

All the streets wet, all the mountains hidden, cars turning slowly across parking lots, the air a haze of water. A narrow puddle reflecting clouds—like a child wearing a locket portrait of its parents. A semi-truck slipping behind the mall—a silver fish slipping behind a shipwreck.

Yesterday yielded to today, July 16, 2014, today will yield to tomorrow, and this is the view from my little office on the eighth floor of an Albuquerque, New Mexico office building. No freeways in sight, and so many cars in solemn transit. Cars rolling south, toward me. Cars turning east, toward unseen mountains. Cars parking. No car moving all that fast. Everything glowing as if lit from underneath. The Jemez Mountains to the distant north, and a mesa in front of them, south of them. Stratocumulus clouds, long and thin across the sky—like layers of blue and white rock—ephemeral eras of the sky's geology. The shopping mall, named after Francisco Vásquez de Coronado—in the same valley where, in 1540 and 1541, he had hundreds of Native Americans killed. A stucco block bearing red lettering, the Boot Barn. Nine moving cars and a bus. Forty parked cars glinting, half-concealed behind trees and buildings. So many trees for a desert valley, for a city's East Mesa. From near to far, a parking lot, a bus stop, a band of commerce, a band of trees, mountains, sky, more sky, clouds. The city, lifeless, motionless, until suddenly: cars. A glassy puddle, flickering beneath raindrops.

A man riding a bike diagonally southeast across an intersection, dressed all in black, and weaving unsteadily. A Big O Tires store, hidden like a hermit's cabin, barely visible behind trees. "O TIRES," its sign says, as if exasperated with tires. The mountains just gone, the sky a pale fizz.

The bus stop I found myself at one night before my divorce when I had to walk miles to get home and three men followed me almost all the way. Clouds piled onto a shelf of sky above the mountains. From eight stories up, the cars all looking slow, and the people. The people looking slow and drunk.

A human form sitting down slowly on the turquoise bench of a bus stop. He or she crossing his or her legs. He or she continuing to sit. A person nearby walking east across a street, in lockstep with a person far away walking east across a parking lot. *Did they plan this?* Back among the band of trees that hides the city, that is the city, the tops of roofs, a water tank, a bristling line of light posts. *Oh, that's why people are always jaywalking across the street right there:* to get to a bus stop. And then, near the bus stop, the ATM I walked down to at lunch, to check my account balance, where what I found was not good, not good at all. I'm overdrawn, again. This job withheld my pay for my first month, and I just cannot get caught up. An almost-round cumulonimbus cloud, like a planet come too close, and a long, thin, flat cloud around it, like the planet's ring. Black Mesa, that's the name of the distant mesa; it has the shape of a wave after it's broken, after its crest has fallen, when the last of its water coasts low and slanting onto shore. I remember driving around on it, years ago, on dirt roads. I remember cliffs of volcanic rock, and the ruins of the engine of a train.

The distant mountains a haze again, as if only an atmospheric phenomenon. The need for a crosswalk. Jaywalking, jaybiking, all eastbound, all to get to a bus. Patterns I have yet to discern or may never discern. How the cars move. How the people move. How the clouds move. How the trees green.

Quickly now, let me just say that the clouds I see often appear in the top-left corner of the window, where there is often only sky, often blue. Every day this sky changes color, and texture. Some days, the sky is as rough as sandpaper, or it looks that way. Other days, it's as smooth as polished steel.

Let me also just say that on cloudless days, the sky gets paler as it goes down, and in the window's tall center-left panel, the sky goes from dark blue toward the top, to a lighter blue, to a bluish white, to a whiteness that the distant Jemez Mountains range wears like a halo. The mountains are a long, low slab of hazy blueness an hour's drive away, and in front of them lies Black Mesa, that long shelf of petrified lava, and in front of that, runs a ratty fringe of green trees, north of Albuquerque, hiding a white hatbox water tower and the tan corners of occasional houses. Power lines, from left to right like the lines of a musical score, cut across those trees, every note a tree and the resulting song a crowded mess without rests. In front of the trees are the businesses along Menaul Boulevard—a gas station, a GameStop, a Big O Tires, and then Menaul itself, named for a preacher here in 1881. Beneath that then lies half of Coronado Mall, a cluttered sprawl of tan rectangles, with the Boot Barn, where I buy the jeans I can't wear to work, and Sears, the mall's tallest, most castle-like rectangle, selling clothing and crockpots and nail guns, and then, in front of that, is a parking lot, more trees, and tree shadows.

