

Sorry I missed your party!

I missed a lot of parties.

Sorry I missed your party. I was at a different party.

Saint Simeon Stylites lived up a pillar in Aleppo for 37 years. He'd joined a monastery at 16, but the other monks thought his form of austerity was, frankly, a bit much: incredibly showy and quite at odds with the practice of living and working communally.

Simeon then tried living in a hut. After a while, that felt far too luxurious, so he moved on to a rocky precipice.

It would be simpler if there were a word for the state of not-born-yet that meant someone who exists only as a futurity, in the way that dead is a word that means being dead.

The animists call it the dreamtime.

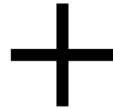
It would be simpler because you could then describe what is happening more accurately: transitioning from pregnancy into labour, the body opens a portal between worlds.



It's always "follow your heart", as though the heart is a leader or a visionary.

What about those of us who make all life decisions as though playing a grudge match of Yahoo chess against ourselves? Where are our motivational quotes? Those of us who like to spring out of bed each morning and say to our reflections, with a flourish of great triumph: try and get out of that one, you loser.





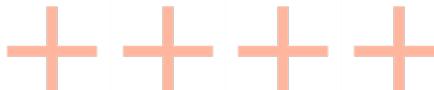
But the better Simeon got at hiding and punishing himself, the more that other people craved his company. Crowds of people swarmed around him whenever he emerged from his latest rock. It was driving him mad.

That's when he moved onto the pillar. Now he was even more popular. Fans would climb up a ladder to ask him his advice.

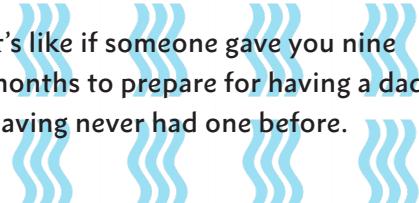
Eventually he died, on his pillar, hunched over in prayer. For over a hundred years after his death, disciples and imitators copied him. Sometimes you would get several hermits each perched on their own pillars, close enough to yell insults at each other about their various theological disagreements.

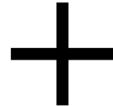


In labour, you are traversing a line between life, everyday life, a room above the Sainsburys on Tottenham Court Road, a room where you could shout and be heard in two separate Prets, between actual life and the not-alive, but not dead either – because that is a word that only means being dead.



It's like if someone gave you nine months to prepare for having a dad, having never had one before.





All it is, all I know, is that my great-great-grandparents and my great-grandparents and my grandparents and I all agreed.

I don't quite remember how we discussed it through the barrier of the living and dead, but we must have done, because nonetheless we had come to this clear agreement. And what we had agreed was that we all felt restricted by the unremarkable length of a life, so we cut-and-shut this makeshift solution whereby your hours of life would be appended to mine, and mine would be appended to my ancestors and so on.

To receive this new transmission, this new life, the body and the body-within-the-body are hooked up to monitors which are the colour that all computers were before 2004.

The nearest Farrow and Ball colour to the colour of the monitors is Shadow White or Ammonite (Elephant's Breath is too warm).

Connected, this mother-portal becomes a lightning conductor, a machine to permit the arrival of a being from elsewhere, from the dreamtime, a techno-witch; or just an object-gateway, like Sigourney Weaver's fridge in Ghostbusters.

What do dads like to sit on? What do they like to eat?

He will probably want a shed. Other people's dads like sheds.

He might want this very expensive, fashionable car, but will he trade it in for an old banger after six months?

Should we risk buying him the car now, or see how it goes?

I just feel like we should get him one expensive, really special, thing.

He deserves it. We don't want to spoil him but we do want him to be the happiest dad. We want dad to know he is loved.



1



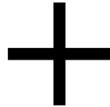
If we all held hands in this chain then we could reach further into the future and into the past. I know you didn't say it was okay but we hoped you wouldn't mind, and even that you might like it too.

By the way, Kristeva recalled: "From that time in my childhood, fragrant, warm and soft to the touch, I retain only a memory of space. Nothing of time. The smell of honey, the roundness of things, silk and velvet under my fingers, on my cheeks."

Sarah Manguso wrote, “I used to exist against the continuity of time. Then I became the baby’s continuity, a background of ongoing time for him to live against.”

And this is it, this is the tiny explosion, this is the thing that really changes you.

In order for me to be rebuilt as something which only vectored love, then I was going to need something to jam the system, to jack it open, to break time.



