

CLUSTER FIG.

CLUSTER REF

"You should be a model"

They say to me, never looking at my face.

Certainly not, not with sores
shrouding my skin, not with each blemish,
No, their gaze lands

on my body. Racing
away, away from the earth
like a young apricot tree in the winter.
Growing quick and lengthy

and fruitless.
A plate a smile a body (grin)
wider than my stomach can groan
because I always leave a clean plate, because
nothing

was ever
there.

Restriction was never
the answer
Restriction, never
choice

my lazy eyes see right in barren soil, and
rend shortcuts from cold air, and

my bones wither and rebound with each embrace because

once, if I hovered above my body
Learned what I've become
We'd laugh, laugh that
my limbs are so tightly bound
caught by my interwoven longing
But it's all-consuming,

get it?

Never cared for clothes until I noticed
that lace, well

lace can bind me and pull me into
A new person, a better girl.
If I become a girl, there'd be glory
victory that
dances past my mother's eyes,
oh, I see it. it's

Fleeting. god, perfection,
I'm so close
hard to tell if strings
frame me, hold my corpse as art or
mold, mold me

I don't eat after 6.
lacking reason for my ritual,
I'm starving on satiety:

I must maintain this balance.

Too far one way,

I shrink,

the broken

stump of what once was

Too far the other,

I swell, grasping

At something I've forgotten

how to remember.