Only trees and asphalt fill the lower-left corner—streets, trees lining the streets, traffic lights, an ATM. America's Parkway runs toward and away from me, two lanes each way; Uptown Boulevard crosses it, Indian School Boulevard crosses it—all named streets, their names only in my head.

The sky in the window's top-right corner hangs inseparable from the sky in the window's top-left corner. The two corners often trade clouds, as I pause to write down what things I can see out of what parts of the window so that readers might find it easier to place and envision the things I describe.

The sky again, descending again, paling again—and the center right panel of the window looks out onto it—onto a mirror-like chaos of nitrogen, oxygen, carbon dioxide—onto sharpened light careening off the invisible. Beneath that sky, like it's the sky's blue bedrock, slumps the eastern half of the Jemez Mountains, low and tapering. Then there's the line of trees again—the trees, the trees, the trees—the houses among the trees, the asphalt among the trees, and a barely discernable vertical line toward the far-right edge of the panel—the north-to-south Louisiana Boulevard, bracketed by lampposts. Power lines cross the scene, a continuance of the power lines in the center-left panel, and then there's the mall again, the mall's larger half, bringing more tan-ness, more brown-ness, more boxiness. The Bank of America building displays its red, white, and blue logo over trees that sway and tremble green beneath it. This window's view, the view from my office, could be thought unexciting, but I've grown to like it, and every day it gives me something new. Every day, I write down just a few of the things I see in it, and over time these things will add up, and become a sort of landscape.

There are trees again, in the window's lower-right corner, and Indian School Boulevard crossing left to right, west to east, named for a school where Native American children were taken to learn English, after being taken from their families. Underneath that is a covered bus stop, with silvery roofs.

Like a magic thing that apparently happens sometimes, the Jemez Mountains have vanished again, leaving only sky. All the trees, alive in the wind, their limbs wild, and a white plastic bag, pulsing by, eight stories up, at eye level. The sky itself, gone away, leaving only whiteness, blankness, absence.

A man is cleaning the inside of the window with a squeegee. The window, an entire wall, taller than it is wide, is divided into three rows of two panels each; the panels of the middle row are long and tall. The window is actually in the empty office across the hall, but I can see it through the glass wall of the office in which I work. All the hallway offices have a glass wall, so we can be checked on constantly. And all four copywriters are kept in two windowless offices—while three empty offices with windows sit within sight of us—so the company can, I suppose, think they're motivating us to work harder. Everything looks muted. Last night's rain hangs like an Instagram filter over everything. The air appears wet, almost opaque. Another day of haze and muted air, and off in the distance, the parking lot sprawling empty at the GameStop. And the game doesn't stop. Five visible traffic lights, four in pairs. Two red. One red. All red now. Cars sitting empty, turned off, full of things. Suddenly, slowly, a man, all in black, hooded, and wearing a cloak, staggers across America's Parkway. Other people sit hidden away, inside the glass and metal of wheeled exoskeletons.

More stupid cars just driving around. *Do something different, cars.* The world a mist of stores, trees, clouds, sky. The day a haze of wind and dust. The gradual brightening of the world—as if the core of the Earth is a shining light, as if everything that exists holds a light deep inside, and maybe it does.

The world always changing but the same—the cars in lazy drift, the streets a gray quiet, the trees thrumming silently, the sky white. July 28, 2014? *Sure, why not.* Three birds flying west, black, flapping, a tiny flock. One flapping harder to stay near the other two. Some clouds. At least eighteen clouds.

So much rain to the northeast, the rain falling so dense and hard it looks from here like just an especially gray cloud. Lightning striking distant Black Mesa, in Morse Code—*dot dot dash*—a message from the storm, from straight overhead. “U,” it says, wondrously. You. Sears and the Boot Barn and some trees alight beneath a hole in the clouds, shining like temples and a sacred garden. All else in shadow. Lunchtime, and the number and the speed of cars, increasing. Chicoma Mountain, the highest point of the Jemez range, sixty-four miles away. Sixty-four miles compressed into one view. A puddle beneath a tree just south of a bus stop on the west side of America's Parkway. When it rains, it reappears. When it's dry, it's gone. Shadows of streetside trees darkening the asphalt like rain, like tattery holes in the weave of reality. One black bird flying low over the ground, descending, descending, its identifying features lost by distance and my own ignorance. The Sun's rays glinting off passing cars; light rolling like alien energies from one part of the car to the next and to nothing. The view faces north, not east or west, so the Sun's never here, only its light.

