ONEIRATA 2013



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This issue of Oneirata is dedicated to Dan Kerness, in honor of his devotion to the music department, the school, and the community. He will be missed by the many people whose lives he touched.

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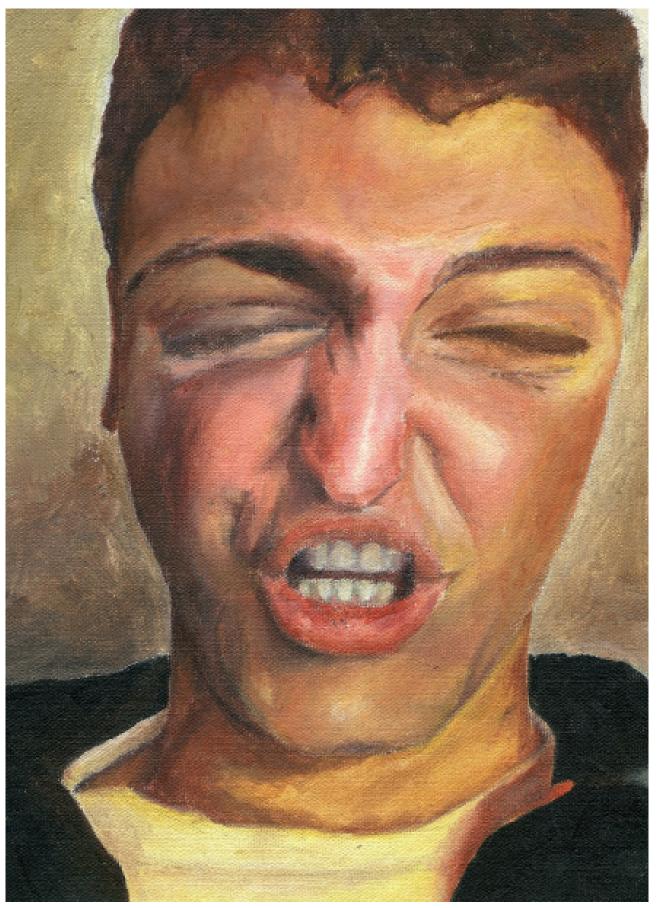
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Ben Torda

This is the way things are this is the fact of numbers, the stacks of papers. This is the calendar days and restless nights and ink on the side of your thumb. This is immediacy; this is obligation. This is your morning and noon and night, rolled together like dough. This is the weight of yesterday, the weight of tomorrow. This is the frame of a door ajar, the blank page awaiting your written word.

This is the way things were this is you forgetting yourself on the leather seat of a swing. This is a good book, a first kiss, a rainy day, a clear night. This is the hum of chatter; this is complete silence. This is time as measured in snowfalls and beach trips. This is plans to become a doctor, plans to become a writer, plans to travel the world, plans to never leave home. This is the pressing desire to grow up.



Hattie Schapiro

This is the way things will be this is the improbable, the illusive, the marvelous. This is the wind in your sails. This is the winning lottery ticket, the unexpected bonus. This is finding happy love, raising happy kids. This is photo albums of past adventures and empty shelves for future travels. This is the horizon, gold and ever-receding. This is you as you are meant to be; this is everything promising and soft, which rests itself just beyond your fingertips.

-Sophia Swiderski



Abby Skolnik

Like A Rolling Stone Robert had developed an uncomfortable malfunction "completely normal for men your age," his doctor elucidated. His inner anatomical mechanisms had spontaneously synthesized a stone within his kidneys; its expulsion was crucial.

Robert unzipped and commenced the procedure exerting bursts of electric force suppressing feeling and pain. The stone was driven through the duct until, with mechanical precision, Robert ejected it.

