

### **Excerpt 1:**

But there is a part of me, the stupid desire humans have for symmetry in the universe, that hopes the soundwaves of those mighty yawps will stack upon each other, all neat and orderly, gleaming and pristine.

The soundwaves I make, the soundwaves that leave my larynx much like a sword swallower pulls a machete from their gullet, are never clean.

They glisten with saliva, acid, traces of blood, DNA, all the stuff that makes us human.

These soundwaves emerge slowly, throbbing, as cancerous lumps that bulge and shove their way up through the stomach, argue over what gets said first, reverse the digestive system, and exit out of mouths, spilling secrets, tensings, blood of our people.

The soundwaves get longer as we become more experienced and we learn when the time is right to swallow our words, tuck the hard edges of emerging sine waves underneath our tongues and bite our lips to stop the bile from rising and pushing these encryptions of thought out into the world.

It all feels like a children's game to me, a matching game you learn in Kindergarten:

We're taught that:

Red soundwaves go with red soundwaves: which are bending and sweeping Cyrillic letters, theories of revolution, the sharp crack of a spray paint can, and what a breath of wind feels like:  
a hot, wet, cowlick that teases up your collar and leaves a wet kiss.

Blue soundwaves go with blue soundwaves: which are hard hip thrust and unlaced sneaker type  
language, caustics of a pool bottom, the sound of tearing paper, a head shave.

White soundwaves go with white soundwaves: shiny and plastic, glossy in their manufactured  
state like the reflection of a mirror, the sound of painted nails clicking on wood, a square of  
chocolate with a broken ridge, white-yellowed linoleum that peels up like a blooming rosette in a  
kitchen on a summer's day, the string of fake pearls that sounded like marbles until they didn't  
and then they were just cheap.

Mechanically perfect in their function they fit together perfectly, their sides slotting in with one  
another without a problem, the plastic slapping together like a panting exhaust pipe, and they  
repeat  
over and over, over and over.

...put your hand against them and feel them!

Feel their perfect, shiny, plastic curves, the way the slope of them changes like a balloon W, feel  
the heartbeat that isn't there, feel the emptiness that echoes within them: they are dark inside.

I challenge you to take these waves and take a rock to them. Take a rock and bash them in, break open the skin of your soundwave and feel the ridges of the hole that is a multilayered structure.

Feel the plastic that chips away and leaves dust on your finger, the plaster that slowly cracks and falls to reveal a darkness, feel these soundwaves: really take them and hold them, cradle them as you would a child because they are:

They are the children of your collective life, and as a result of that, your opinions, your beliefs, your identity.

Take a rock and break open the wave, pound it into the ground until it is all dust.

It is only then when you'll truly realize that everything here is temporary and that you must reconstruct the self.

Pound the wave into dust that the wind will lick and carry,  
The wind will take this dust and turn it into ash.  
Ash will give way to fire, and the Firebird is reborn.

Smash your sound until you have bones littered around your feet,  
Take these bones and sit with them:  
Take these bones into your hand,  
Feel them for a pulse, realize that they are made of styrofoam,  
Take these bones and put them back together again.  
Reconstruct the skeleton of your thought.

This is the subconscious mind:  
A body made from the pressed dust of book corpses and fairy tale letters,  
made to stick by the wind, molded by your hands,  
the bone pages of stories are Whole,

The soundwaves of which hit the troposphere of your skull and bounce back, around, sideways, in short jerks,  
hammering you into the ground,  
giving you and your voice a weight,  
A gravity to it, an orbit.

Gravity deepens: pushing, grounding,  
and I can feel the immense pressure,  
the World taking a break on my shoulders,  
and I sink lower into the mesh of space-time

And as I lower I turn to yell, again,  
But this is out of fear.

This time the waves are sharp: they poke holes in The Net of space-time, which is now an inverted Island, determined by the downward push of gravity.

The waves stack, each consummation,  
each creative process nuclear in reaction,  
but even that light is not enough to escape  
the pit whose edges grow closer and closer  
the more I scream,  
but whose edges are always  
a light year away,  
primed to slip through my fingers.

There is a point when I decide I am content.  
I sit on the mounds of my many soundwaves, nicely stacked,  
A King in a black and white throne room, observing.

Perhaps one day I'll grow smart enough to take a sound wave and hook it into the mesh of the wall, laying it on its side from the mound and to the top.  
I'll climb it like a ladder.  
What will I do when I get to the top?

I will walk, travel, see those other islands of creatives filled with objects and soundwaves.  
My shoes will make erasable imprints in space-time and I will take pleasure in being temporary: footprints marking themselves forever on the moon: by man, that eternal tourist.

I will realize that I sink when I stand still to observe. I begin to sink again. There is no room for observers, I am compelled to participate.

In the end, I will go back to my kingdom, climb down that soundwave, now dusty, and content myself to sit on my mound reading, writing, imagining, ruling, knowing what is out there.

I acknowledge that refusal to play the game means I am complicit.

You cannot cheat the system: you either participate or you don't.

