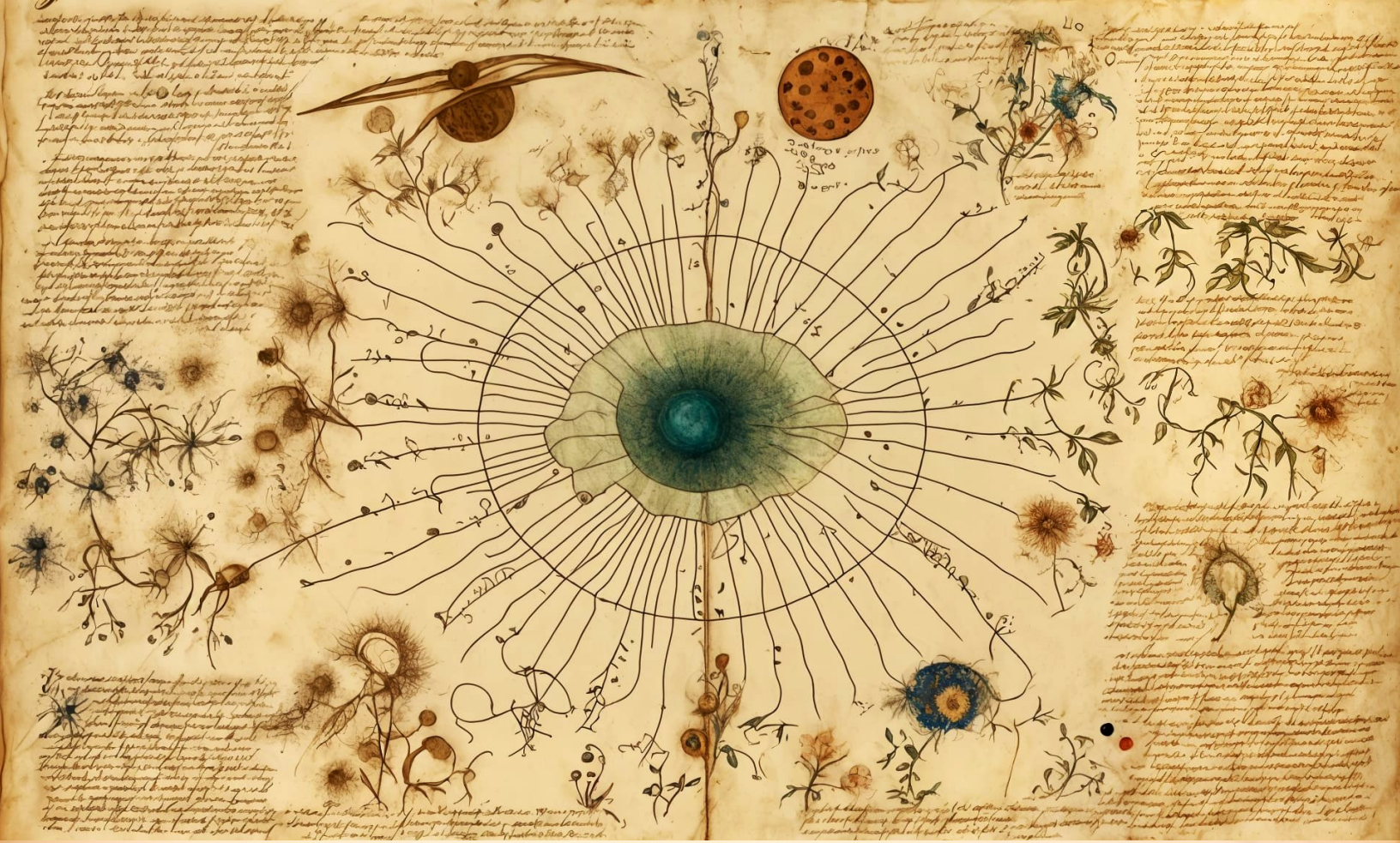




Handwritten text in a cursive script, likely a Latin or Italian manuscript, located at the bottom of the page. The text is arranged in two lines, with the first line starting on the left and the second line continuing on the right. The script is elegant and characteristic of the 15th or 16th century.