-Tommy Gelfars

Mausoleum Archives wilt along the shelves Never to be harvested for the vast Information they hold Almost decaying Crumbling walls reveal The true flow of activity Come to talk, to even eat Some work may blossom Though eyes rarely scan the texts Of this mausoleum Thus the gatekeeper nonchalantly Requests silence of the masses Feebly hoping to attain acknowledgment The day begins, the subjects enter, No reading is stimulated -Terry Bludeau

The Bald Man, The Waiting Room, The Pills I Couldn't Swallow

"A bitter pill doesn't need to be swallowed. Just reading your name on the bottle does the trick." - Kay Ryan, "A Bitter Pill"

In the top drawer of my dresser, under a pair of pajama pants, that bra I've outgrown, and a few stray socks is an ancient bottle of pills. You can't have them.

I got my first prescription in eighth grade - Vyvanse, 10 milligrams, and then 20 after the 10 did nothing. I let them give me the pills - it felt cool to have my own prescription - new, and therefore novel. My initial reluctance started with the fact that I am terrible at taking pills. Even little red Advils make me choke. I have chosen more than once to just suffer through a headache or period cramps rather than to pour myself many glasses of water in the hopes that, for once, it would work. I have watched friends take six large vitamins at once with no water, but I can do no such thing.

"Should I drive over now and get it?" my friend says. "No, stay here with us!" someone else says. We are piled on her couch watching a movie. "But I only have one left," the first friend says. I try to keep quiet. "But you don't need them," I say. "Yes I do," she says. "You don't *need* them," I repeat, hoping if I stress the syllables differently, she might catch on to what I am saying.

For a lot of people now, getting their hands on something like Ritalin requires some money, or a friend who "knows someone" or whose sibling is screwed up and takes it. They don't have to take a series of tests, or to sit in those painfully clean waiting rooms where everyone is painfully quiet, checking off the boxes on the clipboard, indicating no, they haven't lost any weight or been in any particular kind of pain recently. I had heard that ADHD was being diagnosed much more frequently than in past years, and a search for the numbers led me to the CDC, where I found out that one million more children had ADHD diagnoses in 2007 than in 2003. ADHD's being over-diagnosed goes with its corresponding medications being over-prescribed, and therefore easier to get. Out of 4.1 million people with ADHD diagnoses in 2007, 2.7 million of them were on ADHD medication. It is easier to "know a guy" because there are more guys to know.

In addition to it being very common for people with ADHD to take medications such as Ritalin or Vyvanse, as I once did, it has become increasingly common for students who do not have ADHD to take these drugs as "study aids," to help them with their homework. The situation is reminiscent of the over-diagnosis of Asperger's syndrome. People who were awkward on the phone or uncomfortable in social situations were suddenly on the Autism spectrum, as were famous people such as the President, according to wild tabloid accusations. Although this made the syndrome more publicly known, it also made the plight of those who actually had it seem less serious. Since so many people were self-diagnosing, jokingly diagnosing others, or just diagnosing Asperger's instead of Autism, people who actually had Asperger's were less of a rarity and therefore less believable. Since it was easier and commonly known to fake it, its being a real thing became almost unfamiliar.

The same thing is happening with ADHD. It is common in school to hear other students say things like "oh, I totally have ADHD," and slogans such as "I don't have ADHD - Oh look! A Bunny!" can be found emblazoned across tee shirts at mall retailers. Instead of people saying "forgetful" or "spacey," people now throw around ADHD, discounting the DSM status and real repercussions of the actual disorder. Part of the reason this bothers me is that I spent so much time being dragged to neurologists on Fridays, half days, and sunny days in spring. No one likes to go to the hospital when they're sick, let alone when they've been released from school early and could be eating pizza with their friends. I had to arrange red and white triangle tiles into patterns, do math problems, answer questions, and play mindlessly boring computer games, but all my classmates had to do was to label themselves as what I'd been labeled by medical professionals, as what had been, for me, the cause of much trouble.

When I was first diagnosed with ADHD inattentive type (I'm spacey, not hyper), I thought it was a huge deal. I was embarrassed and thought I was stupid so I hid it from my friends. When I finally told them, it was like I was coming out.

