

ONE OF THE  
BEST  
ZINES

ZIND  
EVER



...REBECCA BOWER...

This is for the people  
that hold thier HANDS  
to eyepatched eyes,  
SQUINTING enough  
to see between the lines,  
blurring what is REAL  
and what is FICTION.

This is for the Snappers  
that nod thier heads to  
the Lyrical BEAT, that  
Sip thier Lattes head  
bent over someone's  
Profane Speech  
(FUCKS INCLUDED).

>>>>>

# ABOVE STAIRCASES

Where I live, the clear skies are littered with towering staircases. Long spiral staircases stand like skyscrapers, each begging to be lifted higher to the heavens. Everyone in town builds one. Families can trace their lineage all the way to the first steps, they can see it in the swirling grains of the wood. I know it might sound strange to outsiders, where their cities specialize in creating wide strips of paper that float on the wind or chisel moving icons out of mere rock, but in my town, everyone builds staircases. Maybe that's why I always kept my eye on her.

She was in the same class I was before I started my apprenticeship. She was always doodling, drawing on every little scrap of paper she could find. She'd even draw on the

desk. Everyone thought she'd be a painter. Just like my mother, they thought she'd paint beautiful murals on risers and panels of wood. And, if she was good enough, they said she might even get commissioned to paint out of town. But as I started learning the basics of carpentry, she was still wandering around the city, drawing and painting on everything she could find.

I didn't see her for a while. Most of the time I was working in our workshop that was at the base of our family's staircase. Eventually I got a few jobs in town. I'd stumble over the roots of giant trees in the early morning darkness as all the other workers would cascade down ropes from their treetop homes and join the commute to town. Tool belts jingling with each step, faint light would dance patterns onto their torsos, illuminating the chilly morning. Some would carry boxes filled with wood or paints, some even held stacks high with blueprints and master designs. And as we emerged from the dense forest together into the clear hillside, the muffled lamps of the town customarily greeted our shadows with a flicker. In silence we'd beeline down the hill between fields of towering wild grass as thick as fog until the town separated

us.

One day, after I had finished installing the spindles I had carved for a handrail, I caught a glance of her cropped black hair. The jet black hair stood out between the broken oak boards of a fence. Out of curiosity I carefully climbed between the gap in the peeling fence and hastily approached her. She greeted me with a distant look, her eyebrows twisting into a look of confusion. We stood in silence for a while. I wasn't quite sure what to say after such a long time.

She stood next to our town's oldest staircase, the first freestanding spiral staircase. Abandoned by our long gone elders, the wood was now grey. Cracking, the old structure moaned with the late morning gusts. The base of it was sunk in the sunbaked mud and vines and old tree roots had crawled over its first few steps. There was a reason it was fenced off in the first place. Everyone knew it was dangerous, and as I looked around I quickly spotted bits of nails and pieces of rotten wood half submerged in the overgrown grass.



She turned to me, brown eyes focused in place, and asked if I'd go up with her. Instantly I thought no. But,

when I looked up at the decaying tower before me and the bright blue sky up ahead, for some reason I couldn't resist. As we took the first steps, her always one step before me, the staircase greeted us with a creak.

We climbed and climbed, higher and higher until it was late afternoon. The wind blew forest green leaves into our path, trailing the scent of overripe peaches to the East. Her short hair bobbed in the wind as we slowly took each step, advancing up the staircase in slow twirls. From above I could see the forest where my home was ripple with the wind, the grassy hillside flitted along with the gusts as people below eagerly followed the town's paths clutching their coats and wintertime hats. Clouds above swirled like wispy cotton balls, as if all the spiders down below had found a way to live in the sky.

As we continued on, the sky growing dim and the wind becoming bitter, it seemed like the staircase went on forever. Spiraling staircases stood like dark towers around us, the silence unbearably lonely, and for once, I found it impossible to breathe. My hand gripped the teeth-like railing as our bodies were battered by wind. Sharp gasps came from my lips and I shut my eyes, the back of my

eyelids allowing me to steady my aching chest.