The average cumulus cloud weighs 1.1 million tons. Mountains made of water. A brightness, the defining quality of the entire panoply, a radiance, a shine around the world, a light that pulses, dulls, intensifies. A glint of metal, seen through a tree. Everything, somehow, continuing to exist.

The scene divided by the nearest horizon into two nearly equal halves: one of pale sky and distant mountains, one of everything else. A bus with an ad on it, advertising to me a mile away and eight stories up. A bus crawling slowly uphill, into an intersection, like a beetle clambering carefully up a rock.

It's sixty miles from here to the mountains, and maybe that's why the world seems to bulge and arc. The only motions a light slipping from red to green; a bus easing east out of frame; half a car moving too fast in the mall parking lot. That same puddle that always exists after a storm. There should be a word for things like that, for things that go away and come back the same. More shadows of trees spilling onto America's Parkway, as if the trees are waterfalls and their shadows are forest pools. A catalog of all visible shadows would include those of the trees, bus shelter roofs, buildings, cars, more trees, and maybe clouds. A small black car approaching the intersection too quickly, almost hitting another car. Then almost hitting another car. Then speeding away. Traffic around lunchtime always gets faster. The world quickens. The closest visible horizon's a line of trees; then a band of blue-gray, a three-dimensional shadow, cloud-shadow seen from the side. *Is all darkness just three dimensional shadow? And are all shadows three-dimensional?* Buses with ads covering an entire side appear periodically in the mall parking lot. Sudden billboards, like, "This view was brought to you by..."

The view as a computer screen, every corporately labeled building a pop-up, the sky an ever-changing screensaver. Better than a real screen at least. I'm so tired of looking at mine, so tired of nine hours a day writing promotional flattery for the websites of skincare companies and plastic surgeons.

Something between the rows of the Jemez Mountains—tall clouds between one row and the next, white, thin, vertical. They might be rain. Where a puddle was, a damp spot the shape of a keyhole. I like to think the water evaporating from it has the shape of a key. I like to think the key is turning.

A man leaning on a metal walker, hurrying slowly to get to a bus. A man on a yellow bicycle a mile away, unknowingly being watched. A small white satellite dish on the mall roof, gathering information, from space, for the mall. Or transmitting information, into space, about the mall. Either way: *weird*. A man jaywalking right in front of a police car, across America's Parkway, into a parking lot, out of sight. The police car turning after him. The mall, as sprawling and low as Graceland. The mall, as brown and plain as Santa Fe. The mall, as silent and as still as an empty warehouse. A brightness, a glare, a blue shine that would be here even if everything else was not—the primordial trait of this desert valley. Most of the sixty miles from here to the Jemez Mountains compressed into a single band, a dense line of green trees, a forest hiding a city. Cars like maggots, moving in and out of the rancid block of the world, seen, then unseen, then seen again. Two women walking side by side, every step matching, jaywalking in unison, a woman or man in pink pants following behind them. Light grooves on the western slope of Black Mesa, signs of erosion, signs of rain.

The view: is gray and green and brown and blue, streets and trees and a mall and sky, stillness and motion but mostly stillness. At lunchtime, I walked down to what's left of the puddle I like to write about, and it felt a little like meeting a celebrity. I also got to jaywalk, where I see people always do that.