It was surprising for me to see, at first, that ADHD was not a big deal for anyone else. What was a big deal was the drugs - I was alarmed to find that many of my classmates were craving Ritalin and Adderall, not to get high, but to do their homework. I don't mean to sound uptight, but in my head, this is wrong. Taking drugs that are not prescribed to you is wrong. It is also wrong for people without ADHD to be getting an unfair academic advantage in school by taking drugs that they don't need. Teenagers' prefrontal cortexes are not yet

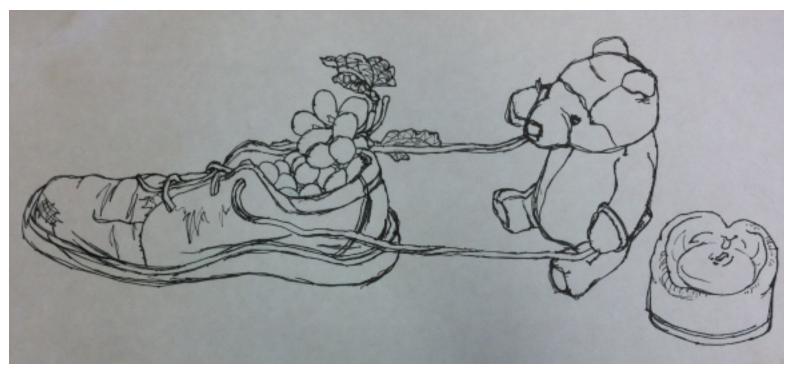
fully developed, and ADHD drugs change the chemistry of the brain. For people with real deficiencies, it can be very helpful and necessary, but for people without these deficiencies, the brain's chemistry is still being changed, but not out of necessity. This is not entirely my classmates' fault, though. In a school such as ours, parents put a lot of pressure on their children to do well and to get into good colleges. Often paired with pressure to do well in school is encouragement to avoid drugs. Ironically, the parental pressure about school seems to send people back to drugs, although not for the purpose of getting high, but rather for doing homework.

"Your teachers said you were really zooming ahead," the doctor says for the hundredth time, lovingly fingering the pages of my eighth grade file, the file from the few brief months that I took Vyvanse. Doctors are sort of pitiful people if you look closely. They have first names like Ronald and Wayne, and no matter how much money they make or how expensive their loafers are, they are still dorky and balding. This one searches for a commonality - he writes poetry, he says. He recites an epic about medicine, about children and their brains. It is a rhyming poem, my least favorite kind. He looks at me with an expression of sympathy and hope as I tell him again that no, I am not going back on medication, and plan for the next time, when I will finally tell him to stop bothering me about it.

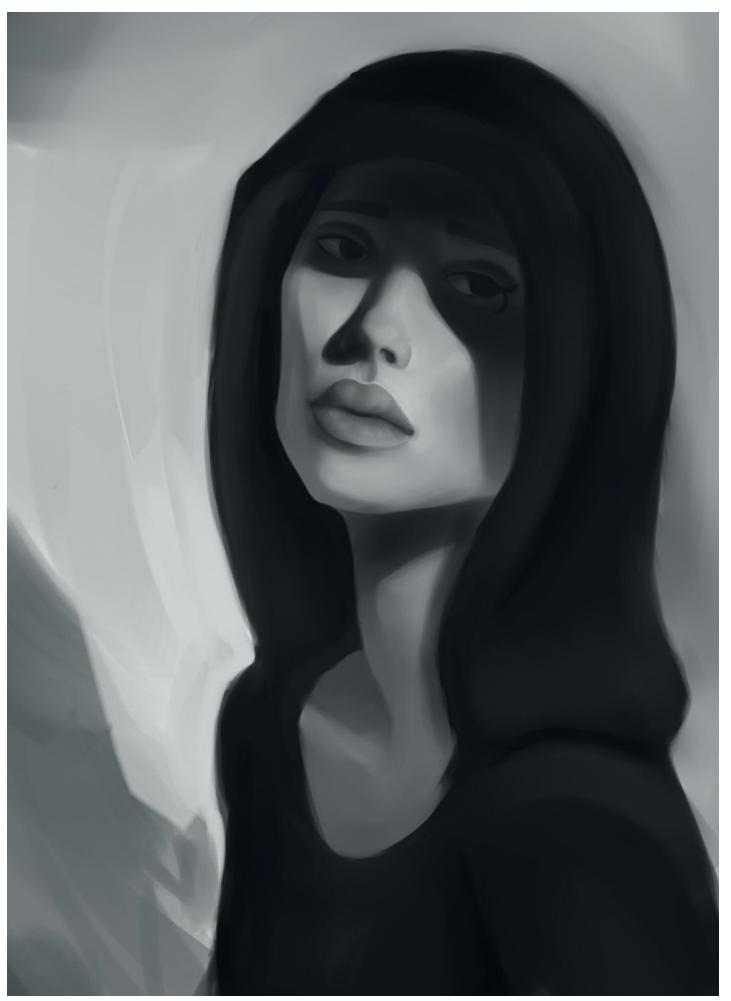
The reason I objected to my friend's desire for Adderall is that I feel like the recent prevalence of teenagers taking ADHD medication that isn't prescribed to them to help them do their homework and maximize their productivity delegitimizes the problems of people like me, people who actually have ADHD. In the way that some may see it, I have chosen to make my life harder for myself. After several miserable months of avoiding my Vyvanse, I chose not to take medication. My neurologist did not understand this, but I ignored him. It bothers me that people without ADHD take drugs like Ritalin for an academic advantage, to basically free them from effort, while I have to work twice as hard to accomplish the same tasks. It is inappropriate to use ADHD drugs to do homework when these people could really just close their Facebook window, turn off their phones, and actually sit down and do their work.

