecules are tracked like trains, limited to back and forth motion. It resists rotation on any axis. I complete my orbit and remove my hand to view a hollow shell of

translucent, felted mucus. It looks like a soap bubble that's fuzzy: the specter of a spheroid rodent.

*So what else is invisibly anchored here?* I'm thinking the safest way to proceed is very slowly with my arms perpetually scanning the air within reach. I realize that I was naive to so boldly orbit the ball a moment ago. Anything can be anywhere. To finish clearing the immediate vicinity, I crouch and waddle through all the space below the ball then stand and sweep my arms above it. *Nothing*. With my back to the phlegm, I take one big step then initiate baby-stepping a wider orbit. My method is thus: I take a small step with a tense abdomen and my arms straight out, then without walking I touch all the space I can, then I take another small step. There is redundancy in this approach, my arms sweep the same volumes many times over, but Ashima and I both have a propensity for thoroughness and I can see no reason to rush.

Slow and steady, I complete my second orbit and step out to begin my third. I'm now obeying a ten-foot radius. My second discovery arrives halfway through this round, diagonally above and in front of me, about two feet over my head. While raising my arm, my right index fingernail bumps a thing. I'm nipped. The schism between my visual and haptic perceptions is a headier disturbance this time, more observable in the wake of anticipation. I pause to mind the rift. *So odd*. I lean towards the contact, wiggling my fingers. The surface is smooth but soft, definitely a rubbery plastic. Where my finger initially touched seems to be the underside of an elliptic cone with its base angled towards the ceiling. The upturned base is saddled like a potato chip and has an opening in it that affords the cone's hollow interior. There is a half-inch rim around the opening, which makes me think this is some kind of respirator, though the aperture wouldn't

accommodate even my small mouth and nose. The object is roughly the size of my fist.

I map my way down the outside walls of the cone and find that the narrow end tapers more gradually like the spout at the bottom of a funnel. The spout becomes a tube, a finger thick, made of the same hard rubber, that continues out into space beyond my reach. Before pursuing it, I return to the mouth of the funnel and test its resistance. Like the tennis ball, its soft surface gives slightly but its form is stubbornly anchored in space. I probe the opening and confirm that the shape is hollow through to the tube. I feel again the rim around the opening... *Ha! Oh...* I know what this is! Or might be...? I think this funnel... *this is a female urinary device!* A fud! As Ashima I remember receiving one as a joke gift from my father after expressing my desire to piss off a cliff. *What a strange...* I smell my probing hand but there's no definite odor.

*So where does the tube go?* I convey the coiled plumb bob to my right hand and trace the cone down to the tube with my left. With my right fist scanning in front of me, and my left fingers high on the tube, I pursue it towards the center of the room. Like the other invisibles, the tube is solidly fixed in space. After eight paces, it veers sharply down and left and I crouch to track it towards the floor. A foot above the floor, my hand is stopped by a vertical artery that the tube flows into. Its gauge is about twice the initial tube's. I tap it to see if it's hollow and an open *tunk* answers it is. The artery proceeds straight up from the juncture and I stand to follow it towards the ceiling. I extend my arm above my head and stand on my toes but encounter no top and no off-shoot. Looking up, I see a small hole in the top of the room, directly above the shaft, that reveals what looks like another lit space. *Huh.*

I put the plumb bob in my gi pocket and grip the vertical shaft as high as I can with both hands. My strong arms easily pull my weight off the ground and I lock my feet around the artery with a rope-climbing foot grip. The surface has ample tack, like the rubber-coated grip of a hammer, and my ascent is effortless. I pull with my arms, then secure what I've gained by locking my feet. Within forty-five seconds I'm touching the ceiling. I settle into a comfortable hold and look down.

The room is a large rectangle, maybe eighteen by twenty five paces, and I'm now four body-heights off the floor. The walls look like white drywall and the floor is concrete, dyed oxblood red. Over a large portion of its center, the floor is hatched with a network of curved scars as if whipped by a floating aggressor before it had fully cured. There is a single small hole in the floor, about four paces from this artery, on the side of the room unoccupied by the ball and the fud.

The ceiling that my head is touching is one huge pane of frosted glass dropped below the true ceiling. Behind the glass is a grid of twelve evenly-spaced low-Kelvin fluorescent rings, each about two feet in diameter. The effect is a soft light, far creamier than is typical in galleries. The saturated floor lends body to the light and its viscosity is eerie in the presence of invisible objects. I now notice a second hole in the glass directly over the hole in the floor. There's also the hole immediately over me where the shaft penetrates to the level above. Because the shaft is present, I can't press my face to this hole and can only look through at an angle. I can see that there's about a head between the dropped ceiling and the true ceiling, and above that another head of solid concrete. All I can see of the space above is a white light, whiter than the light of this room, that's shining through a similar glass ceiling. I look down. The sight of my feet braced against the invisible shaft is funny.