**Excerpt 2:**

Rising, an interesting word. One invoking many religious connotations. When you imagine a firebird Becoming, what does it look like?

I imagine the rising of a figure from ash, wingtips coming first, ash forming sooty skeleton structure, which hardens, calcifies to bone and from there, bone peels layers of itself like an onion, these layers splinter, and thus the Firebird grows its feathers.

Firebirds are both terrifying and gorgeous beasts, asking only that they be left alone and they ultimately offer the power of transformation.

To this day, there is only one man I've ever known who managed to radiate both the craft of science and the committed performance of faith.

Vlad, a physicist, and his wife, bought and restored an empty and broken building on the outskirts.

A Russian Orthodox church by practice, yet "Advising Service" by weathered signage on the outside, it was never fully renovated.

Vlad looked like a Golden Apple. He was made of circled muscled fat held by rays of chained sunshine and the golden robes of a minister and full of knowledge. When the sun hit his stomach, refracted through the rock-pocked windows, he was truly radiant: photosynthesizing, growing, and waiting for the Firebird to find him.

He would conduct sermons in cursive Cyrillic, penmanship inscribed in decades of twitching muscle memory,

this physicist, judge, and lawyer of the definite  
and the indefinite quantum universe!

He would light a Candle, a pinprick  
of burning sun caught within his fingertips.

He raised it close to his lips  
extending an offering within quantum realm,  
passing it along to the flame,  
which turned its gaze to the three raised icons  
inset in heavy wooden frames.

I never learned their names, the icons, but I saw the alabaster skin and dark eyes,  
the fair complexions and the halos that orbited around their heads like records.

The Icons wore this match, this letter to them, like so many others, sewn into their clothes.

I imagine, always, that thousands of flames stitch the lining of their cloaks, thousands of unseen gold threads containing the quantum universe, containing radio whispers, morse code messages from believers, scintillate with the wind through rock rippled glass windows...

Secrets line their pockets, and this makes them rich with the stuff of Knowledge.  
But it throws them into poverty with the burden of knowledge,

I imagine them sitting in a room like the one where these sermons were conducted every Sunday: barren, with twisting veins of electrical poking up through the rotting earth-colored floorboards.

They would take gold threads into their hands and twist them into hanks, twist until infinity took hold and merged all secrets, facts, planetary organisms, and stars which slid up and down on the vast golden plane: the stuff of quantum, in one infinite loop.

Then they take the infinite and a needle, weaving space-time into the interior lining of their already heavy, patched cloaks. The stuff of universes exists as an afterthought, one stitch among billions.

They sew until the loop is gone and infinity is scattered among them in their cloaks.

Bits of facts in the shoulders, facts in the shoulders, opinions sewn into the hem, opinions in the hem, and cuffs embroidered (in a heavy hand, which perhaps explains the rough yet beautiful formation of these things) the stuff of dark matter, which we know contains the jeweled inset of galaxies and universes.

Then, shaking hands, collisions ensuing, the Icons part ways: scattering infinity, stretching the golden plane among them, golden threads of candle whispers aglets to their laces.

They walk, and so the universe grows.

They walk until their cloaks become too heavy, the golden insides tearing at the rough canvas which falls away in patches at which point they shed them.

Canvas strips away and fails, ash falling away, and they are sheathed in warm fire, bundled by warm letters of fire.

It is only here when the Icon, the prophet, has been released of the burden.  
The prophet spreads his arms and flies, now Firebird.

The next person to find this glittering heap of cloak will be a poor one. Only the poor will wear it to stay warm, will be enamored by its beauty, its fragrance of wealth.

The rich know the heaviness of metal, of secrets. They are not enamored.

The poor will drape canvas over this rich cloak so the metal won't rust, won't clank as loudly, won't draw attention. Over time, the Elements will fuse the two until they are one: metal and

textile, natural and unnatural, until humans and fire become one: humans warming hands by that enchanting flame, fire radiating messages, secrets, whispering morse code in archaic, transmitting secrets from quantum realm to realm, secrets of the most minuscule nature, to the largest nature,

to “I Love you” the most Epic quantum of them all:

categorized by burnings of matches, theories of revolution, caustics of a pool bottom, the sound of tearing paper, a head shave. white-yellowed linoleum that peels up like a blooming rosette in a kitchen on a summer's, the lick of the wind and the way it kisses you, passing on

“I Love you.”

Thus, candles are lit and so Firebirds birthed from ash and clothes are stitched by hand by icons that stare sideways, capturing the room, who are all brothers.

I imagine Dimitri, the Golden Apple that he is, the Sun, walking with these brothers. He does not interject, he listens but leads, and at the end of their journey he shakes hands with the Icons who walk off to stretch the universe further, Dimitri left to grow some more until he is ripe to have the Firebird visit him and leave him the power of transformation.

He is pure of heart,

It is he to whom I would give the keys to the kingdom, radiant in all ways, dichotomized by physics and not,

because it is he, the Golden Apple, who holds the fading feather of the Firebird in his hands, the plume of pressed light a burning feather, the burning head the heart, and it is tapering slowly.

He opens his eyes.

He blows out the flame.