

## excerpted from *After the Revolution*

AFTER THE REVOLUTION time was free. Time had been emancipated. Nobody would ever need more time again. Those people who had invested their time carefully before the revolution now felt bewildered and betrayed. Those of us who had wasted our time felt nothing. Now we could no longer buy or spend time and would have to find other things to do with it. Time was the only thing we would never run out of. Long after all the food and medicine had been stripped from the shelves we would still have enough time. This was the time we had always hungered for. Time was now perfectly elastic. Either we would stretch it around gigantic projects or it would snap back and be forgotten in less than a second. This was time during which novels could be written or symphonies composed for a world with no publishers or orchestras but possibly readers and audiences. For a few weeks someone continued to ring the hours on a distant bell tower and dutifully clocked every hour. Eventually whoever it was overslept or gave up or left town like all the other people. It was impossible. Time meant little more than distance and the certainty of sunrise and sunset and the possibility that autumn would grow colder. Time had been freed from its rules and measurements and we discovered we needed other rules and measurements. The order of the day became the order of the day. We invented new rules for everything each time.

We tried new ways of walking talking cooking eating and sleeping. We found dozens of old board games and tried to figure out different ways to play them. We never consulted the old rules. Now that we were able to live without decisions we began to make and follow them. Those of us who were anarchists before now obeyed our own rules more zealously than anyone. Often the rules didn't work: like eat without using your hands or don't touch the ground. We finished every game anyway. We had finally found that the only way to have fun or accomplish anything was through rules. The only way to give free play to our creativity was through a labyrinth of restrictions. We wondered if inventing rules should have rules. Even casual conversation had become impossible without rules. Without limiting ourselves to four letter words or a particular verb tense there was too little to say and too many ways to say it and we would end up talking about ourselves and each other and who hadn't done the dishes and what rules might get him to. We used strange rules to become friends. Now the handful of us were alone together in a world without automobiles or muzak whose electricity had died and whose billboards were peeling and we had to work through the jostling shifting of our various enmities and alliances until we each shared a language with every other person and had learned to enjoy and depend

upon each of our idiosyncrasies. We managed to do this surprisingly quickly. We began to wonder what we could do as a group on the day we agreed on the rule to speak without using singular pronouns.

AFTER THE REVOLUTION I always told you to meet me at the library—the third largest University library in America—I always said you'd find me—even though it was now deserted and the few people you did see were reading and you respectfully subdued the urge to greet them—I had hoped we would never meet (and inevitably discuss what was going on with our friends at home—and how we weren't sure why—even now after the revolution—we couldn't talk about them in front of them—and whether Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle made more sense with interpersonal interaction than subatomic particles—or at least—interpersonal relationships being more urgent—especially now when there was no electricity to power particle accelerators—whether the principle was a more useful model when applied to them—etcetera—instead I had hoped we would each wander a maze of carrels—wandering opposite directions down parallel aisles—researching old ideas of the new society—reading waiting reading sitting waiting etcetera—finding messages we scrawled to one another in the margins of pre-Revolutionary revolutionary

