



Dear friend
(of grape seeds and iron bullets)

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ISSN: 2468-001X
Fictioning Comfort
Pocket Book Series

This publication is produced for the collective project Fictioning Comfort, Rotterdam, 2020. Fictioning Comfort was programmed by WORKNOT!, exhibited at Showroom MAMA and on fictioningcomfort.space

Rotterdam, Netherlands
September 2020

Design and print: Sarmad
The production of this book is kindly supported by MAMA Rotterdam, and Gemeente Rotterdam.

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This publication brings together the writings of artists Valentina Curandi and Baha Görkem Yalim with the sketchbook drawings of Maike Hemmers. Curandi and Yalim wrote these texts to position their own practice while participating in Hemmers' work *Desire digests what moves it*. Each text explored topics based on their own research during a time of deep engagement with Hemmers' cushions. The sketchbook was made while working towards the set of cushions, somatic scores, and what eventually became the engagements that Curandi and Yalim independently developed for the video work on the website fictioningcomfort.space.

Maike Hemmers

Wheel of Fortune
Baha Görkem Yalim

Sketchbook drawings
Maïke Hemmers

Mothers of Tongues, Crown of Feathers
Valentina Curandi

Wheel of Fortune

The meticulous home of a spider stretches perfectly across the corner. Cautiously coinciding walls make for a perfect line to hold her octagonal vision. A home is a complex matter, a duality. A trap and refuge both at once. An ambush and a fortress. Each road leads to the centre where she patiently waits. I arrive there after a tiring flight. She marvels at my small arms. Comes closer. An etching on her side grabs my attention. It reads 'On the table...'. Her skin is a brown I have never seen before. A glistening auburn. Dangerous. Furry. She comes closer, leans to my ear. She whispers. "Good," she says. "Good job!" She turns to her side for me to continue the sentence; 'On the table are great-grandfathers and grandchildren.'

I say "Time!"

She looks at me with all eight eyes. The two large ones in the centre are surprised and the six on the side are welcoming. They expect me to move while the large two expect me to stand still.

“The answer to your riddle is time. The table is time,”

Both her expressions leave for worry.
A broken worry, like shattered glass that holds still.

I am nervous and scared. Not of her but terrorized by something internal. Terrorized by the possibility that I am her interiority, her expression, her frustrated energy condensed and calcified as a thing of flesh.

Every home is an ancient cave where wet rocks of white and brown merge with dry ceilings that feed into the shiny surfaces one drop at a time. Rocks slowly drowning water into themselves. The cave eats itself to rearrange its interiority. It ingests the earth to make it, an act of cannibalism. The moment we took refuge in this interior we made the outside by differentiating from it by passing through a door with our flesh. That's how the interiority of a home makes the outside. It endangers itself to claim the act of protection. It shimmers at a distance. Small vibrations look like fireflies I have never witnessed in the city. At night we only survive through the strength of candelabras and chandeliers.

When dark there is no more inside.

My sweaty forehead drips into her web almost exactly like a cistern dripping to the cave floor. A part of me leaves my body for her. I feel a bit of shame and feel better once I remember it is raining outside. What is a drop on a rainy night?

“What is a drop?” she asks. I explain that it is a very small amount of liquid and like every very small thing it is shaped like a round. “But not quite, you see. There is always time to a shape. Time inverts the round to an inverted comma. That's why we stop at commas. So time can invert the round.”

She asks me what a comma is.
She worriedly asks me another question.

Comma. Comma. Comma. Macommacommacomm. "Are you okay sweetheart?" She sounds worried. Clumsily, she switches from worry to certainty like a mother would. She is telling me it is going to be just fine. That there is nothing to fear. These are reassuring words every mother mutters in times of terror.

Dryness is a luxury.
It is at about eleven o'clock.

The rainy night is calling us to give into the sound. The cold sound leaking through the window is sticking to my warm ears like freshly mowed grass sticking to sweaty thighs on a summers picnic. Sleep grows ever so shortly with each second. Each second drips into the regret of the morning. In the morning you will wish for more of that. My own roused voice wakes me up from the terror of the night. A terror like a compass you don't want to use. A command. My mind, a golden scale, mesmerized by the giant need to find back balance, is dipping its spherical hands in and out of water. Beating it and beating me. The color palette of the bedroom is faded jewel tones of the '80s, delayed a decade by delayed desires of a young married couple who were younger than I am. The rain accompanies the sound of television. A ticking sound chases many colored triangles. The mothers, the sons, and the holy spirits. Maybe a wheel of fortune is spinning. Across the wheel of fortune a woman like a goddess guarding a wall of light. A piece of music in each box that she magically touches. One note. In these family nights, every night, we feel blessed for our fortune for a second.