Few of my friends know what I think about this. Each time I sit at the computer during study hall and someone whines about their lack of Adderall, I am conflicted. What will happen this time? Will my desire not to sound uptight outweigh my sense of right and wrong, or will they switch? These conversations also take me back to miserable mornings of mixing Vyvanse powder into applesauce or orange juice to avoid swallowing the pills, of the mornings I said I was too late to take it, but really just didn't want to, and of the old bottle of pills nestled amongst my underwear, the pills that I will now throw away so that next time someone asks me if I have any, I can say no and mean it, and not have to explain.

—Hanna Pennington



Gina Lindner



<u>I'm Glad</u>

I'm glad you're not a part of me anymore.

I'm glad I was able to let go of you when I had the chance

I'm glad that when I happen to think of you I only think of the happy times we had

And not the bad times that led to me being angry and hurt

I'm glad I have other things that I can hold on to; to take your place

Like the great friends I have or the fact that I have the best family in the world

especially my sisters who are always there,

Always there To warm you in the winter Always there With shelter from the rain Always there To catch you when you're falling Always there to stand you up again Family By your side In seconds if you ask it

That is what I hold on to; because it patches up the hole that is in my heart

—Gabby Arce



<u>The End</u>

Glistening on the ground, the revolver sat and attracted the stumbling survivors. Loaded with one lead bullet in the chamber like a game of Russian Roulette, the revolver was the only tool of defense in a 100-yard radius.

It was ironic: this 100-yard radius on a Nebraskan farm 40 miles away from the nearest building was most likely the most inhabited space in the state at the time. It was even more ironic when considering that the lifeless gun acting as the center of this circle would cause the two male survivors' demise. There were all these creatures surrounding them, salivating with desire at the mere site of them, and each man was most furious with the other for him wanting to take the gun and save himself. At that moment they each craved to reach the gun first so they could slaughter the other one, not the lamebrains limping towards them; so they could perish in this helpless world with satisfaction and dignity. "You've gotta enjoy the little things" had become their motto, and this was their final presentation of that principle.

This phrase had been exclaimed most recently at the supermarket in Salt Lake City three weeks earlier. Plopped down on a filthy blue and green-checkered floor in the back of the bread aisle, the two men devoured the last of the ice cream sandwiches. Crying out tears of joy to the heavens and savoring every last bite, this "little thing" provided them with happiness for what seemed to be a short period of time, when in reality they remained glued to that floor for hours, grasping the smithereens of joy. Eventually, they could not avoid the immanent problem of having the memory of this moment dissipate into a hazy reminiscence, and the everlasting search to find the next source of pleasure ensued.