Because, Revisited

Len Slatest

Contemplating the topic
of the world microscopic
its base of quantum fields
seeing what that realm yields
its laws time-reversible
thus logic-submersible
I state with finality
there *is* no causality
thus freed from banality
we enter a reality
of only patterns, says me
in this sequence: 1-2-3
I’s not acting, no, not he
to spawn 2, but lets him be.

Macroscopic’s where we live
where our common sense ain’t broke
once time’s arrow’s come about
it’s a whole big ‘nother smoke
hence I think it most urgent
to label “if-then” emergent
where effects are collective
at the Big Bang’s directive
you never see eggs uncrack
Lord Entropy won’t go back
meaning *I* wrote this bunk, see
and not it created me.



Time for Crows

Bob Gielow

When I was a teenager, Nana kept talking about how “Grandpa had a special relationship with crows.” She would use that phrase several times a day, even if it was right after she heard Dad explaining to us kids how she was repeating stories because of her memory loss.

Supposedly, there was an old picnic table behind their barn where Grandpa would leave kernels of corn, spiders he had killed, and even dead mice that the cats had left on their back porch. After taking these items away, the crows would leave shirt buttons, screws that had fallen off someone’s truck or tractor, and even coins minted by the US Treasury.

Nana described how Grandpa left his items on the top of the picnic table and the crows would leave their items on one of the connected benches. Nana was convinced that the two different locations for these items was “proof aplenty” that her husband and the crows were “engaged in a mutually agreed upon system of bartering.” She described the swapping of items as a “quid pro quo,” though, at the time, I did not know what that meant.

Grandpa kept all the coins in a mason jar above their fireplace. Nana would show us the jar of coins, explain how they were collected by Grandpa over twenty-five years' time and were worth more than seventeen dollars. The jar even included three one-dollar coins that were “likely missed by their previous owners.” Nana told us that she had sealed up the jar when Grandpa died, when I was only three years old.

...

Last February, when Dad and I drove to Nana's house to clear out her stuff, I couldn't help but tear up walking into that tiny living room and knowing Nana would never again be there to greet us and offer us cookies. I could tell Dad was having a tough time from how he kept clearing his throat.

One of the first items we talked about that morning was the mason jar with the crow-coins, sitting above the fireplace. Dad asked if I wanted to take the jar for when I got my own fireplace, or if I'd like to add to my measly savings account. I agreed to bring the jar home with me mostly because I couldn't remember Grandpa and thought it would be nice to possess something unique he had owned.

When I got back to my apartment that evening, I decided to examine Grandpa's mason jar. I was surprised to spot both a Mercury Dime and a Buffalo Nickel. Dad has a small collection of these old-timey United States coins, so I knew they hadn't been produced in years. Aware that Grandpa died in 1997 and had been collecting coins from the crows since the mid 70's, I got curious and Googled when Buffalo Nickels were produced. They were last minted in 1938. It seemed unlikely but not impossible that a Buffalo Nickel would still be circulating 35-40 years after they went out of production. Mercury dimes were last produced in 1945.

About to put the jar away, one of the coins pressed against the side glass grabbed my attention. It was a quarter with a tree on the back. I recognized it as one of those state quarters, with fifty different designs commemorating every state. I always liked the look of the Connecticut quarters and, when I was 12 or so, I had kept about 20 of them in my bottom drawer. Curious, I Googled when that coin was made. I was shocked to learn it was first minted in the fall of 1999.

I texted my dad to make sure my memory was correct, "Did Grandpa die in 1997?"

I did not know what to think when Dad wrote back, "Yes, October of that year." Dad didn't inquire why I wanted to know about the timing of Grandpa's death. He isn't inquisitive, like I am. I was overcome with curiosity.