But in the next we remember something awful. She is wearing silvery-white. The goddess, she has powers but not quite abundantly. Unaware of her powers she walks an invisible path between the two corners, ever so gently touching a light square. At the end of each stroll cautiously coinciding walls makes for a perfect line to hold her posture. I remember these corners from before. She looks at me.

She whispers "The word starts with the letter M."

Where is my dream? Perhaps in a drawer.
It is under the pillow and I am on top of it.

The dream is fading. Withdrawing tides very slowly reveal a bundle of moss, shimmery wet, rootless brown. The dream as it is fading, jewels reality, marries it. A chimaera is waiting across the television in preparation for an infinite war. It is made off of a lion, a snake, an eagle, a whale. It speaks a language none of its parts can understand. A heroic creature in its tragedy. Outside of it, just a toy. The golden scale dips in a pond of reality, is waving at me from above. A woman's hand, a golden scale. My mother's hand is combing my hair back from my sweaty forehead, did it startle her to hear prophetic questions from a young child?:

"Why am I so small?"

I have not yet moved.

"Why is the pillow so enormous?"

I am indistinguishable from the pillow in my head. My head is the pillow. My thoughts inhabit the wrinkles close to the edges. Towards the centre we meet to become whole. An abandoned egg's fear of rolling to the edge. The wheel stops for the room to take off. Not quite rotating but a subtle movement in the room stretches the wrinkles only to direct them to the opposite direction.

A wrinkle in time makes us emerge.

I sink to the surface. Being invisible to myself makes me visible to others. Or, other things. This glass with milk scars. The window is wet on the other side.

This wall to wall carpet, it is in its essence a sense of security. Knowing it is covering every corner, I easily imagine the room as a whole, through the vision of the carpet, from its being. To be the consciousness of a rock, of a nail. On this gargantuan bed I feel like a fingernail on my fingers.

An inverted comma.

An iteration towards absence.

Nothing plus one.

The room is pushing me downwards.

Rose curtains. Lean nightstands, holding symmetrical night lamps, are demanding equality. But I am too small to counter the weight of my other. The pillow holding my head is the whole bed. A folding inwards. Towel sheets. The faint scent of jasmine.

A broken glass rolls behind the cabin.

I travel this house flying in my dreams. Flying not like some glorious bird but as myself. Laborious flight, ungainly and awkward. Slow and close to the ground. I gaze through the creeks and crevices. Between tiles, behind cabinets. I can see the glass that the vacuum cleaner missed. I can be the glass.

I am the glass, the nail, the pillow. The disregardable weight of them. I vanish and come back when necessary. A longing for balance inside a home.

A golden hand dips. I mutter the other question.

Mothers of Tongues, Crown of Feathers

In this writing, I am unfolding the memory of a series of moments entailing the women of my family, and a younger me, commanded by those women to not become the spectator of its fiction.

The story is about a headache that afflicted my mother for a while, and the relation that my grandmother and her sister drew with the pillow she was sleeping on at the time. Envisioning that something was happening inside, in the filling of natural feathers, they performed a series of rituals to verify that the source of the malaise was of supernatural nature, and that the pillow was playing a specific role in it.

Focusing on popular knowledge and lore, the telling involves matter aggregating inside pillows. In Spiritualism, these phenomena are called 'concretizations' or 'materializations' and refer to experiences of vibrancy of matter.

The secrecy of the performed rituals, the complicity of sisterhood, the fears and affects, together with the zones of comfort and discomfort explored in the story, connect for me with the domestic interiors that set it up (a dining room and a kitchenette, a bedroom, a basement). These spaces speak about the life of some women, bound to caring for the house and the family, and are tied to a reality that is charged with layers of fiction.

Genealogical Order

The protagonists of this story are the women of several houses and of one family: me, my mother, her mother and her mother's sister, namely my great aunt.

As I am losing the substantial connections to the facts – the protagonists of the story are disappearing – I am reviving moments in which different materials came together to vibrantly conjure for forms and alliances. Hereafter, the experience of sisterhood formation meets the agitation of matter inside a pillow.

Mother

There was something about a colleague with whom she was having an indirect conflict, more of a *disflavor*, that's how it would be referred to in terms that are dwelling within the mother tongue. A flavor not out of tune, but dividing and disassociating on its judgment; an alteration of agreement over an otherwise shared sensation.

This *dis-flavor* worked also as a personal disclaimer, a way to lament and project, in order to carefully avoid expressing aloud the real things that were messed up in life: domestic, familiar and marital life.

A sense of malaise and unease started to build up in her. It manifested as a persistent and recurring headache, for which the symptoms started with discomfort in bed at night and continued with fatigue in daytime.