A white car rolling south. A white car rolling east. A white car parked in a lot. The Boot Barn, nucleus to the white cars' busy neutrons. A jaywalker staggering diagonally across America's Parkway, with some sort of shiny metal stick. A sword? A curtain rod? *Seriously, what the hell is that.*

What if alien life is so different from life as we know it, it's basically water vapor floating in the air? If so, the invasion has begun. Coronado Mall, largest mall in New Mexico, first opened in 1965. Before that, this view would have probably been mostly low dunes. Its new sign says "CORONADO CENTER," in a plain gray font that looks stolen from a prison. A car, stopped, blinking to turn left, waiting, waiting, while a man jaywalks across his second street in two minutes, pausing on a median. Beneath the trees, unseen, roots; beneath the roads, unseen, pipes; beneath the mall, unseen, tunnels; beneath it all, unseen, the desert. No clouds today, only one, a single altostratus cloud eclipsing the whole sky, as if spread by a butter knife. Beneath it, cars moving slower. A white car moving east. In the car, an unseen driver. In the driver an unseen heart. In the heart, unseen blood. A car designed for blood and a heart. Fractal explosions of trees—trunks flowering into limbs, limbs into branches, branches into twigs—everything brimming with leaves and green light. Faint lines of rain above a mountain. Sixty miles away, drops of water falling through air, and colliding with dirt.

The distance is for people walking left. Nearby is for people walking right. A man standing by a bike rack, without a bike. Maybe he's pretending he has a bike. Maybe this is a story of desperation, and insanity. A distant churn of white cloud. A woman skateboarding away from a bus stop.

Nothing but brightness, like staring into the Sun and realizing there are people driving around and shopping in it, and there are trees. I can't really tell that every building and tree and car and mountain and road is hanging off the underside of a planet, and that the sky is hanging off all of that.

A three-dimensional collage of green trees and gray asphalt and tan buildings and pale sky and two kids playing on a bus stop bike rack and now I miss *my* kids. I have four young kids, and with no longer being married to their mom, and working here, I feel like I barely get to see them. A line of cumulus clouds so high the tops level out along the bottom of the stratosphere, against the end of all possible weather. Below: people building and maintaining and wearing out new structures. Above: water vapor, wind, and pressure doing the same, and so easily. Gray sky, and the world growing brighter. Sunlight reflecting off the ground, and off the undersides of clouds, and off the ground again. The nearest horizon, shaggy with trees, like the edge of an old rug. I imagine the desert blank before dawn. Then one-by-one the buildings blink into being. The trees sprout up and open, like film-trick flowers. I imagine the desert blank before dawn. And then the asphalt wells up like cool, gray lava. The cars roll in like animals smelling water. I imagine the sky blank before dawn, and then the blue seeps through, like a new color from another world. Clouds pop into being, like popcorn.

And suddenly reality tears, a black gash in its skin, and the tear has the shape of a single bird, far-off, flapping, rising, veering. Mountains stand like a broken castle. The show of the sky comes to an end, and now there's only static flatness, grayness, haze, a churn. The mountains are off the air as well.

A blue wall hangs between the Earth and Outer Space, and beyond it hums the Universe. A red light in the near-distance tells people to stop, and what it says is the law. But I don't have to stop—or even look at it. All the clouds are windblown balloons, tethered by lines of gray rain to the Earth.

In the sea of the lower troposphere, cars as shellfish on an ocean floor, every moving metal shell protecting a soft human creature inside. Is it a coincidence that the shapes of clouds and the shapes of mountains are so similar? Or is a natural principle at work? The clouds are bigger than the city—almost as big as the sky. Lightning bridges the clouds to Black Mesa. The bridge collapses, shatters, sinks away. If the view was a news story, the towering, cumulonimbus clouds would be the hook, the focus. The mall would provide local color. What can anyone tell about a person who's far away, who dresses in black, who rides a skateboard toward an Albuquerque bus stop? In black pants and a chartreuse shirt, another man wears a leaf-blower like a flamethrower, his face a featureless blur. From here though, everyone's face is a blur. The world is a faceless dystopia. No one has faces anymore. No mouths. No eyes. There are clouds, mountains, trees, cars, wires, streets, people—life is a movie with a soundtrack by Grant McLennan played only on my headphones. There is never a Moon, or Sun, or darkness—only light, the brightness—a wild, slick shine out of nowhere.

Is no one else chronicling the wind in the trees at the northeast corner of America's Parkway and Uptown Boulevard? If not, how sad. The trees are sycamores, smooth-barked, broad-leaved, containers for holding light. Some, smaller, are Apache plumes, their branches fraying out into blossoms.

A building not too far off, one I'd never noticed before—the Uptown Sports Bar, almost hidden from view by trees. A slow jaywalker, and then another. Beneath the long roof of the bus stop shelter, a blocky band of shadow. A discrete darkness where people wait to be driven through light.