The only way I could think of to answer my questions was to open up that jar and pour all those coins onto my kitchen table. After several hours of counting and sorting, and I don't know how many fig newtons, I was sitting in front of 1,842 coins, 27 of which were minted after 1997. I even found a penny with the E Pluribus Unum shield on the back. Those were first produced in 2010.

I thought about telling Dad but decided not to. Besides being un-inquisitive, Dad is super-logical. I assumed he would come up with one

rational explanation for how those coins got into that jar... maybe several explanations. He would probably say that Grandma was wrong about the jar getting sealed up in 1997 and that she added those coins in subsequent years.

Although I knew this explanation was likely true, I preferred to consider the possibility that crows were somehow traveling into the future, collecting their shiny objects, and then traveling back. Besides, the Connecticut quarter I first saw was situated on the bottom third of that mason jar. Unless Grandma was shaking the jar and mixing those coins, that quarter was placed in there about a third of the way through Grandpa's collection.

...

My first thought when I woke up the next day was that I needed to find a location where I could leave gifts for the crows in our neighborhood. I wanted to see if I would receive crow-gifts in return, just like Grandpa. I also wanted to test my hypothesis about crows and their ability to travel from one time period to another.

I think Grandpa would have liked the location I had picked for my crow-conversations. Behind an office building about a quarter mile away from my apartment, I found an old picnic table. The two-story building looked like it hadn't been used in several years, probably because everyone started working from home during COVID. The picnic table was pretty ugly, with unintelligible graffiti on the top, but it was still standing strong by the edge of the woods. I liked the fact that I could easily walk to it without crossing into any sketchy neighborhoods. I was even able to get a little exercise going there. The best part, when I first found that location, was that I heard crows cawing to each other in those woods.

...

The next morning, I made my first crow-delivery. I introduced myself to the area's crows by leaving a dozen kernels of corn and a mushed-up spider on top of that picnic table. The spider had been killed in my bathroom earlier that week, folded into a napkin, and then kept in my freezer until it could be delivered.

After placing the items, though I felt completely embarrassed afterwards, I found myself yelling, "Come and get it," for the crows.

...

The morning after that, I returned to the picnic table and found there were still three kernels of corn remaining. The spider was gone. I had

no idea if crows took the items, if a squirrel or some other animal had gotten them, or if the wind had kicked up overnight and blew the stuff off. There were no corn kernels lying on the ground. I yelled out, “I hope you enjoyed it,” but received no reply from the crows.

I left another dozen corn kernels, some salted peanuts, and a small chunk of tuna fish I had set aside from a sandwich I had been making.

...

Several days later, I returned to the picnic table and was stunned to see two crows sitting on one of the benches. They were beautiful to me, blue-black in the midday light, and I was certain they were looking at me. I may have been imagining it, but I also think they bowed slightly in my direction. Not being able to help myself, I nodded my head towards them and said, “Well, hello sirs!”

The crows flew off back to the woods when I got within twenty feet of the picnic table. The corn kernels, peanuts, and tuna fish were all gone. On that bench, I saw the sunlight glinting off something. Coming closer, it was an earring with two little loops and a bent ear hook. I was so happy that my crow-barter had been accepted!