walk this gnarled line,

where I finally fit,

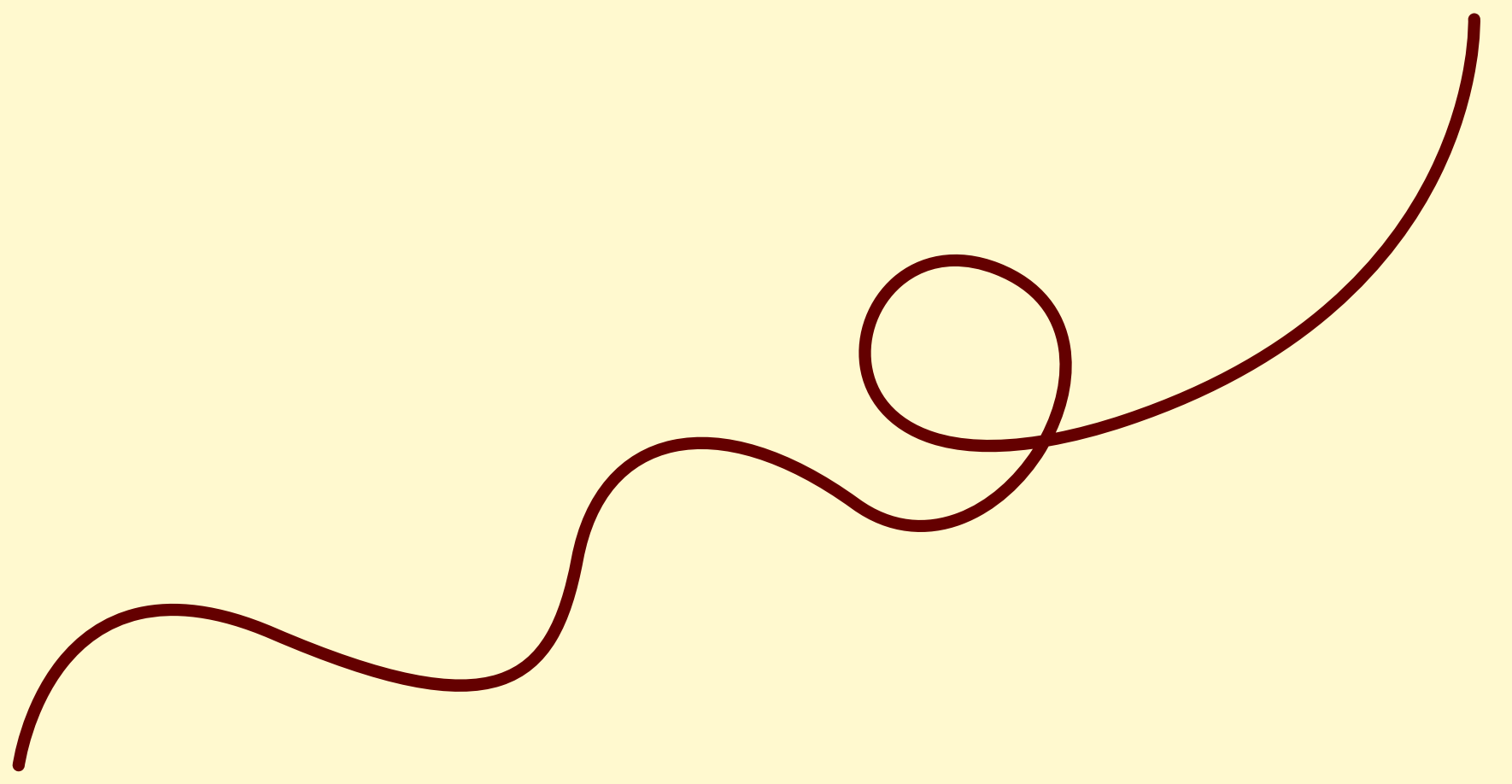
filled with emptiness

because that would, I would simply be

Perfection.

I am no-body

Nobody's whore.



“For there is no one above her,”

her heels like altars
a coffee-stained blouse
smelling of hot tar and jasmine
tucked behind her ears
she chooses

to stitch herself into sirens,
smoke into steam,
into the sermons of subways,
to learn lullabies of languages
from every passerby

the temple and the thief
she carries her onus
my grandmother's rage in her lunchbox
my father's kiss on her eye
my sister's rice in her pockets
my mother's pride on her tongue

as she gets off
the train lolls its head
not in surrender
but in telling
kissing her ankles
in pitiful sorrow

when she moves
the world flinches
ashamed that it had ever
asked for more than
just one spoon
of her dance

“,for there is no one above her.”

dip

each

one

peers

down past

surfaced

ripples

bends

ruptures

thread quivering fingers

red bubbles

ask me

her name

lilies slender

mirror

beg

once more

her eyes

honeyed

glaze

over what

is of

her face

long

blunt raw

strong strained sharp

sucking with

puckered lips

sour puss

keep remembering keep remembering keep remembering keep remembering keep remembering

her keep her keep her keep her keep her keep her keep her keep her keep her keep her

her her her her her her her her her her her her her her her her her her her her

.

step one
breathe in
out
sound unravels
my lungs crisp
stale crackers
down my trachea
my heart tender
not the cut
he bares his teeth
we match
a perfect pear

when did you become a vegetarian?

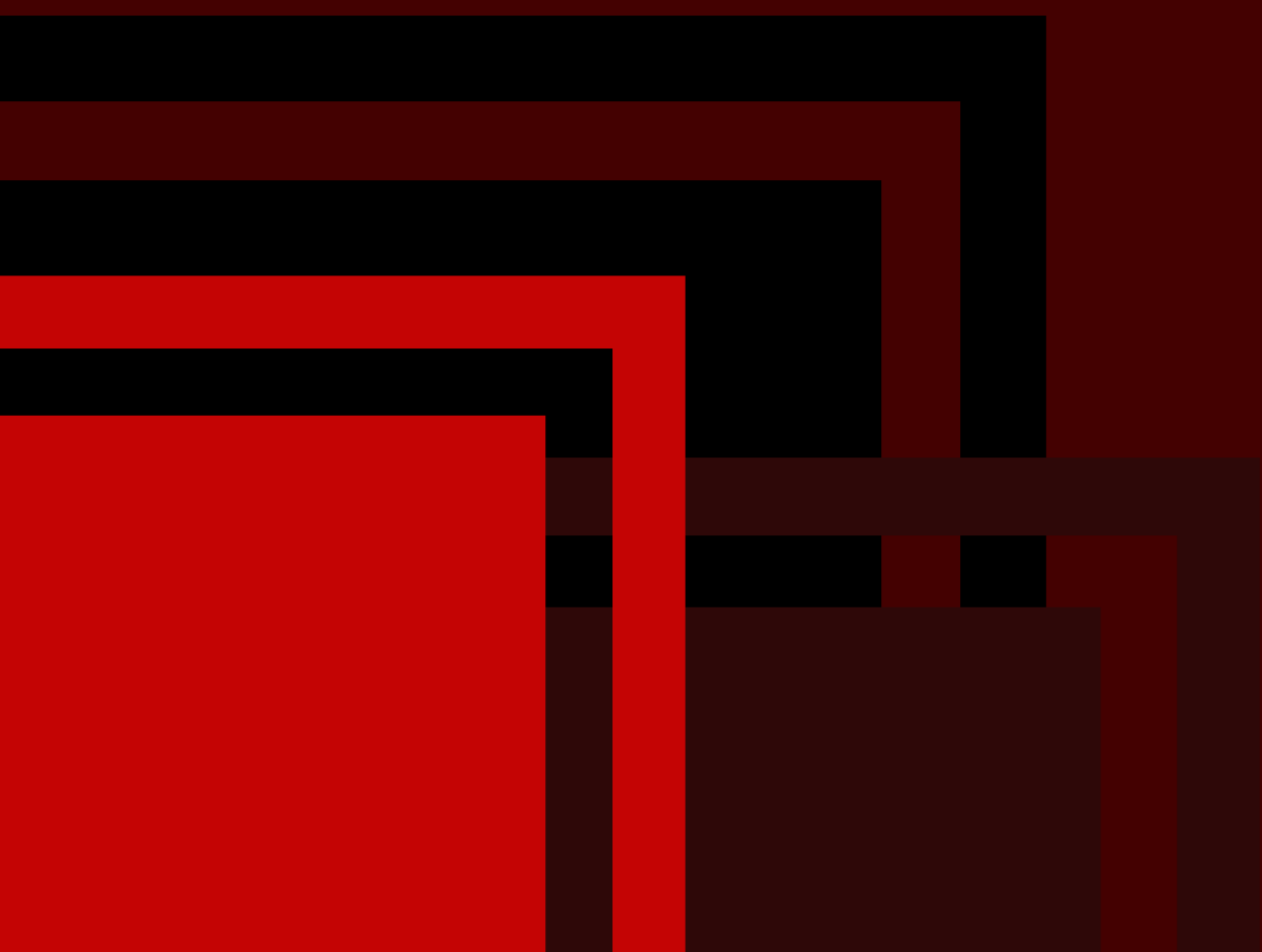
carrots cannot bleed
a gnashed paste
texture means nothing
power gliding
over my tongue
aftertaste residue
metallic and acrid
my eyes water