Now, racing towards their final showdown, this phrase was the only thing scampering through their minds, and they each needed one last proud moment before they left Earth. The revolver had a gravitational pull, with the two men barreling towards it and the unliving pursuers hobbling after them. The dead grass crumbled under their feet as the moonlight illuminated the scene.

Normally this moonlight would have entranced the survivors, being as bright as ever and demonstrating the beauty of the natural world and space. Normally the men would recognize the value of serenity and magnificence, and forget about the melting population. Normally the men would be mesmerized by the sunset past the shimmering river and heave all of their worries into the water.

But this instance was far from normal. Beauty had diminished and peace was neutralized. To be a hero was to be absurd. All that lingered was sadness and despair. Or so they thought.

They spotted it at the same time, each immediately proceeding to rub their eyes and tilt their head. There, in the moonlight, standing as still as a statue, was a hint of living green among the dead gray. The one vivacious blade of grass conjured an intense sensation of hope through the two men, and it caused them to halt in their tracks. It only required one glance of empathy and confirmation between the two to destroy the tension and to devise a plan, after which they were off sprinting once again. But this time, they were bearing different motives.

Their hands grasped the gun simultaneously, fumbling between the two's hands as they were in a hurry until one allowed the other to do the honors. He jerked the gun off the ground and sprouted into a standing position. Without hesitation, he aimed the revolver at an undead's head and tugged the trigger. The blast resonated through the field and acted as a sure sign that life still existed.

-Matthew Fastman

Humpty Dumpty

There are white rivets That trail down my knees And flick over the bumps of my bones. The flesh seared Hot as my skin was Shredded, ripped open And blood slid down: Grooves formed. Scraped knees were a consistency of my childhood.

If the arrogant pull That still tugs on the left Corner of my lips is pride, I still run blind Into wall after wall, Stumbling, A clown, Knowing nothing. My intellect makes me still dumb. So I'm teetering On the red stone wall – pedestal -That I dance on, gleefully. One breath, Softly blowing, A crisp statement, And I'm falling, Tumbling down. I still fall from time to time.

But I patch my own wounds: A life time of red welts And blue bruises That communicate that I'm not Remarkable at all: And no one, Anyone, Will care when I fall. But aren't I just a proud fool after all?

-Gretchen Bogan



Lena Rubin

Sgnitsah Nocturnal Adolescent Recreation

In the village of Sgnitsah it is typical of adolescents, particularly those of the highest division in their education, to take part in certain recreational activities one to two nights per week, when they have a hiatus from their regular schooling. These acts are most often carried out in the largest expanse of woods in the village, which happens to be adjacent to where the education of the youngest children population is administered. The highlight of these activities involves the consumption of judgment-impairing substances, often in the form of drink or specific herbal substance that is smoked. The ingestion of these materials is often performed in large groups of friends, and in turn the effect of the consumption on the adolescents in questions allows an easier time of socialization and ultimately the formation of bonds between unfamiliar adolescents. There is a special clearing in the woods for said social gatherings to occur, featuring a fire-pit surrounded by logs (serving as benches for the groupings of adolescents). The fire-pit is clearly a symbol of leadership for the adolescents taking part in the attendance of these gatherings, as it is usually the older and more experienced adolescents who hold the responsibility of producing the fire for the others (occasionally even sending for the younger adolescents to bring back twigs and small branches from the woods surrounding the clearing for the fire, further exemplifying the authority associated with age at these assemblies). It would seem the adults of the Sgnitsah village deem these gatherings altogether inappropriate, most likely due to the high levels of consumption that often lead to illness in the adolescents immediately following ingestion or the next morning, however there seems to be no extreme need for the cessation of this type of recreational behavior. When it is brought to the attention of the law enforcement in the village, swift action is taken to halt and sometimes even punish the young people for their behavior; though there is the belief, it would seem, that this type of conduct is established in the nature of the adolescents, and however much attempt there would be to put a final end to it would ultimately be futile.

—Sammi Aibinder



I'll Remember

I'll remember my first day of high school.

I'll remember the Seniors lined up, all waiting for their chance to draw on me, yell at me, tag me with labels that said things like "Frail" and "Geek."