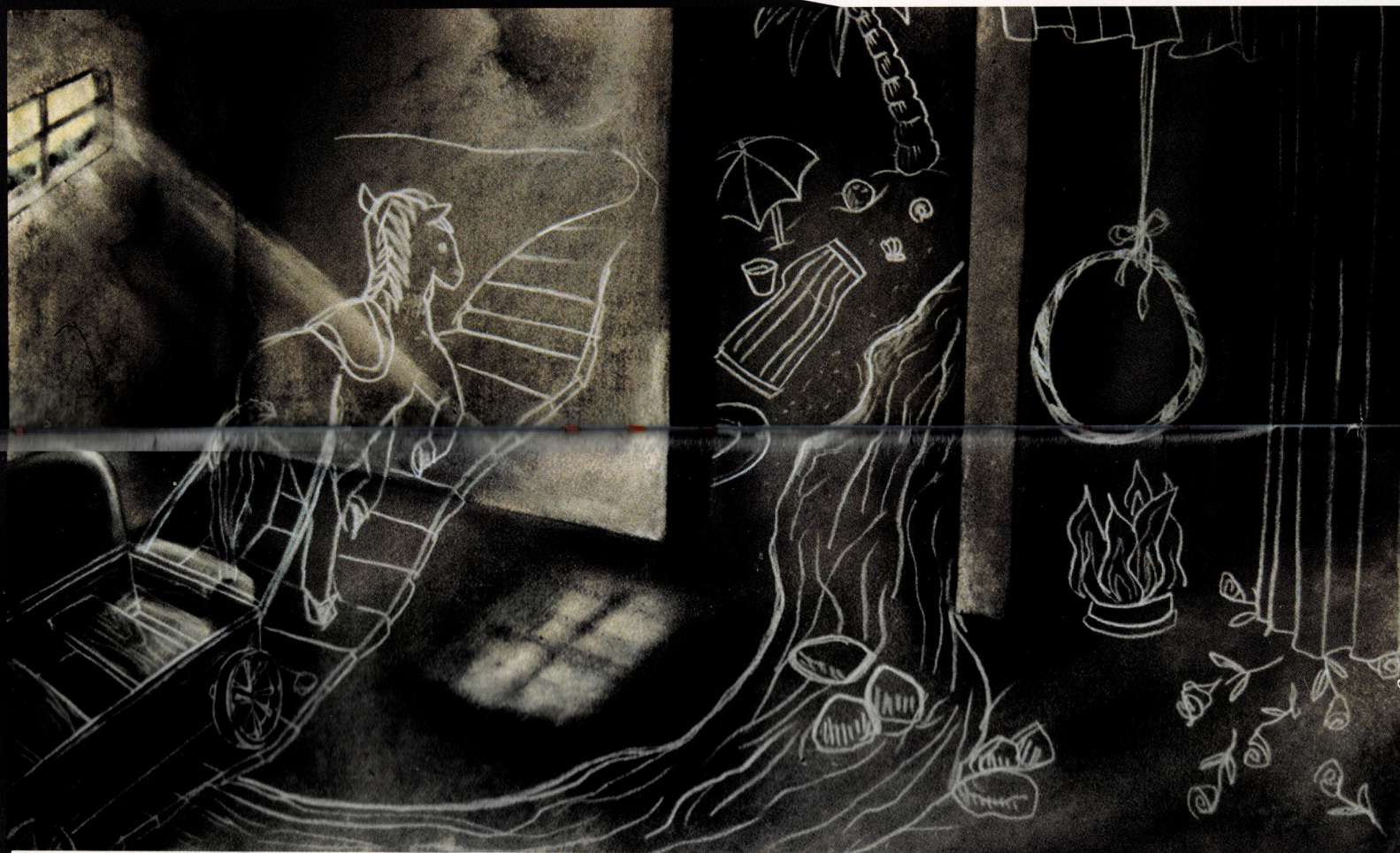


Illustration by Hae-In Kim

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literature—call numbers of books where we had scrawled other messages—wild reference chases in which we would search through pages for evidence the other had been there—finding only answers to more urgent questions—slowly filling the margins of every book with commentary—I left false clues and genuine red herrings—books I wanted you to read so I wouldn't have to—maybe when we found each other at some call number we would embrace each other and with wide eyes speak to each other in the startling new languages of other texts—we would have met interesting people and spent time in their carrels learning about what they had read—we would have used different reference systems—wandered apart on lattices of footnotes only to meet up again—when we last met at 154.63 Sa22:r:E we charted our separate courses through and about time and space and found each other in the poetry of Erasmus Darwin—gaping at the same stanza—different expressions on our faces—we would both walk around the stanza a few times and come face to face between two lines with different faces and different books and we would stay right there for days—building towers playpens out of books by daylight—the libraries never closed—cuddling in the dark cold nights on the floor—and—who

knows—maybe occasional moans gasps sighs would echo down through ten empty floors and the moon would wane—embarrassed—then wax—curious—and—who knows—some day—when our minds seemed to map perfectly—we might disagree on the meaning of a word—and set off in separate directions to find definitions and—who knows—not meet again for days—or weeks—or back at home in half an hour to ask Jane.

(AFTER THE REVOLUTION I found I was as lonely and confused as before (I couldn't explain it because there was too much important work to be done (and I often skipped dinner (rather than reorganize my food on the plate while the others ate (laughed (made up new rules for how to behave at dinner (threw handfuls of cauliflower)))) but I wondered whether I belonged here (where I wanted to be) or whether there was more important work for me elsewhere in the world (and once during lunch the bell tower which had been silent for days rang a great many times and we counted the hours up through thirteen (at which point my friends all screamed (delighted) and chased each other around the lawn while I watched (vaguely sick (that clock used to...(never mind)))) and I excused

myself to do the dishes in the middle of the meal and go for a walk) and I wondered about the other people and what they were doing (since the rest of east central Illinois had emigrated to investigate the rumors of disasters (earthquakes in California floods in Texas) and communities rising up everywhere (looting and revelry in New York and Detroit (they shared the moon with me)) and I walked until night down dark cobblestones through empty residential neighborhoods and I stopped in a park and watched the moon pass through a gap in the clouds and wondered what it saw (What did the moon see? Could it tell me anything about the world it was again the only calendar of?) and I waited for the moon to wink but it disappeared again and left me in perfect darkness too treacherous to negotiate home) and I wondered if the rest of the people were forming groups like ours or whether we were deluding ourselves to believe that our only problems were internal and that everything elsewhere was so good so safe so warm and I asked the moon if the other people had survived a pleasant revolution to enjoy this peaceful world (or were there other consensuses? (another moon passed through the gap in the clouds (I wondered briefly how)))) and then (in the light the moon cast) I ran home).

# november