I turn my attention to the distant loogie orb where it levitates below me. It's barely visible against the deep red and I can just make it out by a glint of diffracted light on its pate. It seems the phlegm is viscous enough that the felt will grip it indefinitely. For no particular reason I start shifting my body from side to side while keeping my eyes on the ball. As I move, the glint arcs back and forth. *What a strange pair of objects...*

Ashima once made an artwork from an unbranded white tennis ball. I soaked the ball for three days in a tincture of hyraceum, a musk derived from the petrified urine of hyraxes. I discovered hyraceum while doing smell research a few years ago when odor-art was resurfacing. Hyraxes are small animals native to South Africa that resemble guinea pigs but are genetically related to elephants and manatees. Oddly, their urine is gelatinous not liquid. More oddly, hyrax colonies will secrete their goopy pee in the same spot for centuries and over time it forms hardened mounds. Hyraceum is made by soaking chunks of this material in sugar-cane alcohol. I chose to scent tennis balls because they exude an association with their own singular synthetic odor and because of their strangely mammalian hide. They also carry the legacy of bourgeois ...*Oof...*

*Uff! Wow...*  
*Fud!*  
*God damn...*  
*I have to pee...*  
*I have to pee now...*  
*Ach!*  
*My bladder... God damnit!*  
*I have to pee in that...*  
*So sudden...*  
*the feeling of having-to-pee...*  
*...is an idea.*  
*...What?*  
*Down!*  
*I have to pee in that fud now...now...*  
*...God damnit...*  
*God dammit!*  
*Go down!*  
*Outstretched arms...*  
*Soles descending...*  
*The threat of incontinence...*  
*Get down pisser!*  
*Deep panic...*  
*Get down!*  
*The floor.*  
*Calm...*  
*The floor...*  
*Clam!*  
*Breathe...*

I speed-walk my clenched pelvis, guided by the tube, back to the urinary device. With my hands over my head, gripping the rim of the aperture, I swing my legs up and wrap them around the tube. By hoisting my torso parallel to the floor against the underside of the tube, I'm able to lock my right foot and shin around it and swing my left leg to throw my weight above it. I overshoot completely and roll over the top, but I'm able to shift my grip on the cone and leverage it to correct my mistake. I'm now breathing into the mouth of the urinal, balanced on my stomach with my legs on either side of the conduit. The pressure of the tube between my legs is holding my pee, as I and I both did manually as children, but it's also vicing my bladder. I'm desperate.

*Heave!* I pull my crotch forward along the tube till it's just behind the fud and, seated upright, find my balance. My hands are on the aperture and my urethra is on the tube but I need the reverse to be true. I move my right hand to the tube behind me, then heft my left leg over the fud so that I'm side-saddling the tube. Now I swing my right leg over to complete the 180 and shift my hips back so that my clothed crotch nestles the cupped opening. The swell of anticipation is destroying my will. *I'm going to pee now.* With an awkward yank I loosen the ties of my pants and pull the waist below the cone. The instant my vaginal flesh contacts rubber my legs melt into space.



The pale yellow beam surges like a laser into the room. Ten feet out, it rounds the steep downward curve and its speed is halved as it begins filling the thicker vertical artery. The release is joyous but my bladder still feels full. With my feet dangling and welling with blood, I watch the liquid rise through the invisible conduit. Already it's at my eye level. I track it, up and up, now approaching the ceiling, and I'm tweaked by the confused sensation that I'm urinating vision. The bond between the feeling of release and the sight of rising liquid triggers a sexual memory alien to Ashima's psyche that wedges itself between us but is short-lived.

After a minute the urine has ascended through to the gallery above. I squint, peeing, at the radiant column. My weight is distributed between my externally-rotated wrists, bracing the tube in front of me, and the padding around my vagina. For two minutes I'm urinating hard and continuously and there's no change I can see other than the steady upward flow through the artery. The pee is moving around in that other space above.

Suddenly, a stream drops from the second hole in the ceiling and thins into a palm-width, paper-thin film of yellow. It drops more slowly through this flat conduit, falling for ten seconds before opening into a shape about twice my height off the floor. I'm amazed. The pee hugs the interior walls of the invisible form, like horchata in a circulating fountain dispenser, rendering the form seeable. The flow of color draws a familiar shape — familiar to Ashima — filling in as the color pools. The form is an enlarged model of a vertically-oriented swim



bladder. Ashima recently made an artwork by injecting resin into the swim bladder of a dead rudd, then peeling away the flesh and casting the shape in lead. Rudds are a medium-sized fish and the bladder was about the size of a common sinker. The piece was simple — the lead bladder attached to a lure and hook, hung from the ceiling by fishing line (a rare instance in which it felt appropriate to use that loathsome filament). It was called “Sinker” and I was inspired to make it after learning about swim bladder disease, which causes fish to float nose down, tail up. The hanging bladder assumed the position it would occupy in the body of a fish thus oriented.

The model I’m looking at now shares that vertical orientation and is about the height and width of one of my legs, but only three inches deep. Its form is two chambers, each the shape of a human canine tooth, connected by a short channel. The upper chamber is much smaller and more rectangular than the larger more fang-like lower chamber. The object resembles a translucent “Bird in Space,” hung upside-down, glowing gold. The volume of pee is refracting the thick light from the ceiling, casting a flare and an oblong halo on the red concrete below. The film of urine feeding the shape is almost unnoticeable above the radiant object.

As the shape fills, the pee sneaks out through a tube near the top of the bladder, drops several feet, then turns horizontal and thins into a palm-width flat conduit. It’s progressing steadily towards the far wall. As the color arrives at the wall, it bows ninety degrees to obey it and travels down till it slows eight feet above the floor. Abruptly, a wide horizontal line appears, an inch in front of the wall — now a thin wide rectangle, revealing the top of an image. It seems the urine is slowly saturating a screen, perhaps a piece of paper, that’s printed with a resist to modulate

how densely the color soaks in. Or maybe the surface is etched by a laser to that effect? Somehow the urine is being distributed so that a ten-foot-wide photographic image is appearing, in yellow, within an invisible blotter.