sweetly
I was slashed
Skin singed
his choice
fight fire with fire
so I did
slash back
take back build
back into this this
more than girl
bloom a little better next time

hair in my mouth
nails
bits of self
falling from my lips
the more she smiles the more slips out
pitter pattering tiles
I devour away
brown hair brown girl
filling the keratin clippings
stretch away
something beyond birth
always been tall
bones bulge
rap against skin
good for growth

HIS(S).

no growth is wrong
swelling is better
lurch forward
convulse
bloated choking
on my own bile
spews out acid
scalding the walls
just like-



Morning Sickness

11:00 am.

As soon as you enter you can feel it. The sun outside is aggressive, almost performative in its heat, ninety degrees and rising. But the cold is better. It slaps you, clings to your skin, burrows in your bones. A reasonable punishment for forgetting your jacket. Still, you shiver, your sweat drying too quickly leaving a salt-tight crust on the back of your neck. Inside, the walls are wooden but not quite wood. There is golden, humming lighting, casting shadows of intimacy, while large, neon slogans blaze above the aisles, making your skin glow like Chernobyl.

This is it. One hour, just one hour, carved out of your bullet-proof schedule. Every biweekly Saturday you embark on this race for what most people call shopping, but you call “The Sprint”. You love it (crave it, need it), the one moment to take you out of your own head.

And today (please, *please*, today) you’re going to beat your previous record, the one that you haven’t in the past 6 months.

But 11:00? Peak hour. Eleveneleveneleven. A nearly impossible task.

Still, you feel ready. You fasten your armored tote bag, steel yourself for the quest, and—

A girl with a scarf tattoo passes you by.

You pause for just a second to wonder.
(Come on now, you need to hurry).

Hasten to the narrowest aisle. Loud, fuzzy, lyricless music creeps into the crevices of the towering rice sacks. Grab the two biggest bags, **just** two (you’re prepared, not a hoarder), even though you want more so you can prove you don’t live alone.

Regret not grabbing a shopping cart.

Leave both bags.

Hustle past the fruit, though the thick and sweet and sticky air is asking, no, *begging* you to enter. Fine. Which are the fastest to snatch? Flick your knuckles on the most perfect watermelon (which you don’t want), sniff the yellowing pineapple (which you **don’t** want), and then stop (too long) to grab a bunch of green bananas, which you *do* want, even though you won’t be able to eat these for a while (but you can’t go back now).

Her shoulder brushed yours. The tattoo was only an outline, her lobster-like skin taking place of ink. She had three bracelets on one hand, each a different size, each a different type of metal. She reminded you of something, a once warm-weathered (but now just weathered) memory that resides in the edge of your ear and the side of your hand and the tips of your teeth.

Nope.