Personally, although I didn't really tell them this, I was jealous of my ancestors for pluming up into the air like clouds of house dust, for swirling around in a time and space that their bodies couldn't manage, for their fingerprints and eyebrow twitches to hang around and become futures, touching blades of grass that haven't been seeded yet.



All the things that you thought were an inevitable consequence of time – your 37.5 hour work week, your train journey, the distance from your childhood to your death – it turns out that these were just proxies for time, just the bandages around the invisible man.

Time does not exist when you strip these away.

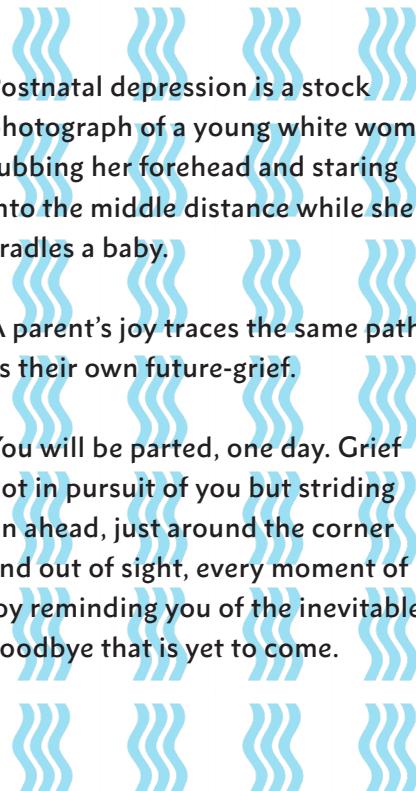


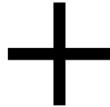
(When I realised this, I felt a bit sick, as though I had seen something I shouldn't have.)

Postnatal depression is a stock photograph of a young white woman rubbing her forehead and staring into the middle distance while she cradles a baby.

A parent's joy traces the same path as their own future-grief.

You will be parted, one day. Grief not in pursuit of you but striding on ahead, just around the corner and out of sight, every moment of joy reminding you of the inevitable goodbye that is yet to come.





I have never wanted the best for myself, not really; but I thought that maybe I might like to be an ancestor too, one day.

I had a baby because I wanted to be better at something than Anne Boleyn.

Maybe we could be a dynasty, me and the baby, a legacy; maybe we could create some cosmic meaning where none would otherwise exist.

We could be pharaohs.

“The world is made of nows”, writes the physicist Julian Barbour, because “the world does not contain things, it is things”. Space and time are not a stage on which the world’s action can happen. Time does not actually exist. The only thing that actually exists is nows.

We can all experience a now. We know what an instant of time feels like. Only in an instant we are able to take stock and understand what is happening.

A rave gap is the silence that exists in a noisy party record — the interregnum, the drop out, the moment where that now stands still and allows you to catch your breath.

1. I have been able to laugh and see the funny side of things.

As much as I always could

Not quite so much now

Definitely not so much now

Not at all

2. I have looked forward with enjoyment to things.

As much as I ever did

Rather less than I used to

Definitely less than I used to

Hardly at all

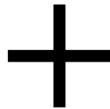
3. I have blamed myself unnecessarily when things went wrong.

Yes, most of the time

Yes, some of the time

Not very often

No, never



"It's not like you think it's going to be", you hear yourself saying.

It's not like you think it's going to be, because what it is like, is that you will not be able to stop thinking about death, not even for a second, calmly assessing any possible situation for its potential to bring death, but also drinking in your new-found daredevil proximity to the world of the dead.

And yet you will do all this in a spangled state of shivery joy, like you've had an extra half a pill for the journey home, snuggling into a sheepskin on the night bus.

Notable rave gaps:

Cola Boy, *7 Ways To Love* (1991)

Bizarre Inc, *Playing With Knives* (1991)

Glenn Branca, *Lesson No. 1 for Electric Guitar* (1980)

37C Stoke Newington Church Street, London N16 0NX (2004): 18 September, 2.15am

35 Euston Rd, Bloomsbury, London NW1 2BU (2016): 22 January, 6.25am

(The chains of the sea? Oh, they busted in the night.)

4. I have been anxious or worried for no good reason.

No not at all

Hardly ever

Yes, sometimes

Yes, very often

5. I have felt scared or panicky for no very good reason.

Yes, quite a lot

Yes, sometimes

No, not much

No, not at all