I'm still pissing though the internal pressure is greatly reduced. I look down at my wrists and put pressure on them to give my pubis a rest. I look back at the developing image. The wide strip of color is steadily creeping down like a puddle expanding in snow. The first feature I can make out is wood grain, diagonal to the borders, flanking a nearly unpigmented shape. Something is developing in the center... a ribbed strand. It looks like the draped body of a worm... *fat*... hung over the lip of a bowl. Now a darker segment of the worm body... *candy*? The shadowed outside of the bowl is visible now, spotted with miniature illustrations of forks and knives. The resolution is astounding. (*Peeeeee...*) All the filled-in parts of the image flicker as the liquid moves through and a golden umbra is doubling the shapes on the wall behind. Now: the base of the bowl and the head of the worm, cocked limp, resting on the table. *Gummy I think*... the sheen of its surface and its girth and bi-toned body betray it. As the grain at the bottom of the image is rendered, the pigment levels out along the bottom edge and begins dripping into what must be a wide trough. The trough funnels the urine into another flat conduit that bends ninety degrees at the baseboard and creeps towards me just above the floor.

Without time to process the full image, I look away to track the pee. My bladder feels nearly empty but I'm still evacuating a quiet stream. My feet and lower legs are tingling asleep. The approaching urine changes shape near the small hole in the floor, about fifteen feet away. It saturates a heavily-textured mass slowly coming into focus in the shape of an inverted truncated cone. The granular

texture and shape suggest it to be soil in a typical round planter. The pot is fifteen inches wide and fifteen inches tall at the soil line and tapers at its base. For thirty seconds the yellow shape deepens in color, then a beam emerges from its bottom, opposite the inflow, and quickly disappears through the hole in the floor.

I'm awed. I look at the swim bladder then at the picture then at the soil. I close my eyes. The end of my emptying is glorious. I feel all the muscles in my back relax as my weight shifts back to my pelvis. The stream stops for a moment and starts again with a feeble encore. I open my eyes. The gap in flow drifts through the tube and up towards the ceiling. I clench my bladder to force out the last of it and exhale audibly through my nose. *There.* The detached caboose rides through the line, followed by nothing, siphoned by the vacuum ahead. I watch its backside round the steep curve, rise through the vertical artery, and stop about three feet from the ceiling. All the flow stops. The bubbles moving through tubes and objects are still. *There.*



In stillness I feel the pain of the pressure around my vagina. Pushing with my arms I dismount the fud and drop to the floor. I fasten the ties of my baggy pants and retie the belt of my gi. Habitually, I put my hands in my pockets, as if checking for keys, and I'm satisfied to find the coiled plumb bob. I take in the room.

The four objects — ball, bladder, image and planter — hold the space elegantly in the visual absence of the fud and tubes. The flat conduit that connects the bladder to the image and then to the soil is pale and subtle against the richly saturated objects. I fixate on the image. A single gummy worm draped over the lip of a bowl resting on a table. *Strange*. I become aware again of the room's two exits. As intriguing as these objects are, I feel compelled to explore the rest of this complex before investigating them further. I walk carefully, sweeping my arms, towards the passage that I had intended to exit when the tennis ball stunned me. Nothing unseen interrupts.

The opening is the size of an average doorway and has a semicircular top. There's no light on the other side. All I can see is that the red floor continues through it for at least a couple of feet. I walk through with my arms outstretched and my pupils rapidly dilating. The quality of air changes. It's much cooler and damper like the air in a cave. After three or four cautious paces my hips bump an obstruction. I probe it with my hands. It feels like a wrought iron fence, unornamented, with pickets spaced six inches apart. The light from the room reflects off nothing out here and is restricted by the darkness to a small domain just past the doorway. It's a thorough blackness. I feel my way down the

fence and reach my right arm through the pickets to feel if the floor continues beyond it. It doesn't. Several inches past the fence the floor drops off. I reach over the edge. The cement floor is about eight inches thick with nothing below it, as if I'm on a balcony. I reach my arm straight out into space. *Nothing*. I retract my arm and stand up. Turning to face the outside of the gallery, I look up and notice light, meekly penetrating the darkness from another doorway twenty feet above.

I approach the outside wall of the gallery. The surface feels like wild rock, coarse and cragged and a little moist. I feel around for holds. There are options. I'm curious to observe how my instincts unfold in this darkness. I find a decent jib for my left foot and a pinch for my right hand and begin. There are two good options for my left hand and I choose the higher one. I scan with my right foot, testing, easy. I continue moving slowly, always testing several options before committing. My body and my intuition about what holds will support it are strong. As I rise, my will surrenders to Ashima's animal ability. I'm feeling without doing. Small surges of fear punctuate a general comfort and I experience a grace of motion that my other body has never achieved. Even in the dark I'm able to do this with beautiful precision. Right hand... left foot... pull... scan.... I seem to know this rock. As I skirt my hands and feet over the wall, a graphic of its topography finds focus in my mind's eye. Each limb is an eye, rendering swaths of the wall that fade as the eyes climb. Ashima thinks, as if to me: *In daylight this would be a V6 or so but in the dark, without shoes or chalk, I'd call it a V8*. I feel her joy in the final moves... my fingers are gripping the lit floor.