I'll remember the hallways and the squeaky floors.

I'll remember stepping over the cracks in the uninspired pattern that comprised them.

I'll remember the water fountain, which I would stand at for what seemed hours of my time, filling my cheeks with cold, hard water because I couldn't gain the courage to talk to her.

I'll remember walking out of the vice principal's office on the verge of tears.

I'll remember almost flipping over the heavy wooden bench they would sit on.

I'll remember forcing myself to keep my eyes open, tired from the few hours I had slept the night before.

I'll remember the bathroom by the gym, with a smell so putrid I forced myself to breathe through my mouth.

I'll remember the hallway of the science rooms being even worse, a smell so awful one could only rationalize it by imagining someone burning a combination of rotten cheese and sulfur.

I'll remember walking into that library, seeing middle-schoolers lined up playing flash games on the computer.

I'll remember being one of them.

I'll remember my first day of middle school.

I'll remember the progress I felt I was making.

I'll remember pain, depression, tears.

But I won't remember why.

I'll remember being tutored by students of the high school, even then struggling to get my homework done.

I'll remember looking forward to going home, and dreading waking up in the morning.

I'll remember saying goodbye to my father when he left for China.

I'll remember my graduation from middle school, where Pomp and Circumstance was played, knowing even then how inane it was but how happy I felt.

I'll remember my elementary school, but I'll remember more walking through it as a Junior feeling I would nearly hit my head on the ceiling, sorting through the book fair, seeking old VHS Tapes of Ingrid Bergman and Audrey Hepburn.

I'll remember laughing with my friends in the library.

I'll remember acting like an idiot to make them laugh.

I'll remember feeling like an idiot, when I would stare at the cold, heartless screen, knowing I had 10 minutes of the lunch period to finish my essay.

I'll remember neglecting my responsibilities to go to the pizza place in town with my friends.

I'll remember it being worth it.

I'll remember the hours it took me to clean my room, staring at the mountains of clutter before me, Cathode Ray Tube televisions, framed prints of old actresses and video game systems from as early as the 80's filling the floor.

I'll remember the smell of the house my friend lived in and how it would stick to my clothes.

I'll remember talking with my friends past midnight.

I'll remember the hopes, the dreams, the disappointments.

I'll remember feeling I was only sticking by with the thought that things would get better.

I'll remember reading poems to a silent audience in the auditorium of my school.

I'll remember flashing lights, hearts pounding, and dub step.

I'll remember rushing to write this, on the notebook I bought off of a friend with the 50 dollar bill I found on the ground of the gym during the Junior dance.

I'll remember how good things were for me back then, yet how unhappy I so often felt.

And I'll wonder why.

—Michael Ganjehlou

Fresh as Febreze

The freshest kicks around, the newest, mint condition, straight-from-the-factory. You have to have the hook up, the freshest hook up, the man on the inside, and I've got that down pat. I had to labor for these, beg, pull out every favor, and I still barely got them.

My man said, "This will cost you."

And I said, "Whatever it takes." 'Cause you know style isn't easy, and I've got style for miles and miles of styles. These will be my crown jewels, my size 11 and a half, brush with a toothbrush everyday until they shine, put them in the fireproof safe at night, babies. I wasn't gonna let them out of my sight – no barefoot Buddhist temples for me. I'd lock them to my ankles with handcuffs, but that'd probably scuff the leather.

THE IMPORTED, 100 Percent Genuine Bovine Leather, with the suede finish, and, the rumored, real ermine fur finish on the suede finish, none of this knockoff stuff. For me, it's only the finest. And you know I deserve to treat myself once in every couple of days, 'cause I work hard and dress tighter still.

They came in the box, not made of any of this cardboard – I call that a poverty box – but rather this was plywood –*NO doubt* the dopest packaging material invented. I made the postman take my signature when they disembarked, because let's be real, it was a mix up that the postal service *didn't* need it. Nothing this fresh was going to be left at someone's door – that's how Jordan's across the country are stolen. I said, "Thanks my man, you're killing it out there – both rain and sleet." And he said I should probably go unwrap my shoes now. But just a little more directly with some fresher language – but you know I like honesty.