I think she held my hand. I think she led me further up the protesting skeleton stairs. All I can really remember during that time are the large staircases surrounding us, standing as if they had finally penetrated the sky.

It got darker after a while. The sky turned a shade of eerie blue and my senses felt numb. My teeth chattered and my fingers shook, freezing in the early night. We went up, but as the town lights below twinkled like stars and the sky above stayed hazy and mysterious, I wouldn't have been surprised if we were going down. The elderly structure shook with every step we took. Swaying, we tip-toed in sync, passing broken steps, creaking hand rails, and missing stairs.

Boards cracked beneath our weight, startling me. She went on as if it was nothing, her small figure danced up the stairs. Each creak and each howl from the crumbling staircase was like a string quartet, accompanying her every tip-toeing step. As she spun up, every movement seemingly more exaggerated than the last, I continued my slow and careful pace. At times I felt almost beastlike compared to her graceful accession. It was unbearable to see her float

her way to the top, while I was desperately struggling. And, as we went up, I considered abandoning the trip out of sheer jealousy. Yet, as I saw her black hair swirling in the wind, her small and petite frame shaking from the cold, and her hand clutching mine, I couldn't let go now.

Eventually we reached the top and there was nothing. No more steps to climb, nowhere to go. She teetered on the final step and I had to catch her from falling. The wind intentionally pushed and pulled us. The elder groaned as if he couldn't support two people anymore, as if he had given up. Her expression didn't change when we had reached the top. It was like she expected nothing, just stairs, nothing else. Inside, I felt just as numb as her expression was.

As we descended, the stars got closer. Candle-lit stars, light in simple lamps warmed my heart. People shuffled around uncomfortably in the cold night and it was strange. I was upright, yet upside down.

Since then it's been hard. I can't keep myself from thinking, remembering that last step—the hollowness of the quiet sky, the nonexistent stars above covered by a sheet of gray windy weather, and the sea of light below us, just one

step away. Sometimes I'll even catch myself daydreaming while working, imagining something finally in that sky, something finally at the top of those stairs and that helps. It's like I'm holding my breath, waiting. Maybe that's what she felt, this anxiety, this... I'd ask her but I think she left town. I've asked several people, but they all say the same thing. She's gone.

I try not to think of her too much. But sometimes, while I walk through the misty morning, blinking away restlessness, I can't help but think, and doubt that she ever was real. It makes me feel bad to feel that way. Because, every day at the end of each work day, when I'm tired from thinking and my hands are sore from sawing, chiseling, and hammering, I pass by one of her doodles. It's still there, her painted yellow flowers and bright blue sea. It surprises me every time, to see that she really is real, that she was and is.

Again and again it reminds me. As I make my way out of town and to my treetop home in the woods, following an ant line of carpenters just like me, with the lonely wind howling to the shaded moon and with the swinging, clanking lanterns of tired workers, I recall that night. I pass below the shadows of Babel, the towering,

deteriorating wooden staircases and I recall endless stairs,  
stairs with no end and probably no beginning, stairs that  
will never be complete.







He always carried binoculars. Down the street you'd see him go, goggle eyes, carefully planning one step after another. It took him days to make his calculated trip to the grocery store, even longer to cross the street. Yet few paid him any heed. One glance at his teetering head, strap dangling from his glued perspective, and they'd swiftly part. But he saw this all coming.

With enhanced view, he adapted. A child would clumsily bump into him, a dog would run across the street, and someone up ahead would drop their keys. With each misfortune, he'd simply schedule them in.

But eventually the unknown became too much. With so many variables, so many outcomes, the man eventually didn't venture out. There was no time for laundry or conversing with friends. There was barely any time to go walk down the street. His watch kept ticking faster and faster, each move seemingly more useless than the next, and for once, his vision was blurry.

There was no more precision, no more crystal clarity, there were only tears. A hot fog surrounded him, his breath tight, his mind whirled into circles and his spectacles finally fell to the floor. His foresight was gone.