I pull my weight up over the edge, kneel, then stand. This second gallery is of the same dimensions as the one below and there's nothing visible here except a single

plinth, urine-filled and luminous. The plinth is in the center of the room directly over the hole leading up from the artery below. A small tube parts from its base and flows through a second hole that must lead back down to the bladder sculpture. The light in this gallery is whiter and the temperature feels cooler. The floor is a slightly lighter red and is similarly scarred though the curved grooves are smaller and shallower. The doorway through which I entered is the only exit. With precedented caution, I step into the room, sweeping the space before me with my arms. Pace by pace I approach the pedestal. Nothing interferes.

The plinth is my chest's height, a rectangular prism with a one-foot-square top. The urine inside is static. I crouch down and place my hands on its sides. I can feel the warmth of my pee through a half inch of invisible material, smooth like marble. I squeeze my hands together and focus on the strange absence between my left palm and the liquid. I'm again unnerved by touching the invisible. There's no refraction of light around the pee as there would be with even the clearest glass. Straightening, I slowly move a hand through the air above the plinth. No object. I move it back across, lower, but still find nothing. *Huh*. There must be something here unseen.

I begin by the same method I used after discovering the tennis ball, walking in ever-larger circles around the pedestal; stepping, sweeping, stepping again. After three rounds I'm ten feet out and have felt only air. Three more rounds. I'm nearing the walls and still nothing. I clear the room and begin scanning the walls, crouching and standing, sweeping in large arcs. The dirt on my hands from the rock is marking my progress with broad curved strokes. *Ha!* There's so much satisfaction in marking a large virgin surface. It's so primal. A playful mood ignites and I begin moving faster and dancing. I slap my palms on the

wall and dry thuds punctuate my prints. I skip along the baseboard, tapping high and low as I go then spin-jump into the adjacent wall and kick it with both feet: *Delightful little toe prints!* Running now, reckless, I perform a series of spinning jumps, each time leaving a pair of feet on the wall. I round the second corner and run the length of the room with my right hand on the wall, leaping to draw a low-amplitude sine wave. At the next wall I proceed by beating my fists while galloping sideways. *Hoooot! Hoooooooooooo!* I cartwheel then bounce my weight off the first wall and stumble into the room. I raise my hands in the air for breath. *Ha! fffffff!* I'm panting. The emptiness of the room is liberating and I do a few staggering twirls to complete my celebration. *Woof!*

As my heart slows I approach the pedestal again to reinvestigate. *How do I know this is a plinth?* The knowledge that it is, like all this architecture, seems essential to this experience. It's built in. This is a plinth to support a work of art. *So where is it?* I pass my hands through the air over the top of it several more times and jump to see if something is hiding high above. No contact. I squeeze the sides again and try to move it. It's as solid and fixed as everything else. I lie on my back and kick it as hard as I can with both feet. Only my torso slides along the floor. I stand up again and look down at its top. I can see my features in its surface. My black hair and the black gi disappear my face with their density, but not my narrow black eyes. I'm an amber ghost.

Enchanted by my reflection, I touch the top of the plinth. *Hhhhhhhh. Oh... there it is.* I run my finger over the surface. *Whhhoooo...* I tap it. *Tah! Oh my....* Every touch I give to the top of this... *hhh...* I feel every touch... on the soles of my feet. I drag both hands over the surface... *fffffffffffff...* Both feet. The right side of the surface is my left sole... and the left side... *shhh...* is my right sole. My heels are nearer

my body, my toes are facing away. I tap, starting from the near left corner, moving across the front edge. I feel the taps progress across my right heel, up to the midline of the surface, then continue across my left heel. As I advance towards the far edge, the sensations move towards my toes. The surface is like a Mercator projection of my feet, distorting their surface area to perfectly fill the square. No part of the square is numb. As I tap along my toes, I'm tickled by how wide they are. My little toes correspond to an inch of surface and my big toes an inch-and-a-half. I knead the plinth. The pressure translates perfectly.





For several minutes, standing with closed eyes, I massage my feet. Satisfied, I step away from the pedestal and exit the gallery into darkness. I climb down the rock, landing on the balcony, and reenter the initial room. Everything is as I left it except that a small stem of urine has emerged from the soil. There must be a plant drinking. I'm curious about it but am drawn to investigate the large picture.

The urine image is still now. For the first time since peeing I can smell it. It's sweet. The smell is deeply, chemically familiar to Ashima, but only generically so to me, and again a rift yawns in our psyche. In stillness the image looks like a photo-lithograph except for its translucence and wetness. I walk to one of its edges and pass my hand along the wall behind it. My hand is visible through the image and touches no support or backing. The golden film is only a sliver when viewed from the side. I walk in front of it. The small knives and forks patterned on the bowl have the look of engravings. I see now at least two different styles of fork... three... but all the knives are the same. I examine the limp gummy worm. Its ribs are each spotted with a single highlight strung in a line along the length of its body. Hung from the lip of the bowl, with its head cocked on the table, it resembles an inverted, armless Crucifixion. I reach out...