I took them immediately to my room and set them down on the king sized bed stand, which was there only to compliment my emperor-sized easy chair – the place I do my musings. This wasn't some Christmas day unwrap-athon, there was no shaking or manhandling. Rather I have my routine to make sure everything works out. I slide over to the speakers and crank up my tunes, making sure that the neighbors hear – I'm educating the masses in musical taste – then, fully feeling it, I groove over to the closet, not even glancing at my babies in case I get tempted. It's the closet where I live, rows on rows on rows of sneaks and sandals, laces and linings, merino and midsoles, this is a museum at this point – I should probably charge admission. I looked over my possessions admiring each as admiration was do, and like Caesar said, "I came, I saw, and I rocked that toga to *death*."

But finally it was time for a new addition, the crème de la crème, the game was itching to be changed. I swayed toward the bed, my custom made, silk sheeted bed – I don't think I need to say anything more – and busted a move in the mirror, you know I do that sometimes – I'm sometimes too spontaneous for spontaneity. As I came closer I stopped though, 'cause there is no fooling around near my babies. Rule number one is that you don't mess with the kicks – that's just common sense. It should go without saying I mean, for real. The box rose in front of me, cushioned by my sheets, which protect it from seismic waves and all that. And I paused for a second, soaking it in. I remembered back to every box I had opened before, every top I slowly popped, and every fresh look I copped. Carefully I reached toward the all-black shine of the box, and I slipped the latch, paused again 'cause it was mad dramatic, and opened that money box up.

It was like I was Blackbeard with his treasure, my babies simply glowed. I peeled back the wrapping, not made of this *tissue paper* – I call that bankruptcy strips – but rather only ostrich feathers caressed my kicks – wasn't gonna risk scuffing the finish.

THE ALL WHITE, ITALIAN MADE, English tailor sewn, polished eight times before they even reached my door, leather that was promised to caress your feet like a *foot Snuggie*. The sole was made of Peruvian rubber, carried on the back of an *Aztec* for like six miles before it was even shipped. The laces were hand-woven in my own personal color – I call it Milk White. If anything on this planet screamed "*ILL*" this was it, I had reached the mountain top, baby. And I hadn't even told the best part.....

THEY HAD WINGS. Down stuffed, Scandinavian crafted wings that emerged from the sides, signifying simply that I was "*it*", there couldn't be any higher aspirations than those I just obtained; it was official as a referee with a whistle.

I barely had to picture myself rolling up to school, fresh to death, shoes shinning – blinding people with their shine – that was going to go down in history, American and European. The friends are were gonna have to hide their jealousy, but they wouldn't do it well though cause these shoes make that impossible. No one on the face of the earth had shoes this fresh, and if they do, they can't wear them as well I can, not even a question, Supreme Court ruled and everything. But first I had to see how they felt.

I slid my foot into the shoes I lined neatly up, side by side. First right than left, 'cause that's part of the system, and I stood slowly, graceful as something graceful, and it made me wince how good they looked in the mirror, it was uncomfortable how good. More than uncomfortable – simply distressing how good they looked.

The hardest part of walking is having to pick up your feet, and you can't know this until you're trying not to scuff the new sneaks on the way to school. I bounce along in the usual style: head bob, neck bob, knee dip then back to the head. Thoughts of the glances that people were going to give out of the corner of their eyes, as they use every ounce of self control to try to stop from getting down and kissing my hem consumes me almost as much as picking the places for my steps. I don't think swooning will be going too far, maybe not far enough.

The school, red brick on red brick, rises up in front of me – it's definitely not as fresh as I am. And the moment is here, now's the time, and I'm ready and steady, dry underarms for days. The doors approach, and the swagger only grows, the bob greater, 'cause I've been told I have to do me. Through the doors, this is it, R Kelly said it and I'm living it – flying. I hop-step as the door glides open, just for the added emphasis, and the fluorescent spotlights hit me, causing the suede to pop, the ermine to crack and the wings to take off. I stand, posing like never before: feet front and center, arms crossed to show I don't care in the slightest.

