Sometimes I would have a hard time telling whether your face was your face or whether I was there—rather than that it was myself, rather than any extension or anything else—just merely the self in the same way as any other part of oneself. In many ways there was kind of a relaxing feeling, almost like being asleep for three years.

—Paul Bindrim
Time had a frisky personality before all this.

In its mesh of traffic, music, color, coincidence, I was alive with speech. I was always talking back. Not so much waiting for words to come, as sifting through language and feeling the texture.

Time was an effable substance. It was exciting.

In the time before, I wrote constantly, as if I’d been charged with some kind of vocational purpose. I felt wise and cool in my body, even while I suffered strange turbulence and disorientation.

This time where I sat writing every day, this place, this full-stop, was only a point of origin for my great book. Yes, I would write a book.

Now I write formlessly, into no-end. I draw an asymptote, ever-approaching, never arriving.
I won’t say I don’t believe in regimens or routines. Work with steady patience, and you can pre-determine your progress. It is possible, with good planning and discipline, to effect real change on the body and mind.

But all of this language is anathema to me.

I have made up my mind about so many things, and am doing so all the time. It’s a kind of ecstasy to decide and name my choice, to establish monolithic fact.

And then, too, I love to abandon my ideas and tastes. I love the freedom of unchoosing. To be insubordinate to myself.

It might be a kind of privilege to reject… these motivational, organizational, goal-oriented frameworks.

Should I keep my mouth shut?

I remember when I learned that ecstasy and the state of being “ecstatic” were a condition of standing beside oneself. It’s a theory that makes perfect, common sense.
On the M train, we are all going West. Under the bluest sky. This must be Europe, this must be the past. There is the steeple.

Imagine if a bird entered the train car? I would love to see a bird on the train.

I miss my childhood and I miss you as soon as you leave.

I am always out on the water. I am always having a private moment with the water.

Imagine at least three colors at once, instantaneous, with glitter. Nail polish, gummy worm, Christmas ornament, Mark.

Mark was standing in the sun yesterday, and I know that people are jealous of his hair. They want to tell him he looks like somebody famous. Later, a robin pooped on one of the curls.

On the 6 train, going home, someone scream-singing, raking his throat. The Covid was airborne and I was laughing behind my mask. I felt so sickly calm.

Then, at the Container Store on 59th Street, nothing left at all, just one plastic hanger.
I wonder if I believe in God and I find myself asking God the question.

* * *

There are ski gloves on the floor because I’ve given them to the cat. She finds them endlessly exciting. I will never know this excitement.

* * *

In a class on teaching younger children last week, we wrote “I am...” poems—poems which would use “delicious details” to imagine ourselves on the page. “I am,” in the exercise, is a kind of mantra, as it begins each line in the poem, and anchors all the poem’s ranging images, concrete or metaphoric language. The professor also provided the word “delight” as a prompt for our writing.

This business of writing a song of myself, a poem of delight, provoked a kind of counter-attack from me. “I am a cringing store bought shelf elf,” I wrote. Some more: “I am a crystalline isotopic metal / I am drinking you under the table / I am a neon bulb, very expensive.”

The professor modeled a respectful, compassionate approach to children. He was warm, clear, self-possessed.
But I was wary of this exercise; suspicious that it might spur me to romance.

When the students shared their “I am...” poems, the professor closed his eyes and held his palms together in a prayerful pose. He showed us he was listening with his body.

* * *

It can be very soothing to imagine the names of children.

* * *

I had a roommate, a very good friend, who used to wake up after a night of drinking, appear in my door frame naked and crying, laughing between tears, “Did I do anything embarrassing? Should I be embarrassed?” This is how I imagine embarrassment became a kind of fascination in my life.

I was not entirely unfamiliar with the idea. I can think of many times when I anticipated embarrassment, when I lost feeling in my hands, couldn’t cope with the fluorescent lights—this, before a speech at school, or some game. But then I would deliver the speech, or hit the
ball, and even if something wasn’t quite right about my performance, I don’t remember feeling too bad about it.

What about the expression, “an embarrassment of riches,” the having of so very much. There’s an indictment in that, isn’t there, or at least, an invisible should. A nudge.

Embarrassment says, “you shouldn’t have all this.” Embarrassment is a lesson in size.

* * *

My first fight with Mark was about cold sores. I didn’t know they were worse than cankers, I didn’t know there was a difference.

In the middle of it, I said, “I want to be on a beach right now,” and we smiled at each other before we got back to arguing.

Cruelty comes over me like an urge to go swimming. I showed Mark that capacity in me, which scares me and might embarrass him. The announcement that I’d like to fuck off to the beach. Have my intercourse with the water.

In my writing, I preempt the urge toward romance, and I cringe to find it there by accident. I ask myself, Is this
entirely necessary or true? What greater purpose does this serve?

What is keener, sharper, or clearer, than an unromantic sentiment?

But then: Why do I collect so many kitsch objects, and how can I be so in love?

Perhaps “romance” is plastic, is, in fact, the opposite of true love; is the glitter and the gummy worm.

Whereas Mark is no such object. Whereas Mark is some greater part of speech. Whereas Mark terrifies the sentence. Whereas Mark intimidates my subjectivity. Whereas Mark seduces the syntax.

* * *

Sometimes there is a collective feeling. A mood, like a color, about the day. In Workshop last week, Tim asked us if we sensed it, too. “Does today feel serious to you?” We all nodded, “Yes.”

The wish for peace is immense, almost fantastic.

At a student reading on Zoom last year, one writer lit a candle. He read us a funny, sort of aggressive, sexy story,
in which the names of things were particular and strange. Everybody had feelings about the burning candle.

* * *

In the bathroom at Mark’s apartment, there’s a window showing a patch of blue sky and a big, happy pothos plant hanging there. I’m taking a shower, washing my hair, thinking about other showers I’ve had, other plants, other windows.

What is the difference (or the distance) between jealousy and true love? If I imagine a stranger jealous of Mark’s hair, is that another way of saying that I know what it is to love him?

Do I want to hoard the truth?

* * *

Fran Lebovitz, in blue shoe covers, considers a miniature, three-dimensional rendering of New York City. It isn’t a bird’s eye view. The vantage is expensive in its privacy, like so many others in the City, on the roof, terrace, etc.; guarded, static places.