*Ohhhh...* All together: my fingers feel the wetness, the image smears, I feel the touch in my stomach... *inside* my stomach... *my stomach...* the lining of my stomach... *ffffffffffffffff*... I swipe the surface again... *ffffffffffffffff*... a long smear... a wide touch — left to right — behind my navel... *shshshshshsh*.... This is far stranger than touching my feet

through the pedestal. It's remotely similar to the feeling of air bubbles moving through me, but more distinct. Perhaps a touch from an unborn baby feels this way to its mother... *but no...* this is my stomach! *I'm touching the inside of my stomach.* Again, that knowledge seems built in. I stick out my right pointer finger and trace the boundary of the worm's body. A long precise sensation unfolds in me. I draw the letter W off to the side... down, up, down, up... it's behind my ribs. Smears graffiti the image where I've touched it but there's no residual sensation of the touches inside me. I only feel them as they happen. *Am I being scarred?* I press my palm against the image and hold it there. I can feel each finger in miniature below my heart and the touch feels vaguely like nervousness. With my left hand outside my abdomen, I measure the sensation. My palm on the surface of the picture translates inside to an area the size of my left thumbnail. I press harder and feel my little hand pressing out. *Ach! I'm in...?* Tapping gently across the surface I feel the taps round my organ. It's higher in me than I'd imagined.

I stand back to look at the modified image. The prints from my taps are spread out over the bottom two thirds of it. The left side of the worm's body is smeared and a W the size of my head is angled by the edge. I feel a little queasy. It looks better. *So I'm in...?* I turn around and am oriented towards the ball. *What part of my body is that ball?* I felt nothing when I touched it before. I walk over to it, around the periphery of the room, so as to avoid the now invisible fud and tubes. The translucent sphere seems somehow more energized than before, as if it escaped a shadow. The phlegm still coats the fuzz evenly. Standing before the sphere, fixed at my chest's height, I feel a surge of trepidation. As my hand nears it grows shaky. My chest is humming. My finger moves closer and I feel a density of

vibration in the air around the ball, like static. I move closer still and the hum in my chest swells. It feels like fear lit by the sudden awareness of an error that will cause me to fall, when I'm still touching rock but it's slipping away. My finger hovers just over the surface, trembling...

*Phu...* As I contact the opalescent shell I feel a kick in my chest. It's how I imagine the shock of defibrillators feel. I'm stunned rigid, then reel into a wave of aggressive sadness, ancient and buttery. It engorges behind my lungs, deflating them, fisting towards my mouth and eyes. The tears flow as freely and forcefully as my urine had, and the release is comparable. My sobs are silent. I put my hands on my knees to brace myself. My mouth is agape to the floor as if vomiting but I'm heaving out my eyes, tickling my lower lids. The sadness in this liquid is not my own; it's an ambient sadness, the source is not personal. No memories of Ashima's nor mine pollute it. Any thought at all that takes shape, any association is promptly eroded. Long threads of brine and snot are splatting on the red concrete, pooling in the curved scars. My voice gains traction, begins a low breathy moan, like wind in a culvert, then finds rhythm and modulates into a pulsing avian honk: *Haahnhnhn... nhnhnh... nhnhnh... nhnhnh... wheezy inhale... haahnhnhn... nhnhnh... nhnhnh... nhnhnh... I'm retching. It feels good.*

I cry for a long time and almost lament it when it quiets down. The calm blankness that follows is pure and satisfying. I erect myself and wipe my face on the sleeves of my gi. My vision returns. The orb hovers, bearing witness. I back away. Apparently my interaction with the pedestal has activated these objects, coupling them to my organs. *I'm looped.* I look up at the swim bladder. It's well above my head and far enough from the vertical artery that it's out of reach. *Liver? Spleen?* I remember the plumb bob in my pocket and walk around the central obstructions so that

I'm under the bladder. I take out the bob and let the string unravel and fall to the floor. *Should I throw it?* Too much contact could be painful. I toss the bob lightly towards the sculpture but its ascent peters out shy. I catch it. *This could hurt. What else...?* I look down at my belt. It's wrapped twice around me and tied in the front with material to spare. I take it off and the gi falls open exposing a channel of skin down the front of my torso. Holding one end of the belt, with my arm extended above my head, the other end reaches the floor. I tie the bob's string tightly around the end I'm holding, then, while holding the other end, throw the bob over the flat horizontal conduit that connects the sculpture to the worm image. The bob hits the floor with a *tink*. Holding the end of the belt, I pull the string till I'm standing on my tiptoes. At full extension the end of the belt attached to the string is still out of reach. I carefully let go of the belt and tug the string till the belt is draped in half over the conduit. The two ends are now evenly hung about a leg above my head.

Taking a few steps back, I run and jump, simultaneously grabbing both ends of the black belt. My body swings with my forward momentum but the conduit holds fast. Still no sensation within me. I swing back and forth a couple times and gradually find my center. As I stabilize, I transfer the belt so that I'm holding both ends in my right hand. I climb. Hand over hand, it takes four moves till I'm gripping the conduit. I pull myself up so that I'm draped in half, like the belt, with my weight in my belly. I then prop myself up so that I'm side-saddling the conduit with the sculpture in reach. I find my balance. *There.*

The thin edge of the bladder is facing me, the small upper chamber is at eye-level. I move my hands to either side of the larger chamber and tentatively approach. There's no static here as there was with the ball. *Inhale.*

I bring my palms to touch the shape and am surprised that there's only a thin malleable membrane around the pee. Immediately, I feel the touch in my chest. *Lungs!* A pang of claustrophobia passes and I settle into the touch. *Exhale. Woah!* Unexpectedly, in this zoo of immutable objects, the bladder contracts beneath my hands! A rush of bubbled pee surges through the conduit, and as I inhale, the bladder inflates and recalls the lost pee. *Strange...* I remove my hands and exhale again. This time the bladder doesn't move. Empty of air, I touch the sac with my left little finger and try to inhale. *I can't!* Quickly, I move my hand away and draw breath. I put my finger back on the bladder and exhale. The bladder follows suit. *So any contact allows for two-way influence.* While touching the sac I can only breath within its capacity to expand.