The website for the Uptown Sports Bar says it's a great place to celebrate things like birthdays, promotions, and divorces. *Divorces*. Hmm. A thin, foot-tall strand of something white on the outside of the glass. Perhaps there's a bird's nest or perch just above the window. *Clouds are just flimsy, disposable mountain ranges. Can't even get the damn things to stay down.* How strange it is to be so broke and then look down to see a big box of money, that ATM, right there, inaccessible. A gleam of light riding east on the side of a black car. A gleam of light riding west on a gray car. Gleams of light, with human chauffeurs. The northwest corner of a parking garage. In high school, friends and I would stand on that garage's roof and throw chocolate Whoppers down at cars. That was something we did. A new fire in the Jemez Mountains. White smoke rising from the lower range just southwest of Chicoma Peak. The smoke from forest fires can become clouds, pyrocumulus clouds. I've seen it happen over the Jemez before, two months ago, in June, when I first got this job. This fire is the Pino Fire, and was caused by lightning. It's burning on a ridge six miles east of the town of Jemez Springs.

A light in the daylight—atop a pole in the Coronado Mall parking lot, visible, bright—a modern beacon, the mall a cliff and a cliffside fort. People walking away from a bus, single-file along a narrow sidewalk, like a line of monks in procession, moving up a hill, through the sunlight, and into shadow.

The shadow of a tree, a flickering, unstable black hole, near the center of everything, seeming to draw the entire world toward it. A man alone on a red bench at the bus stop, hunched intently over something, a phone or a book, his back to a forest fire, sixty miles away. The fire, unaware of him as well.

A silent band of trees hiding neighborhoods of houses, and in them people hurt each other, love each other, feel happy, and feel wretched. There are moments when nothing moves. When no cars go. When the sky just sits like a blue block atop the horizon. The view is a wall of Plato's Cave; the view is an incomplete glimpse of a wider world. Of shadows and light hiding infinity. The oldest things in this view are mountains and sky. Volcanic mountains, 1.4 million years old. The sky, oxygenated for 2.4 billion years. The Pino Fire smoke growing hazier, and wider, and what I thought was a bird, but is actually an aircraft, circling to ward it, flashing. After the 1680 Pueblo Revolt, and the 1692 Reconquest of New Mexico, the Spanish had a church built atop Black Mesa. And it's still there, invisible from here. Umbrellas, a red raincoat, hunched postures, the sky shining gray on wet asphalt, red brake lights, the horizon as gauzy as spiderwebbed trees. Imagine a sky-sized ghost of television static, transparent, multi-dimensional, falling endlessly to the ground, the drizzling gray of the world right now. Mark Olson singing "Clifton Bridge," the city sitting below his song, and not listening.

The Sandia Mountains are always just out of view. But even if I walk to the glass, I can't see them. Fog everywhere. Fog clearing. My office-mate, Leslie, also a copywriter, stands looking through hip glasses and a camera-phone and the window at the clouds draped along the foothills. Outside: rain. More rain.

The air drying. The streets drying. The air brightening. The streets gray and moving in unison around the axis of the Earth. And something besides myself attending to the view—the club leafed money plant on top of my filing cabinet, twining its pointed leaves around a partial wall, hungry for some light.

One end of a long, wide swath of light stretching 93 million miles to a star. A cosmic bridge between a mid-sized mall and stellar fusion. The clouds over the Jemez Mountains, breeding, drifting toward potential mates, merging, spawning a wild, white sky full of offspring. The sky, as if it's something separate from the air around us—though twilight and dawn, when the air is blue and gray on all sides, show it's not. There's something so strange about watching rain fall an hour's drive away, on mountains I rarely visit. Here, it's sunny, and the sky is clear. I can see the pinkish dirt of the side of Black Mesa, about twenty-four miles away. *Dirt, I'm looking at you. Dirt, you're a star.* Watching how an empty sky fills with clouds. Thinking of how protons clumped together in the early Universe. Thinking of how anything forms. The view is of the part of the Earth exactly opposite the middle of the Indian Ocean. In a sense, this view is the lowest strata of an ocean floor. The fire in the Jemez, the Pino Fire, continues to burn. A mountain shows itself to be the volcano it began as, smoke pouring off its peak. People just walking along, swinging their arms like that's their job.