Medicine did not offer answers, nor any other kind of relief.

The malaise was dismissed as a cervical inflammation.

As often between women and their conditions, there was an ineffective diagnosis and the ill-advised prescription of more discomforting rest in bed.

For long, she went on enduring the headache, as she was used to going through the many layers into which the messiness of life refolded. It went on for about six months, before she opened up. One day the headache and some possible causes of its insurgence came up as a topic of conversation with the women of the house.

The Women of The House

They held many things in their hands and in their house. Throughout their days there was much occupation with one's own and other's lives, and little was delegated to external policing forces. They feared the men intervening, judging and dismissing their ways of making worlds. Nonetheless, they always believed in the Roman Catholic Church and in the institution of the modern television, and cared for modestly conforming to social roles.

They practiced many forms of knowledge, diligently assessing which one would suit better the circumstances they were called to work with. What they drew from any knowledge needed to prove effective in solving the particular cases of those they cared for.

The women of the house were busy with the present conditions of those they assisted, and used doors to remind themselves of the adjacency of many worlds.

Doorframe#1

At some point, doors that need to be closed behind are not completely closed, and are left ajar, maybe because of forgetfulness, because of the rush and excitement accompanied by some slight fear.

She is visiting the women of the house, and sits low in a crowded dining room with furniture against all the walls. The women are standing at the door of a little kitchenette, obstructing any trespassing.

She tells the women about the headache, the symptoms and the conditions of occurrence: discomfort in bed at night and fatigue in daytime.

The women ask what it is that bothers her in life, in the everyday, at work, and the dis-flavor with the colleague comes up in the conversation. They wonder aloud if this person could have cast an evil eye on her – a curse devised through an obstinate glare.

They propose to ascertain their foreboding and she stutters a bit before accepting.

If the knowledge asserted by a group of women could bring her the liberation she needs from the headache, she is willing to take it.

The women of the house then prepare and start an operation of domestic affairs.

They pour cold water in a pasta bowl and ask her to hold it straight on her head. They let olive oil drop from a fingertip onto the water and observe the movements.

After a few minutes, they toss the liquids and ask her to balance the bowl on her head while they crack an egg in it.

They warn that if the oil drop disperses into droplets, or the egg yolk scatters losing its roundness – or the two things together happen – the assumption of an evil eye is accurate.

With both oil and egg falling apart from their original states – the failure of essential forms of sustenance in their kitchen – the women of the house know that she's got it. She's got an evil eye that has been entrusted and sent to her with an 'invoice', a proof that redirects the aggressive energies of the malicious glare toward her.

The women say she is paying in pain for the evil eye, and one can measure its effectiveness in the frequency and intensity of her headaches. But the 'invoice' needs to be found in order to break the curse. It could be anything around her, a thing hidden somewhere in a comfortable place where she lets go of any defense.

Like the pillow she sleeps in her bed. Does she know what the filling is?

Doorframe #2

Again at one point, doors that need to be closed behind are not completely closed, and are left ajar, maybe because of the omnipresence of everything together at the same time and with the immediate priority and urgency in some women's circle: A messy layering of domestic, familial, marital life.

The women are now visiting her place, and they become the women of the other house.

She is sitting on the side while their hands sense every cushion lying in her apartment, but it's in the bedroom that they need to touch.

When they press the bed pillow with their whole hands – the palms passing through the surface and sensing its tension – they state that it's best to move somewhere else.

Touching from the outside, on the skin of a thing, is not offering enough reliability, so they want to see the filling. The women of the other house start speaking of matter coming together, things they heard or witnessed before.

As if an inside's filling has the capacity to respond to human feelings and affects, and can move with those, aggregating, weaving and braiding, making and retaining shapes of resentment, jealousy and envy into real and concrete forms. They want to pull the insides out.

Doorframe #3

Once more, doors that need to be closed behind are not completely closed, and are left ajar, maybe for no reason, or for so many of them that there is no logic to follow but impulses for which some doors are left just slightly open to breathe and resist a claustrophobia of things altogether. And also to form a pact that can be stipulated only if somebody else is seeing, listening, and being initiated to it without having yet crossed the doorframe.

In the basement, one of the women of the other house is holding the pillow by the tips, while the other is pulling down and off the cover. They tear the sewing open along one edge. Through a flapping-ly fringed cut on the fabric of the pillow, a whitish, grayish mass punctuated by darker strokes appears: A crown of tightly braided feathers, thick and joint altogether. It is separated from the more indistinct filling of goose feathers. The women of the other house take out this solid bun. While holding it with two hands, the thing is heavy and stiff, but a whirlpooling motion is impressed in the braiding, and seems to retain the force of its formation.

She stays silently observing for this whole time.