I take in air and hold it, then place both hands on the bladder and press them together. Despite my effort to resist, the air is forced out of me as the pee exits the bladder. I relax my hands and inhale with my diaphragm, feeling the sculpture expand. I press my breath out again with my hands. *Inhale.* I do it again. With my diaphragm relaxed I can obey the impulse to exhale with my arm muscles. *Neuronal rerouting? An experiment:* I breathe out manually three more times and remove my hands. Maintaining their orientation I hold them in front of me to the side of the bladder. I inhale and move them apart. Then, with the intention to hold my breath, I press my hands towards each other. The effect is subtle but noticeable. I'm able to retain my breath but definitely feel the stifled impulse to exhale. *Where am I exactly?* I inhale again and place a finger on the bladder. Turning to look at the worm-picture, I exhale starkly and observe a ripple move down through the image. Inhaling, my exposed chest rises, and the ripple moves back up into the conduit. *I'm looped...*

...*The plant?* I shift to bend over the conduit, then lower myself so that I'm hanging from it. Releasing my grip, I drop to the floor. I untie the string from the end of the belt and retie the belt around me. I put the plumb bob back in my pocket. The plant has now imbibed enough pee to illuminate about ten inches of stem and the beginnings of three branches but no leaves are yet visible. I walk over to it and kneel. The thick central arteries are surrounded by minute networks of capillaries crawling out. I place my hands on the outside of the pot but feel nothing within me. It's warm. I remove my hands and notice the sooty prints. They round the unseen pot, hovering a quarter inch out from the granular piss. Tentatively, I cup the air above the soil on either side of the stem and slowly raise my hands...



...Haaaawwwww... too much. I withdraw. I try again...  
Ssssssss... lighter... Oh. A new leafffff... better. Another...  
et... soft touch.... The plant is... my... I'm twelve... another...  
I'm awake... It's night. Each leaf... no moon. Each leaf...  
There's a large tree and a large tire... this plant...? Both  
larger... both little me... gently. The leaf tips... mapping...  
labia... a field... the sound of a highway. The treads, thick and  
black... I find my spot, the tread nearest. I find my lips... these  
two... thick bark holds... I hold... slowly towards the stem...  
the touch moves.... mapped. These leaves... crawling... the  
tire on my belly; the rubber on my belly... between my legs,  
a thought! Perfectly dense. Fffff... my forehead resting...  
resting knees and roots... slow... rubbing leaves... kneading,  
tread... the good... these leaves... waxy, joined... full floods  
on and through. A branch... fumbling shoulders. Swelling  
light blue... climbing, darkening... steady... two leaves now...  
gentle. With my thumbs... the night air. Strong fingers too...  
my pushing... the best tread. Kneading... my small action,  
rubber... pressure... tack..... long pushing. Fluffing... each  
leaf... knees and roots. The black tire... the black tree... the  
black sky is... the black... I'm on my way. Fffffff... On my  
way... swelling blue. The black... pressure. Grazing. I'm on  
my two leaves, waxy, waxy. Two clefts... cliffs... my little boy  
clit... the perfect corner, the perfect tread. My little stuck-on...  
unknown... building out. Wind. Building up. Up, loving... this  
rough bark... rubber rubber... my strong hips, fingers. Building  
blue... eyes tight. Building blue... these leaves will... rattled...  
mounting... the best tread... here... pushshshing... here... fe...  
sss... here... climbing..... open...



We're sweating. The veins of the inner leaves are yellow now. The plant looks like a young ficus. We stand. Our legs are soft. Looking down, we notice the outflow from the planter disappear into the floor. There's a space below us. *The other exit?* We walk towards the room's unexplored doorway, diagonally opposite the one we exited previously. Approaching, it's clear that the floor stops at the boundary of the room; there's no balcony as there was on the other side. We kneel down at the edge. The exterior walls are craggy rock, same as before. There's no light above, no sign of an entrance there, but a dim yellow is visible below. We *L* our body over the edge, belly down, legs in the void scanning for holds. Right, left, scoot back. Hanging from our fingers now, scanning... right foot... a crevice to follow. The wall feels good on our body: cool dark... pinch... feet, the cave air, pacing... down. Our hands seeing, dancing, down easy. Our left foot donates a hold to our right. *We are nowhere.* The dark is hollow and vast behind... *hind*, switch, reach, reach, a wedge, a pinch, split. Left hand crimp, switch, stretch, right foot... drop... floor. Five paces away there's an opening into a lit space. We feel around. There's a fence to our right that feels the same as the one around the other balcony. We walk to the doorway.