Go to the packaged foods. Try your hardest to avoid the swarm of women, the dragonflies who circle and buzz and click around lazily about something scandalous, (maybe how quickly you got your bananas). Come too close and you'll be sucked into the sweetest vortex where you'd become one of them, one who talks about how much you actually despise your job, how you miss your sister, how you lack a lover. Nodding to everybody and nobody with an opinion, who make people feel safe for no good reason. You know that you're made for more. And you glance at your watch which says that you have to pass **now**, so you do, though you can't shake the feeling that maybe, just maybe, they're more than you.

Slip past. Grab a jar of peanut butter (no jelly (you're allergic)), a lonely bottle of ketchup, and one container of cajun seasoning that you'll never, ever, use but you might as well add some whimsy to your life.

Veer into the next aisle, blocked with samples which (of course) are leading the herd of snickering teenage boys, who (of course) sneak an extra quarter-cookie when the worker looks aside, who is rubbing the shoulder of a screaming baby (not of course?) in the arms of a wearied but smiling mother, and it makes you feel something that akin to irritation because it pricks at you, but it isn't and it should be.

Like a gluttonous coward, you trudge forth to buy a cookie box and are enveloped in the aura of *them*, surging through your lungs with toffee-like stickiness, fixing you into place. You gasp, not used to the ache pleading with you to wait: claw at your chest all you want, it won't go away. In the hustle of it all, you almost forget what you're here for.

But you don't. So you drop the box, and rub your eyes, and barely notice the gum that slips off your tongue as you continue on.

Vegetables.

You don't want them. You're only getting them so that when your mom calls on Tuesday (at 4:00 pm), you can lie and say you added them to your spring rolls (that really only have shrimp) which will be a nice topic of conversation for a change (without the change part).

Just something so she won't keep praying for you.

Carrots might appease her. Celery might kill you. Cucumbers? They seem okay.

You leave them anyway and grab four rotting tomatoes, hung together with a swarthy stem and a stench so vile you can already imagine throwing them away.

You would have told her something. You wanted to ask her where she got it. The tattoo, not the bracelets but also the bracelets and also her look and also her soul.

...

Do I even need to tell you?

Maybe you would ask her to take you there.

Last stop: cashier. Pull out your wallet with the growing hole on the front. Place your trinkets on the worn and greyed conveyor belt and brush fingers with the cashier's slithering, scaly hand as he tries to assist.

At last.

You shoo him off.

Bolt to the car. Hurl the goods in the backseat. Jump in, latch the leather noose across your neck, and for the first time this whole morning, breathe.

Check the watch.

11:44.

Your legs seep into the scorching leather, as though putty. How can you express how proud you are? You can't really, but you know it, that this is the best you've ever done, may ever do, and that's something.

Until you look out into the sunny parking lot, and see her, the girl and her tattoo, attempting to haul all her heavy burdens into the trunk. Realizing the futility of her actions, she calls out for help and you feel like you should *go*, unlock the door. Open up.

But you don't. Instead you tremble a little and sweat a little and sit quite tight and watch as someone *else* comes. He heaves and "ho"s to press her random junk in, then laughs and bumps knuckles with her (like your cashier) with inexplicable intention (not like your cashier) before waving and leaving.

You don't quite understand. You just know that this, whatever this is, is making you nauseous and it's probably time to go home (got so much to do).

So you jam your keys into the ignition (which is bad) and pull your hamstring trying to reverse out of the lot (which is also bad) which means you have to watch her smile all shy and bite at her lip at this little act of nothing, *but no not nothing, not nothing*, which means you try to coax, then reason, then force your leg into submission, praying for it to *let you go*, but instead, it stubbornly pangs all over and refuses to budge (which is pretty damn bad).

Which means you'll have to sit (for longer) and hurt
and wonder why,
oh why,
weren't you faster.

feast of fire

you stride over to him
ripe strawberry cheeks
tamarind brown skin
a prophet on a plastic stool
preparing your feast of fire

you ask for the song
his knee a bouncing memory
stained with papaya and years
in the lull he offers
his steamed stories

