

Taylor Drake

# Rumination

*There was a time when all the body's members  
Rebell'd against the belly, thus accused it:  
—Coriolanus, 1.1.89-90*

Of being a worthless leech, a fuck-up, of roommates screaming on the front lawn and empty wine bottles in children's closets and totaled cars and estranged mothers too drunk to cut pizza.

Ruminants are animals with a quad-partment stomach: the rumen and the reticulum, where food is digested; the omasum, where water and nutrients seep into the blood; and the abomasum, the regular stomach onto which all this is stapled.

And so for those three sweet summers, we were whole.

It really used to feel that way, us against the world.



A year later only half of our belly is still in my messages, the rumen joking about impregnating a cosplayer with octuplets. The abomasum must routinely regret introducing us back in high school: when I talk about spearing the cosplayer through on my non-existent dick, he says, *You're both insane*. At dinner, the rumen eats enough for three on my ticket and brags about banging strippers at fifteen.

And I realize a day late that I've forgotten the reticulum's birthday.



The other night the rumen told me how he'd filtered another girl through the reticulum's honeycomb structure—didn't *tell* her to get those tattoos, those piercings, that purple hair, but didn't stop her, either.

She got her first tattoo on her thigh and went to visit him in New York, learned he'd been cheating as I laid my violet bathrobe out in the grass, far enough from the party I'd been kicked out of that I could hear the abomasum relaying the blows over my phone. Loud crickets, no people. Crisp air, no sweat and liquor.

Full dark, no stars.



She was my friend first, you know, back in middle school. Once, I'd walked behind her to the bus loop and caught a brief glimpse

of a drawing from her first breakup: chains being snapped in two.



Don't laugh, but my favorite swallowing-your-own-needs-for-someone-else's song is about a girl stress-eating grilled cheeses after spending a century on the moon.

Waffle House leftovers are still on the counter—egg and cheese sandwich, hash browns so thick with ketchup it drips off my fork like radioactive sludge. We'd go, only 3/4<sup>ths</sup> of our belly, always the same small plates, always waiting in the parking lot for the 1/4<sup>th</sup> who needed to *just use the restroom*.

The moon is never out and the stars are too far away, like the last remnants of glitter still left in the carpet. There's new carpeting in the basement over where the reticulum had rolled over and puked off the side of my couch; her ghostly hands still on the wall from where the rumen had plowed her; his black hoodie still half-swallowed by the peeling leather cushions from when he'd needed to crash at my place, lest he or his father started swinging.

The lower quarters of the stomach would look at each other, and I the omasum would ask, *Should I go in there and check on her?* And the abomasum would always answer, *I don't know, if you want to*. Eventually, she'd nod when asked if she was feeling alright, but her heavy eyeliner would be smudged and her breath would have that dark hint of blood.



So many nights the rumen stalls in my driveway, our chocolate milkshakes melting as I nod along, focusing my attention on the neon green glow of his dashboard, sitting there utterly still in the same seat she'd projectile vomited all over.

He is chewing her out: she'd hacked into his phone, she'd harassed his parents, she'd held her body hostage so he would never leave her.

Later, he'll tell me he forgot her completely when asked by a different friend. Three years and he couldn't even hold onto her name.

Outside the moon is gone and my house's outside lights make the stars too hard to see.



And when they dropped me off back home, I would pace until I could hear my father stirring for his morning gym crawl, my dogs' black eyes following me idly as I dug my nails into my skin until they raised hills. And imagined, as I so often did, cutting my stomach open with a dull pair of scissors.

You clean tripe by rubbing it in rock salt and rinsing it in vinegar, then scraping all along the outside with a long, sharp knife.

“How does it feel to be the only normal person in the group?” I ask the abomasum as I lie on top of him, drawing stars in lipstick over his unshaven cheek.

“Feels normal,” he says.

“Thank you for that wonderful insight.”

And when I look at how long it’s been since I last messaged her, I realize again how much my loyalty depends on who leaves me and who comes back.

The night has finally vomited up the moon, which shines so bright I have to go outside and stand in her shadow. I can see now how the stars are suspended in the atmosphere—some distant neighbors, others close friends. My dogs push past my legs as I step out, biting at each other’s ankles while I lean over the porch railing and stare into the darkness. The old wood cuts into that place where sewer line becomes septic tank.

I watch my breaths bloom white in the cold air, sigh, and give a little *bleh* for emphasis. When I go back inside, my cheese-fest will be over: I’ll have to feed the animals, shoo one of the cats away from pissing behind the TV, toss my empty Coke cans and evidence. Plus I always need to check my dogs’ mouths for dead rats.

That wonderful ache of being an essential organ, that after-taste of rotting meat.

Rumination’s just another word for puking into your own mouth, anyway.

Taylor Drake is a native Georgian named after the Cabbage Patch doll her mother had as a child. When not writing, she can be found reading folktales and spending too much time online cataloging human curiosities “without realizing,” as a professor once said, “that she herself is one as well.” Visit [taylordrake.carrd.co](http://taylordrake.carrd.co).