Once, my baby daughter laughed at apples on a tree. A man just glided by on a motorcycle, and it made me laugh as well. Normal things are weird. Smoke between the ridges of the Jemez Mountains. The whole range obscured by haze. Pyrocumulus clouds, clouds born of fire, high overhead.

Things made of air and water. Things made of wood and plaster. Things made of tar and crushed rock. Things made of glass and metal. On a side of a bus is an ad for a loan officer, mostly just a close-up of the officer's face and really it just seems obscene. His face. *His giant, pink face.*

August 26, 2014, but, also, other times behind it, each time held intact in the past, sealed in unalterable by all that came next. A bird that could be flying in any direction but is flying right above a street with the direction of traffic, perhaps looking for bugs and lizards and mice run over by cars. Tall black lines, rain from a high cloud somewhere far to the north, like a messy web, built by huge, cloud-dwelling spiders. Every building painted in brightness. The light like a color. The light like air. A single small, gray feather stuck to the outside of the glass, not far from the long white streak. There really must be a nest above this window. The brightness. The return of the brightness. And where exactly is it? Around everything? On everything? In everything? The city's mountains, the Sandias, are only about four miles east of here, but they're just outside of view. Still, they shape the clouds. If I divide the scene into only light and shadow, then the world is mostly light. That's how it is right now, anyway. Before humans existed, this land was here. And when humans no longer exist, it will still be here. The buildings will be ruins, and then windswept rubble, and then not even that.

New theory: the Jemez Mountains form from the sky. The sky and the mountains are the same material. The sky dissolves away the mountains. That's how it feels, anyway. So much smoke. A new mountain range made of smoke. I bet the people standing out at the bus stop can smell it.

A pyramid made of smoke. Cars moving seemingly at random, and yet every car has a driver, and every driver has a destination and a reason for going there. Still: random. Shadows of trees like the things themselves—all the trees like shining green effects of their far-more-tangible shadows.

The Jemez Mountains looking like they've just exploded. A pillar of smoke like a mushroom cloud. If an atom bomb went off in Los Alamos, in the Jemez Mountains, the view wouldn't look much different than it does now. A car rolling west. A man in a wheelchair rolling east. The distant fire in the middle behind them. The fire is Moses. The car and the man are the Dead Sea. The whole view is a bizarre remake of *The Ten Commandments*—its soundtrack the low rumble of my office's air conditioner, making the scene ominous, and foreboding. A gray bank of smoke stretching miles. According to my car's radio this morning, "Everyone's talking about the new Taco Bell waffle taco." All those people down there, talking about it. Hovering like a ghostly black cross above the city, the reflection in the glass of the beams of the window. The beams are reflected in the glass wall across the room, and then that reflection is reflected again in the window. In the 1600s, reports of ghostly crosses in the sky were almost as common as reports of UFOs, today. I can see my reflection too, but only faintly. Tall, but hunched. Young enough, but worn-out. Wide-eyed and looking for something else.

A magic trick: a man swings a bag onto his shoulder and stands up. A bus slides up and conceals him. The bus goes away, and the man is gone. The mountains unraveling. Stone spooling away into smoke. The Pino Fire has burned for weeks and, like every fire in the New West, it feels interminable.



The white-and-gray feather on the outer window, like a “You are Here” marker on a faulty satellite map. And “Here” is the front of the Uptown Sports Bar. Confusing. Because “Here” is actually an airless skyscraper, and “Here” is where a master’s degree in Creative Writing has gotten me.

Brightness in the form of clouds. In the form of buildings. In the form of trees, cars, mountains. Brightness, the air around everything. The feather that’s been stuck for weeks to the outside of the glass has blown away. The weather was windy over the weekend. The horizon, so beautiful to think about, literally a line where the roundness of the Earth makes seeing any farther impossible. I imagine putting my mind into a lighter-than-air body so I could explore the tops of clouds. I reflect on how the best music can make anything cinematic. Listening to Bleachers and watching a man bike around a bus stop and it’s epic and it’s about life. Yesterday, after work, I walked around outside and found what may be the feather that had been stuck to my window. ...And I got to look insane! What if this is a story, and what if the main character of this story is the red, white, and blue logo of the Bank of America building? What if this is a story, and the point of this whole story is that, often, trees grow near buildings? Or that, often, people just drive around? Or what if this is a story, and it’s a notably less-eventful sequel to both *Zero Dark Thirty* and *Gravity*? What if this completes a trilogy?

