**Words Come**

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To be a soprano, my childhood voice teacher said, you need to think down, not up. You have to imagine, as you’re reaching for a high note, that your diaphragm is dropping to the floor. I don’t remember his explanation for why this worked, but it did. My tone always came out crispest, my vibrato sharpest, when I laid my breath down at my feet.

Maybe that’s why, a couple months ago, when I was about to make myself come, I saw the word *nadir*. It was after midnight. Sweat pooled at the backs of my knees and dribbled down my calves onto my sheets. The term flashed like a marquee just behind my forehead, flickering out only after I had pulled my fingers away from me.

Words come to me like that. Get stuck in my head the way that others hear songs on a loop. Lavender, empirical, adumbrate, Sisyphean, Sisyphean, empirical.

I wasn’t all that familiar with this particular term—had maybe encountered it once or twice. Had assumed, based on the lift of its meter, the unstressed *na*-followed by a very stressed -*dir*, that it was synonymous with *climax*. The fact that the word arrived as I was climaxing seemed only to confirm my conclusion. But then I washed my hands and googled it. *Nadir*, I read, my phone screen the lone polygon of light in a moonless room. From the Arabic *naḍhīr*, meaning opposite the zenith. The lowest point in the celestial sphere.