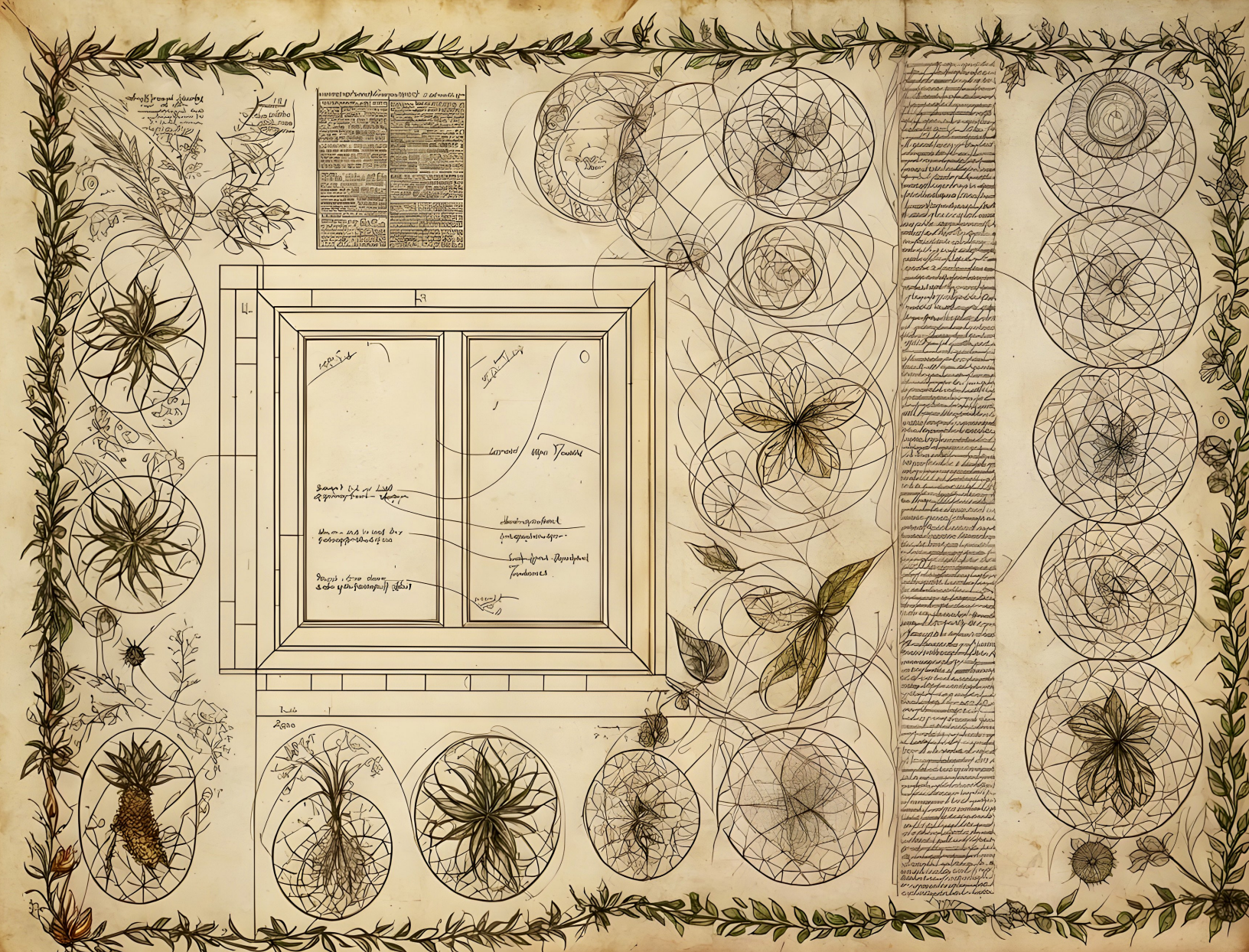
...

Within three weeks, I was thrilled to receive my first coin, a Roosevelt dime from 2018! Within three months, I had collected over three dollars in coins, including quarters, dimes, nickels, and pennies. I had even received a Canadian penny!

...

Today, I am very excited to report that I’ve received the gift for which I had been waiting, hoping. On that picnic table bench, I found a dime from 2026, minted two years into the future. I now have in my hands something that has not yet been made. Who else can say such a thing? Did my crows (yes, I see them as mine), travel into the future and then return with a trinket for me? Am I engaged in a “quid pro quo?” Yes, I firmly believe that this dime in my hands is “proof aplenty.”