“SEARS,” blue words on a building’s corner say, as if describing what the brightness does. It sears. And “CAUTERIZES” would be too long. The Uptown Transit Center, the covered bus stop. One online reviewer gave it two stars—and said he was banned from it “for wearing a red shirt with red shoes.”

The world, to me, feels as if a fuse was lit, and now everything is exploding in light. The brightness is here—and even the mall appears to revel in it. The brightness, the cloud shadows, the mountains. The mountains, wallowing in light. The mountains, luxuriating in shadow.

*Okay—sky, clouds, land, roads, buildings, vehicles—sure. That’s fine, that’s fine. But... where is this all going? What’s the endgame here?* The mountains are blue in the distance because the sky is blue between here and there. The blue of the mountains is the blue of the sky. North America, 100 million years ago, was divided south to north by the Western Interior Seaway, by an ocean. And all of this was underwater. I just can’t get over that the mountains exist—the trees exist—the sky exists—that anything exists. All the rest makes sense though. Black Mesa, a table. The shadow of a cloud, a tablecloth, covering the table perfectly. *What’s the occasion? Oh yes, September 10, 2014.* The same view every day, and it’s always beautiful, and disappointing, always boring, and interesting, nearly always the beginning of yearning. Near me, the view is only as wide as a parking lot, but it’s sixty-four miles long, and perhaps that wide at its other end. Even longer, thinking of the sky as a glass-blue window onto space. Suddenly, a white flash from outside, not even a full second long. Something unexplained. Something that probably happens all the time.

A man who had been sitting down, standing up. A truck that had been parked, driving off. A cloud that had been a cloud, different. And all morning, the feeling of being in a cocoon. Of imminent rain. And now, the clouds dispersing. The cocoon crumbling. The world opening up, at last. Or maybe not.

Sometimes, I like to daydream that this planet's dominant species is not humans but human fields of vision—that my consciousness resides not in my brain but in or on everything I can see—that my body is just a device used by this field, by the real me, to move around and grow—that my brain is just a back-up hard drive for this angular cloud of sight and light and shadow and experience that my brain is just a movie projector for the real show, except actually it's a movie receiver, and the show is the thing, pouring into my eyes, sitting there in front of me, pushed along in front of me, gliding along in front of me, dragging me along behind it, because it needs me, because it is me, and I think how this means that for the past few months, for eight-to-nine hours a day, five days a week, even when I was feeling anxious, or feeling depressed, or worried about my health, or worried about my kids, or worried about my girlfriend and our relationship, or worried about my brother and his alcoholism, or worried about money, or worried about everything, I have been enormous, a world, a field of wild vision at least sixty-four miles long, containing mountains, and clouds, and forest fires, and a part of the sky, and this would mean that last Friday, September 12, 2014, at precisely 10:00 a.m., I became smaller—last Friday, when I was sitting at my desk, my face a sickly screen-soft blue; with Leslie facing her computer on the other side of the room—last Friday, when one of the company's managers came rushing in—a gray-haired, ex-military motorcyclist—a nice-enough guy doggedly committed to the illusion that we're all one big happy family here, which we must be if he occasionally buys us all donuts, and which we must be if the company's president once took us all to a baseball game—never mind that employees just mysteriously vanish all the time and are never seen again—never mind that anytime I've ever asked about these employees, I've been glared at and then blatantly lied to—never mind that literally every lower level employee here has to have a second job to survive—never mind that we're all constantly spied on—never mind that we all get emails from the higher-ups referencing things they couldn't possibly know unless they were reading our private exchanges never mind that twice, when Leslie has gone home before me, the company's two managers have sat down at her desk, turned on her computer, and then gone through all her files, claiming to be fixing a bug—never mind that Leslie has told me they've done the same to my computer—never mind that this sedentary job has made me gain weight, something I have never had a problem with in my life—never mind that isolation and silence is the devastating norm here, that we're all like test subjects in an unkind experiment, that this job has made me so depressed, and that I am not the only one—never mind all that, mind only that last Friday, the manager clattered into our office moving too fast and looking away, telling Leslie congratulations she was getting her own office, a window office—and telling the other remaining copywriter, Gena, the musician friend who helped me get this job, she was also getting a window office—and telling me I was getting my own office as well, the windowless one I was already in, an obvious raised middle finger to me, especially with two other windowed offices still sitting empty, and no doubt this had to do with Leslie and I talking every day—in fact, the company's president once told her, “We find it better for production when employees don't talk to each other”—and no doubt this was about the company's other manager, an all-grown-up sorority girl, finding out that I had criticized her in a private email to the company's president—a legitimate criticism, as she had been underreporting the number of pages I'd been writing—and no doubt this had something to do with the rumors I've since heard, that that manager and the president, who's married to someone else, are romantically involved, so of course he's going to take her side—and regardless of what this may be about, it just leaves me feeling sick and empty, feeling drained of life, feeling like I've just given too much blood, and when the gray-haired manager rushed all of Leslie's things, except her desk, over to the office directly across from mine, the