Then, reality widens with a whole range of questions: How long has she been sleeping on top of that thing? Would it hurt more to keep touching it?

Would the evil eye be passed or be liberated? Should the thing be burned?

Should they burn the whole thing, including the pillow?

The women of the other house say they will take care of everything.

She steps out of the basement, crossing the doorframe and dragging away with her the possibility of seeing any further.

Doorframe #4

Many headaches after, she is clearing out the house of the women, when she meets again the crown of feather. It is wrapped in plastic inside a shoebox, in the wardrobe of the room where she herself slept until leaving for a different house in marital age.

She wants to throw the thing away, together with some other stuff of no value, but the woman of this house stops her, stepping in besides her – besides her mother.

The Woman of This House

I am the woman of this house.

I went through the matronage of the aforementioned houses and now reside in my own house. Growing up, I stood by each of the doorframes that signalled a location for the appearance of the lived syncretism in which the women of my family dwelled.

When I am asked to tell what I saw, I double check online on the visions of those days.

The findings classify into various belief systems and state that crowns of feathers: are dangerous, because they represent omen of death for the sleeper; are signs of luck, because they indicate that the departed who slept on top of them reached heaven; are normal, because they form with the tossing of sleeping heads; are hoaxes, because they get inserted in the filling of pillows and are used to extort money from those afraid of supernatural and paranormal activities.

In those moments, each of the doorframes figured as an arena of contention between those women as sisters, daughters and mothers, and the laws of the hood and of the rest of the world. By the parallel lines of the doorframes, I could see the comforting of the lore and the ruling of the laws agitating and then braiding together into a sisterhood formation. It

was a powerful result, not less forceful than the opposite forces it was coming from. Each time I was caught observing the appearance of that formation, the same would state intimidatingly: The seer only sees when called to tell.

As a grown-up woman, I have inherited and I am guarding the vision of my late grandmother and her sister (my great aunt) holding a daughter's (my mother) headache as a formation of goose feathers that comes together under a whirlpool-ing force of softness.

However, as a woman of this house who stood by each doorframe, I have my own fights with the pillow I sleep on, thinking about what I could tell about those moments. Head tossing, eyelids throbbing, hair tangling, cheeks rubbing, eyelashes sweeping. No answer, only synthetic filling. Because that's what my mother commanded to have from then on.

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Maike Hemmers (1987, Germany) is an artist based in Rotterdam. Her research reflects on the affective relation of bodies and inner spaces through drawing, text, and everyday relational art objects. With an interest in feminist architecture, soft resistance and queer directions, her work explores intuitive material relations. She recently finished a research project into the modernist social housing complex De Kiefhoek, Rotterdam, which manifested in a publication of an essay and photographs of drawings made inside the museum house. Hemmers holds a Masters in Art Praxis from the Dutch Art Institute.
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Valentina Curandi (1980, Italy) is a practitioner with an experimental approach to text-based research, bodily and scripted performativity. She develops performative acts focusing on the material-symbolic setup of the sexed and contracted willful subject. Her theoretical and artistic research on feminist and post feminist analysis of contract theory inquire the effect of legal regulations and devices on the everyday management of gendered reproductive bonds and obligations. She tries to balance her solo practice with shared endeavors and forms of collaborations that are based on affinity and friendship. Valentina received her Master in Art Praxis at the Dutch Art Institute. More recently she showed her work and created commissioned projects for, among others, Marwan (NL), The Physics Room (NZ), and the 16ma Quadriennale di Roma (I).
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Baha Görkem Yalım (1987, Izmir) is a visual artist. After having worked as an engineer, Yalım completed their BA in Fine Arts at the Gerrit Rietveld Academy in Amsterdam, receiving the award in the Thesis category. Additionally, they completed an Honours Degree in Art and Research at the Gerrit Rietveld Academie and the University of Amsterdam followed by an MA degree in Art Praxis at the Dutch Art Institute. Yalım's exploration, not only of contents but also of the use of artistic media, is in a constant flux – refusing to crystallise media in a particular form and radically allowing things to appear as themselves. Yalım employs video, sculpture, and performance sometimes in variations and always as folds of the one and same practice. Their practice at times crosses the borders of a writer, educator, and curator. Although the range of subjects that they touch upon is varied, some notions appear with recurrent energy, such as the poetically charged vertical/horizontal allegory, which functions as an oblique critique on modernity and patriarchy. Objecthood and history – with a particular interest in the concept of keepsake – are also often thematised. Their work is often accompanied by texts that cross over poetry, fiction, and academic reflection. They are currently working around questions of ritual, landscape, and rhythm through the lens of labour and gender. These open questions come together over a desire to diminish art and artist as unified ontological categories.
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