

# On Animal and Vegetable Physiology

*Doug Martin*

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A tall man who is Leonardo da Vinci walked into the dim-lit drawing room, within which two doves, three months old and beautiful, the color of a page of the thesaurus without ink, perched on my shoulders. They watched him sketch his maps of veins and future man-made birds, but when I woke at midnight, in the ICU's broken armchair up on the second floor, it was only Leonardo's ghost, like a cold mist, which roamed the hospital. Out the window, I saw the airport landing lights backgrounded through the ghost's x-ray of chest and thighs. Down the hall, you couldn't see him. Comatose and on life-line while they helicoptered you to Saint Vincent's that morning, the sum of your body was a torso and two short legs, and if anything was left of your mind, I wanted it to be the garden choked with birds last Indian summer when a large number of Navaho medicine doctors camped on the courthouse lawn for human rights. You were eighteen and we were just married. The Indian protests did no good. I went downstairs to the waiting room, and buying an apple from the vending machine, I assumed that each drop of rain against the hospital's emergency entrance lights synonymized each other with that awful, impossible need to combine. That early October morning when they boated out to rescue you and the others, they found you floating face-up like a squashed vegetable, your hair mobbed with algae. There was no lightning that first night, like an EKG machine going straight, and the doctors who were like grave-robbers tried to keep you alive. Your plane that crashed in the big lake was no miracle-invention but a bird drawn downward by the sere beauty of land overwhelmed with what was left of the rotted lettuce. The ghost and the garden never came back. On an old receipt for cooked squash in my wallet, I made a list of all the adjectives that couldn't begin to tell how I felt about our lives.