office with my window in it, and then that manager pulled the blinds down in that room, I could hear him saying to Leslie she'd need to keep them pulled far down to avoid sun-glare on her computer screen, telling her to always keep them pulled down—and why would he even say that if he didn't know about the file on my computer, this file, the file I'm adding to now—working title: “View from my Office Window, July-September 2014”—something I've added a line to a few times a day at most, that barely takes any of my time at all but that brings me a little joy—and then just like that, the only two things I've liked about this job—a fun, intelligent, beautiful friend I can talk with between tasks; and the view out the window across the hall, which I've loved, and needed, and identified with—were just gone, and they're gone still, and they're going to stay gone—I can't be staring into Leslie's office all the time, that wouldn't be cool, and those blinds cover most of the view now anyway—and I don't want to believe the apparent message of all this, the message I can't help but take away—the message that life is enormous and rich and right there and there's no end to it, but it's not for you, you just need to look straight ahead, be quiet, type, do the time, be unhappy, and produce—websites for plastic surgeons, websites for plumbers, websites for divorce lawyers, websites that mention certain key words a certain number of times and link a certain number of links—oh, and let's not forget that mandatory staff meeting where we discussed the company's new core values, and they all had to start with a C, and you suggested adding “Creativity,” and the company's president said, “No, that's not that important, we're going to go with the list we have”—and don't forget, at that same meeting, the sales manager who looks like Dwayne “The Rock” Johnson but thinner, giving a speech about hope and change that was obviously just cribbed from Barack Obama's 2008 campaign and adapted to be about Search Engine Optimization and Pay-Per-Click Advertising—because, well, that's it, this is your world, a world of nonsense, a world of people so plain and unimaginative they would crash all this awfulness into the side of your building not on September 11, which would have had a certain poetic, historic weight to it at least, but the next day, on September 12, sheesh—so you might as well just look right at it, don't look away, why look away, what else is there, there's only this, the eighth floor of a mirrored twelve-story building, and on this floor are just two companies: this company—which takes up half the floor, and holds a long hallway lined with offices, with cubicles at one end, and offices throughout, and a reception desk, and notably outdated customer testimonials framed on the walls, and a break room, with a fridge and a soda machine and a coffeemaker, and my half-empty office, and in my office, on my side, from left to right, is a black filing cabinet with a plant on it, and my desk with a few things displayed on it—bottles I found in the desert; a 1941 newspaper; a 1953 pulp western magazine; the computer; and on the wall, a signed concert poster, with a photo of my seven-year-old son in a soccer uniform tucked into its frame; and I know that all I need to see is the computer, and I know that that's right, and I know that that's wrong, and I know that outside there is no way to tell which clouds are growing bigger, and which clouds are going away, and that outside there is a haze over the mountains, remnants of the fire, and a haze of light over everything else, remnants of the Sun, and I know that the only other company on this floor is a family law office, coincidentally, unbelievably, the exact same law office where my now-ex-wife and I met with a mediator to finalize our divorce almost two years ago—and I remember riding up in the elevator with her and there were mirrors on two walls of the elevator, and our images reflected back and forth into infinity, our reflections getting smaller and smaller, and it was like someplace else we had been before but different, and now whenever I ride that elevator I see myself reflected alone, myself getting smaller and smaller, and for that reason, and for the exercise, I usually take the stairs, and climbing all of those stairs, it just kills me, every time, and really, it just never gets any easier.