Window

Preston Muir

Light lined in shadow...

what is the inverse of "limned"?

A picture box of the
world

I look through it, into
this assemblage, made
of a courtyard

and see a moment in time,
laid out
just for me.



Royal Pain

Andrew Nickerson

The Disney Princess franchise is unquestionably one of the greatest in modern family entertainment. Wondrous humor, charming songs, characters as immortal as the tales they’re based off of...it’s almost impossible not to find something to love about this line of movies, TV series, and even games.

Yet, one thing that truly makes these characters relatable has always been the problems they overcome. Between issues with jealousy, usurpers, or risking their lives to save others, the trials endured by the franchise stars are as timeless as they are. Furthermore, in a cruel twist of fate, the majority of these problems have the same source: their own families. To paraphrase Lumiere from *Beauty and the Beast*, “Don’t believe me?” Let’s look at the facts from each film (animated only, for our purposes) to date.

-*Snow White and the 7 Dwarves*: Who’s the Evil Queen seeking to murder Snow White out of jealousy? Her stepmother.

-*Cinderella*: Who’re the ones cruelly demonizing and taking advantage of poor Cinderella? Her stepmother and stepsisters.

-*Sleeping Beauty*: Why does the evil Maleficent come after Aurora? Because the latter’s parents don’t invite her to the princess’ public presentation, nor do they rein in the kingdom’s three patron fairies when they insult her.

-*The Little Mermaid*: What sends Ariel into the arms of Ursula? Her dad Triton, who cruelly tries to force his hatred of humans on her by destroying the contents of her grotto. Also, who's Ursula? Ariel's aunt.

-*Beauty and the Beast*: Why does Belle first go to the Beast's castle? Her dad Maurice is captured and cruelly imprisoned when seeking shelter.

-*Aladdin*: How does Jafar rise to power so easily? He takes advantage of the wishy-washy nature of Jasmine's dad, the Sultan of Agrabah.

-*Pocahontas*: What inflames an already ugly confrontation between the Jamestown colonists and the Powhatan tribe? Pocahontas' dad, Chief Powhatan, not reining in his braves, along with nearly killing John Smith when brave Kokoum goes out of control and is killed.

-*Mulan*: Why does Mulan join the army? To save her dad, Zhou, who's so proud he can't accept he's unable to fight.

-*The Princess and the Frog*: Tiana is the lone exception on this roster. Her issues are a combination of outside influence and Prince Naveen's own recklessness.

-*Tangled*: Why is Rapunzel held prisoner? Because the security in her parents' palace was so lax that Gothel was able to slip in and grab her.

-*Brave*: What initiates the curse in Merida's homeland? Her mom, Elinor's, stubborn refusal to heed any outside opinion, ultimately culminating in the fight where she tries to force her views on Merida by throwing her bow in the fireplace.

-*Frozen*: What leads to the conflict that engulfs both Elsa and Anna's homeland and the girls themselves? Their parents' recklessly ignoring the trolls' advice to teach Elsa to control her powers, saying fear will be her worst enemy; instead, the former teach her to suppress her powers, using fear as the primary motive.

-*Moana*: What almost prevents Moana from setting off with Te Fiti's heart to save the world? Her dad's stubbornly ignoring the warning signs of impending doom, ultimately leading to his nearly destroying the people's boats to ensure his way...and only stopping when Moana's grandmother dies from the shock of the move.

-*Raya and the Last Dragon*: What leads to the shattering of the heart, thus enabling the evil monsters to reappear? The naivete of Raya's dad, who recklessly invites members of the outlying tribes to his kingdom without ever considering some might have ulterior motives.

As you can see, while conflicts of these ladies come in various shapes/sizes, nearly all of them have the same origin: home. It's a sad truth, but one that ultimately helps forge these women into some of the most amazing role models for modern children. Granted, they've got their flaws, but the trials they conquer that aids in their growth...even if their own families are the source of said trials.