The moment our body is inside the space the doorway fills in. It's gone. There's unbroken wall, seamless. We push it. The opening is gone. *Here we are.* The room is dimmer and warmer than the one above. The light is thicker. The light weighs in our head. The floor is a deeper red and the



scars are broader, less numerous. The ceiling is dropped glass like the others and there's nothing visible within the room except the pee filled conduit penetrating from above. Just beneath the entry-hole it splits like a + into four thinner veins that channel the pee along the ceiling to the centers of each wall. From there the four yellow lines drop down, halving the walls vertically, then stop — inexplicably — ten feet above the floor. We walk to our right along the wall we entered through and look up at the stopped pee. We feel the wall.

*Letters.* The wall is covered with raised shapes that feel like letters... *are* letters. Words too... letters that make words... that make lines of text. We slowly move our fingers from left to right along the middle of a low line: *i... n... o... c... u... l... a... r... ”... space... i... n... space... t... h... e... space... f... i... f... I wonder if these are conduits... t... h... space... l... i... n... what's retaining the pee?* The letters are raised a half inch out from the wall. *It's enough.* We spread our fingers out over a higher line, full-crimping the tops of the letters. Leveraging the grip, we lift our weight and step on the lower lines with our feet parallel to the wall. The outside of our right foot and the inside of our left big toe edge the letter tops. In this way we begin to climb, flat against the wall with our lower body rotated to the left. The letters make fine crimps and it only takes a few moves to arrive at the top of the text. The static pee is just above. Taking more weight into our feet, we pinch the word it with our left hand and reach up with our right. On the conduit, just below the pee, there's a small lever. *A valve?* It turns...

The pee drops through the tube and begins worming through and yellowing the text. We step down a few lines then jump to the floor and stand back. *Is this our head?* It seems the text is conduit, like neon signage, though it weaves in and out of the wall so that all the connections

between letters and words are unseen. There is a general descent down from the top but the pee is not flowing linearly through the text. Instead it's erratically filling individual letters throughout, like air through embers. A network of capillaries must be woven behind the wall, dividing the pee into a multitude of channels. Sometimes several letters, in different words on different lines, will appear at once. The lines at the top are nearing completion.

The text is twice our arm-span wide. The letters are precisely shaped and the font looks like Garamond or some comparable serified font. It begins in the middle of a sentence. This is what we can see now:

wi h the Qantass urus that inh bits th s space. She is alive 115 milli n  
y rs ago in A alia wh n it is part o the u erc nti ent Go dwa a.  
he is 1 et s tall, 2.4 e rs lo g and is 10 m ths d. Sh h s a  
o ce, b k, a nt e es ad te to e lo ar nt s.  
jaw h sts n e te h. he w is si ted j st  
i ar to t s l, t a x en be we e "t  
e e, a d t w

There must be text on the other walls too, below the three other lines of suspended pee. We leave this text to let it develop and walk cautiously, for fear of unseen things, to the adjacent wall to the right. We feel the wall for text and find it centered. It feels like it's the same width as the previous one. Edging the letters with our feet positioned parallel to the wall as before, we climb to the top and release the valve. The flow begins. We dismount the text and proceed, climbing and activating the other two. Now all four walls are hosting the graphic urine at work. The first text is almost done, the second is half done. We've yet to find any obstructions in the space, though curiously, the center of the room is warmer. *Here*, in the heat, we're watching the texts come into view around us. *This is exciting*. Our eyes are enticed to dart around, filling in gaps in words before the pee, mis-hypothesizing and being corrected. The dance perfectly illustrates the mental activity it ignites. *What?* It's a feedback loop. *Is this not always happening?* We turn clockwise from text to text, catching words from each as they flicker into syntax. *Qantassaurus?* We get the sense this is all one text.

Stepping away from the room's center we feel a refreshing drop in temperature. The shift is well-defined and correlates to the boundaries of the texts: All four texts are the same height and width and all are centered on the lower half of their respective walls. If we (*we-we?*) number the texts *one* through *four* starting at any one, and proceed clockwise around the room, then the corners of *text one* and *text three* can be considered the eight corners of a rectangular prism spanning the room. Likewise, a second rectangular prism, perpendicular to the first, can be projected between the eight corners of texts *two* and *four*. The space at the center of this cross where these prisms overlap is the hot space. We step

back into it. It must be twenty degrees warmer here, and the gradient is steep. We've never felt heat so well contained. Walking around it, its surfaces are palpable; a geometric solid made of heat... *a fever?*

All four texts are fully visible now. The urine has stopped close to the floor in conduits below each text. There must be another set of valves containing it. The conduits above each text that move up to the hole in the ceiling are still full, so presumably some of the sculpture above is still full. The text is describing a dinosaur in the center of the room. Describing? *Describing, yes, and...* the text is using itself as a coordinate system to place a dinosaur in the room... the text is projecting... the text is positioning a dinosaur in the room. *Between the "t"... here, and... the "y" in the...hips... jaw.* It's a matrix... a cage. The animal is in the hot shape. The four texts read as follows:

with the Qantassaurus that inhabits this space. She is alive 115 million years ago in Australia when it is part of the supercontinent Gondwana. She is 1.3 meters tall, 2.4 meters long and is 10 months old. She has a short face, a beak, and giant eyes adapted to the long dark winters. Her lower left jaw hosts nine teeth. The jaw is situated just below the line, perpendicular to this wall, that extends between the first “t” in the word “situated” two lines above, and the “d” in the word “named” in the fifth line of the text behind you. The teeth are located at the intersections of that line and the series of lines parallel to this wall that emanate from the letters in the word “cinematic” in the fifth line of the text to your right. This jaw bone, NMV P199075, is discovered in 1996 by Nicole Evered and is one of only three fossils tentatively