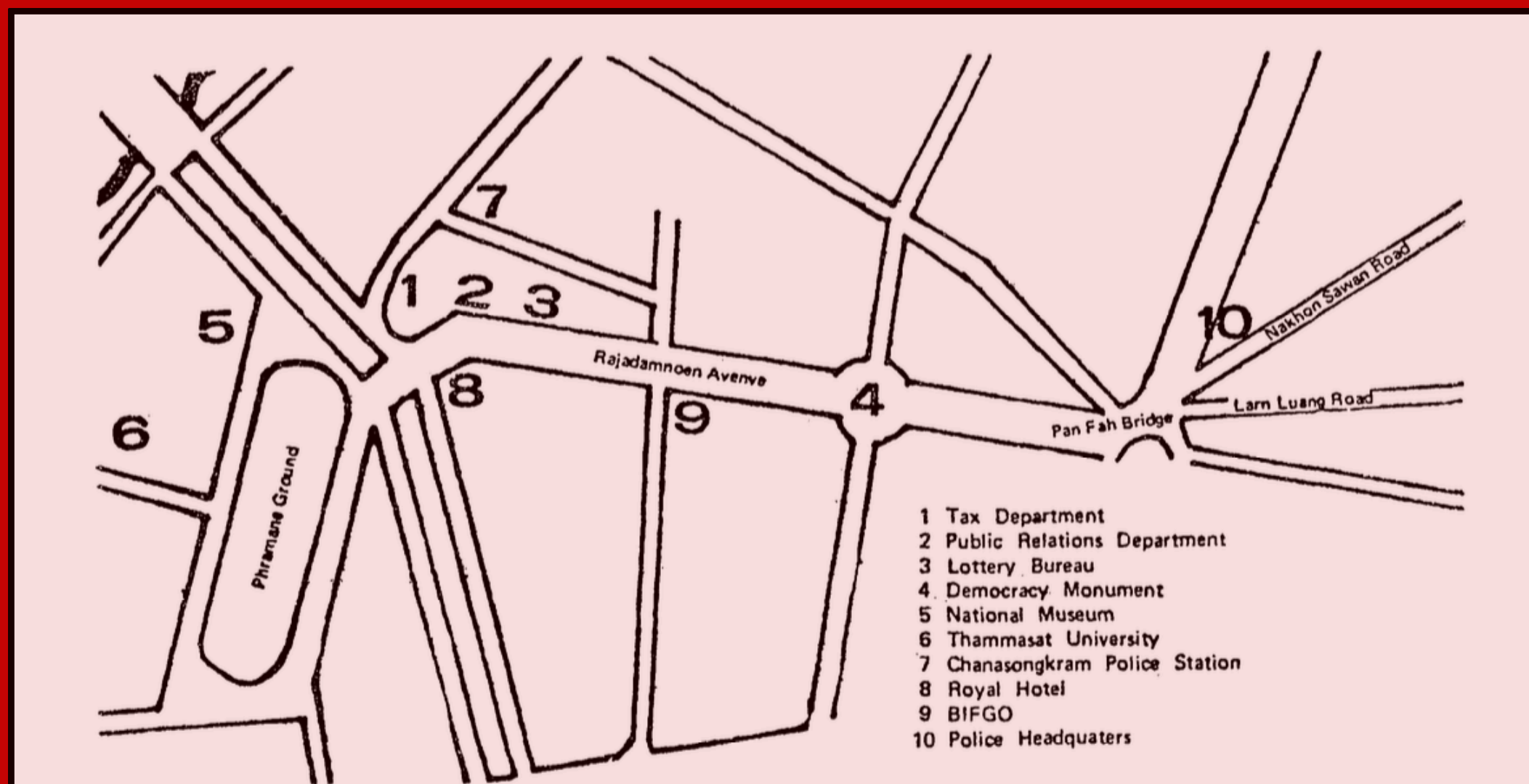
they took the square first
said a rice husk voice
no guns just fists and chalk slogans
and the way he says it you believe him
while motorbikes scream past

we were tigers drinking
molotov cocktails but
even the yellowest of ribbons
are burnt to shreds
and he stirs them a little faster

you do not ask his name
he does not offer it
only the fire returns
in his eyes
as if the match still rests

instead he offers
a moon sized plate
gratefully you sink in
his petrol tinted labors
something truly

ภาษาไทย.



For further research, consider this source!
Heinze, R.-I. (1974). Ten Days in October--Students vs. the Military: An Account of the Student Uprising in Thailand. *Asian Survey*, 14(6), 491–508.
<https://doi.org/10.2307/2642679>



cluster fig



Come close!

I heard:

that when the lowly wasp,
and self-appointed prince,
grimaces over his rotting synconium,
he pierces the fermenting skin,
and begins his ascent.

laughs rasp from his brittle jaws,
fresh from crawling through pulp and dusk,
triumphant, negligent,
and his specious
feeble gaze falls.

the teenage girl,
who whacks him into oblivion,
like a ruthless bumblebee,
leaves no exit wounds,
yet,
he believes it to be love.

Thank you so much for
reading!

Contact kirtanaharharan12@gmail.com for inquires