After a while he reassembled himself. Goggles unmanageable, he looped them around his head and slowly popped his joints into place. Feet uncertain, he shakily stood up grasping blindly at his new surroundings. Everything seemed smaller, as if his 4x4 room had suddenly shrunk. With this new perspective, the man felt like a giant. The time was nowhere to be seen, but that didn't matter. Quickly into the bright daylight, he ventured out of his apartment with his red eyes squinting and walked down the street. Completely visible, he noticed no one stared. Walking with a spring in his step and a broad smile on his face, the man dumped his binoculars into a trashcan and lived life anew.



Susie couldn't take her eyes off the glowing horses. Their white manes, illuminated from the neon glow of office buildings and traffic lights, ceaselessly blew in the wind. With their hooves valiantly posed, their nostrils flared as they confidently sighed. Their heads were bucked, their eyes wild, and yet without motion, frozen in place, they ran.

The kids beside her pushed. With ant-like urgency the other children rushed each other, policing every little move until a man suited with a smile let them in. Just a few more steps and she could ride one, she thought. As if the man wound it himself, the music box chorus chimed as the horses came to life, drowning out the cries of nighttime traffic. In her bustling line, Susie glanced away from the animated expressions of her friends and looked up and saw stars. Or, at least, she pretended to see stars.

The song sung its last cords as the horses trotted down into a stop. Smiles all around, the children before were escorted away. The excited chatter around her buzzed as the man made his way towards the line. Butterflies tickled Susie's stomach as she leaned forward, ready to run. Almost immediately, the hatch was released as children spilled out across the platform. Heart thumping, she spotted a horse with a beautiful pink saddle. Not too far, not too close, Susie bee-lined towards the beautiful and wild creature. Almost there, she told herself, almost there. Feet away from claiming her ride, a boy, only a few years older than her, cut her off.

Her heart sunk into her stomach. Feet twisting, Susie tripped once. Despair wrapped around her as she stabilized herself, picked herself off the ground. But by the time she could glance up, all she noticed were the other children. All around her, happy smiles from happy children surrounded her on their glistening horses. And the horse she claimed, gone. Thompson gave a sweaty grin, his two ugly loose teeth wiggled in taunt. Before, she would have thought Thompson would have looked stupid wiggling his holey teeth and wagging his eyebrows. But now, now that

he had the last horse—the only horse she wanted—all she felt like doing was cry.

Little tears welled in her eyes as the muffled voices of her classmates sharpened the pain. For a minute, with her eyes blurred and hands shaky, the stage looked metallic, the golden lights were mere light bulbs, and the horses, plastic. Completely disheartened, a rush of water fell from her eyes as snot oozed from her nose.

Panic shot through her body as she felt someone pick her up. Air rushing through her hair, she hastily tried to wipe away the hot tears and by the time she could see again, she was seated on a horse. The big man beside her smiled as he fastened her in. Amazed, Susie grasped her neighing horse's reigns. They weren't pink, she noticed, but by the time the lullaby began to play, she didn't care. Her whole body shook with excitement now as her horse lunged into the air, so high that she felt the clouds might suffocate her. Downward they went, stars twinkling hello, as they landed in a field of gold. Pictures, places she only dared dream of going to, swirled past her in a minute. By the time she felt she could catch her breath, the glorious song wound down, her horse reared his head rebelliously

one last time, and then they stopped. They were back on Earth again. On the ground, Susie twirled around with the rest of the children. And, like the others, she dizzily left, stars still shining as bright as ever in her mind.





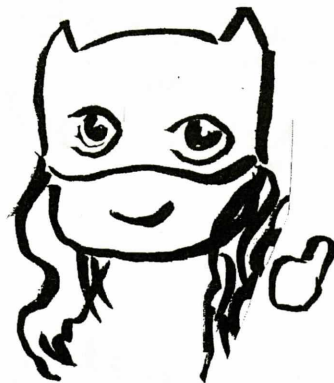
This is for those sighing  
over wishing wells,  
throwing thier change  
at momentary SPELLS  
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that ate my hot pocket.

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