ascribed to Qantassaurus Intrepidus all of which are dentary fragments. The Qantassaurus in this room is warm blooded and doesn't hibernate during the antarctic winters. As she exhales, her warm breath radiates from her nostrils in conical gusts that heat an area of the adjacent text shaped like a Venn diagram or the cinematic caricature of binocular vision. The heated text reads: "ssaurus is amed aft / ervice (QANTAS) which ju / dest airline in the world an / NTAS has a policy of no / ompani d childr." The area is just above the text that the animal studies most. Contrary to prevailing speculations among paleontologists, this Qantassaurus has a feathered torso as do many other ornithischian dinosaurs. The feathers are black and mask her pallid, nearly transparent skin. Several times a day

the Qantassaurus feels a nervous tension in her sacrum. She experiences it as an emotional discomfort and remedies it with long sessions of forced laughter. She is currently comfortable and relaxed. Her tail is firm and extends beyond the far margins of the texts to your left and right. The Qantassaurus is named after the Queensland and Northern Territory Air Service (QANTAS) which justifies its u-lessness. QANTAS is the third oldest airline in the world and is nicknamed "The Flying Kangaroo." QANTAS has a policy of not seating adult male passengers next to unaccompanied children because 98 percent of convicted pedophiles are men. In 2005, upon learning of the policies, double amputee golfer Kevin Gill spends 22 hours atop a 10-meter-tall gum tree stump just outside Nelson Australia

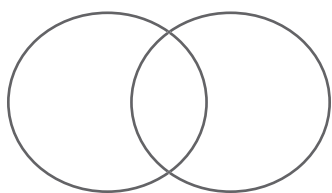
in protest. The Qantassaurus in this room is bipedal and has clawed feet for traction. She has short thighs and long shins. She runs very fast. Her hips are 72 centimeters wide and are currently situated between the lines parallel to this wall that extend from the “y” in the word “you” and the “r” in the word “intersections” in the eighth line of the text to your right. This Qantassaurus’ dietary habits are mostly vegetarian though she’s an occasional insectivore. Twice a day the guards feed her five pounds of organic dwarf-blue curled-gates kale grown indoors at a nearby facility. Once a week she eats half a pound of local beetles. Her stool is very healthy and filled with beneficial bacteria. From January 2035 to July 2036 I successfully treat my Crohn’s disease with an 18 month course of her dung. The guards are often alone





We'll find her now. She's clear to us. We read the texts again, turning, they cycle. Her body is available, it's marked. She's here... *we need to release the pee*. We walk to the first text and feel the conduit below it. The valve is there, in our fingers... *open*... urine floods the floor. The next valve... *Open*... floods. The next... *open floods*. The fourth.... We move with the piss towards the center of the room and enter the heat. *She's here. Her teeth... here... our jaw*. We lean forward into her, matching our spine to hers, horizontal. We turn to read... *her hips are... from the "y"... here*. We see the lines... *her breath... radiating... reading*.... Our feet should be a little wider... *here... bent knees... heat*. The urine is rising. Our ankles are warm... *clawed feet... hips*. We lean forward more. The weight of our tail is a comfortable counterbalance, surely. Adjusting... *our jaw... the "t" in the word "situated"... "named"... here... nine teeth. Nostrils. Breath*. Our arms must be tucked up front, sort of pathetic... *here... clawed hands... breathing... studying*. The rising urine is warm... *our long shins*. Numb feet... the floor is magnified... the blood in our body is moving forward within. Our head is filling, gaining weight.... We lean forward with strong hands clenched. Feet wide... tail up... emptying organs. The texts are draining now. *Our black feathers... gusts*... Our short thighs are numbing... we're slipping in... *numbing... rising amber*... We're looking down at the piss, leaning forward... it's rising acidic. *Ashima's acid*... it's close, the piss-smell is strong. *The piss-smell is strong*... the reflected face... elongating... *am I being deposited? I'm being*... Ashima is leaving... she's dropping me in this vacancy; this vacant animal... evicting me. She planned this I know, I can't stop it. I'm locked in,

larger, longer, immobile and boneless. She's pulling away. My memory is draining. My face is... *there... there she is!* Wading... staring through me. Black hair, black eyes, waist deep in piss; she looks angry... walks towards me. My vision is fixed, I can't look around. She's standing, glaring just before me. She has something to say... *Swipe!*... her hand passes through my head violently. She's happy I'll die here. With a grunt she turns... ..She's gone... ..The tip of my snout is wet, sputtering. *Inhale... yes... burning bubbles.* Ashima's opened the loop: She's strictly the world now; the surround. I open my mouth for air... *big breath. Big teeth.* Eyes open, my reflected eyes are so close... *all the fear is there... all the fear, millennia, folding... joining this archive.* Only a thought now: *my body is a thought that this tide will swallow. Petrified... in a mud house, in a museum: my shapely, waiting death... pulling now from then... towards then. Tail high, her fossil-house... waiting... home... ready and waiting... to mute... ..waiting... head under now... muffled slow... a slow... dive, no... ..slow... a sinking... Slow, or... not... ..but giving-in, or... away? No, giving... given... taken... taken, yes... consumed. I'm... no... ..shhhh... it's... the tide... .. thoughtful... absorbing prey.*







ISBN 000-0-00-000000-0



0 000000 000000