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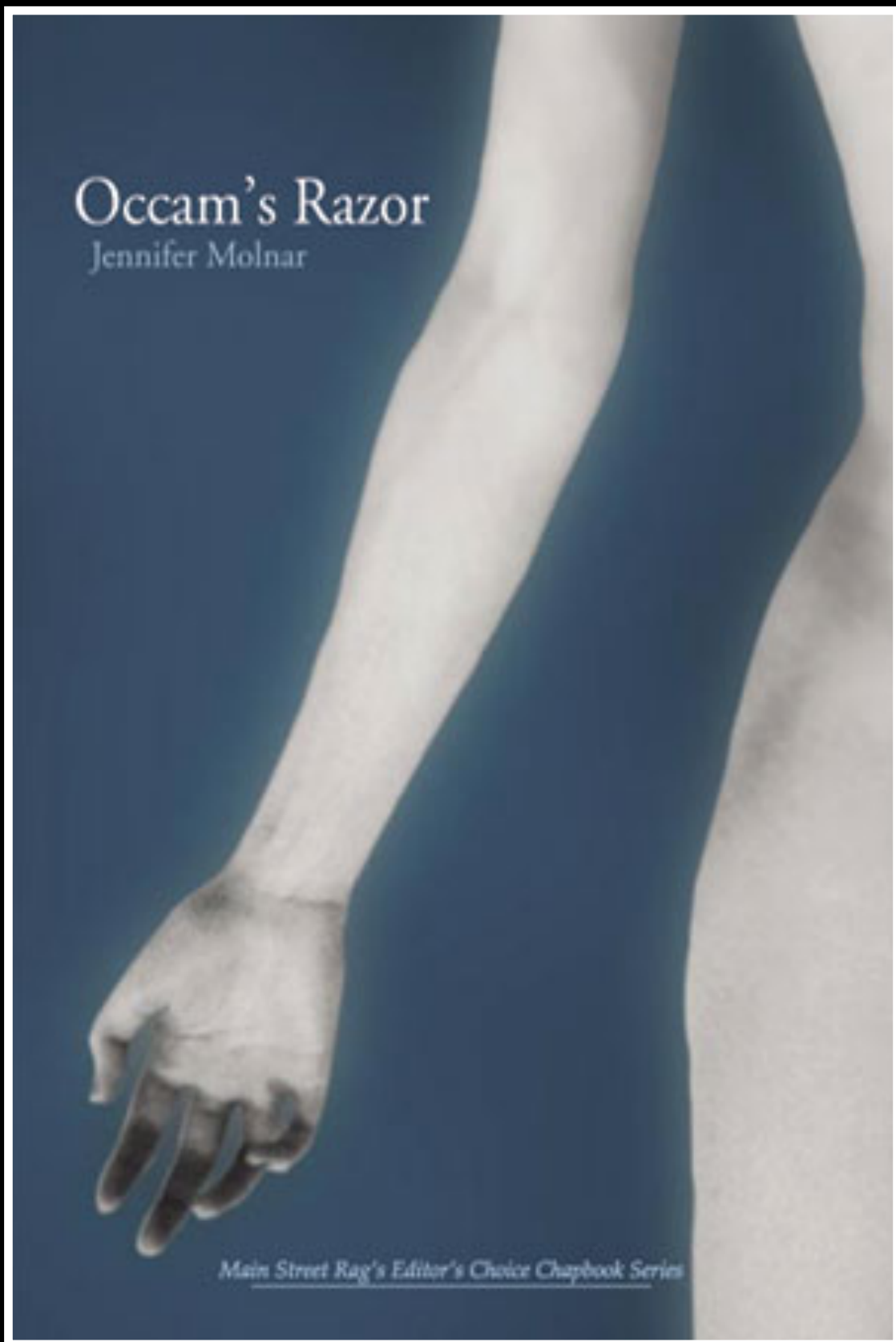
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