And silence hits me like a smack to the head, the gut and the kidneys combined. The heathens walk by... and keep walking. The scrubs wouldn't notice style if it rained Air Max sneaks. My babies don't need the respect from these people who didn't even appreciate that they were in the presence of perfection, of the culmination of the history of sneakers. I don't want them to look, it would've offended me. But some people who will appreciate are the friends, now those cats know style.

So off to the lunch room – the spot to be if you know who's who. I stroll there through the halls, laughing at each philistine that walks by, living in darkness, my head shakes with pity. And it's time again. The doors approach, and the swagger only grows, 'cause I've been told I have to do me. Through the doors, and the fluorescent spotlights hit me, causing the suede to pop, the ermine to crack and the wings to take off. I pause letting the scene sit, and those who were blinded time for their eyes to adjust. I pimp-walk to the friends, not even glancing at them, if you're wearing these shoes you stop for no man. I bop up, eyes still closed and give daps all around, and there is not even a sound – that's the noise of being stunned into silence. I say, "What's up, man?" you know 'cause I don't want the quiet to continue, "What's happening, fellows?" And the silence continues, an unprecedented silence, never have shoes shocked this many people into deafness. I never doubted they would.

I open my eyes slowly, not smiling, I take no pleasure in any of this, as one of the friends, Hepner, says tersely, "Chill bro, we're watching." I look now, six heads huddled around Retman's phone, in its revolting case – a heinous red.

Retman says, "Look, it's mad funny."

I turn, only thinking one thing: what has the world come to? I'm living in the sewer. And I run, no thought to scuff or cracks – not a single comment, no glances, no envy, no hem-kissing. A failure like never before, history could have been made, should have been made, instead ignorance won, America lost a little today.

Only one place to go, only one place to fit the outcome. The doors approach, and I slouch through, 'cause I've been told I have to do me, but what a dumb expression anyway, you know. I walk in, splashing the standing water on the floor, past the drawings on the wall –each profane remark, they were probably written by the general school population, the Neanderthals – and to the stalls I go. I hold my nose but it is too late, I'm polluted, probably won't ever recover, I'll have to burn the clothes. And I reach down and slowly undo the Milk White laces, I stroke the suede once more, puff the wings and let both drop– "Such a waste, what a waste" – into the cracked ceramic bowl, the clogged shitter for my shit shoes.



Flower Girl

She's covered in flowers. A whole layer of them, and beneath them a layer of clothes, in case an early winter comes and wilts them to dust. She asks me why I feel like I'm covered in festering sores and everyone is staring at them. Well, I say, because I am covered in festering sores and everyone is staring at them.

People tell me they'll fade, simmer down with experience, romance, the stuff good lives are made of, but I know they will only grow larger. They are the marks of age, of knowing too much about family finances, psychiatric hospitals, a house that's slowly sinking into the earth. This girl and I, we are the same age, but her skin is pink and smooth. When her flowers finally wilt, she'll be ready, protected by her layer of real clothes.

I was never ready for things, only for change, but when it came I cried. I remember worrying about sleep, still awake at midnight when I was seven, silently crying on the couch as Emeril pointed his fat finger at me. I remember telling myself, "Sleep is overrated, sleep is overrated" again and again. I remember telling my dad that we had to be home by eleven and being too young to protest when he told me I was obsessed with time. I wasn't then, but I am now. I find that change is always good, hits you like Emeril's accusatory finger. But time forms slowly under your skin. Time emerges red and revolting, accompanied by a whole family of festering sores. Time feels the first hard blow of winter and loses one petal, then another, till the layer of flowers lies dead at your feet, till the cold scrapes your bear skin, turns love into indifference, till no one needs a flower girl anymore because no one's getting married.

The flower girl worries everyday about losing her flowers. I want to tell her that it's not so bad, being naked, cold, marked up by time and wide awake because that's the stuff real lives are made of, because winter always comes too soon, because sleep is overrated.

-Miranda Willson

Gangsters

"This is it, Iceman," Grange said next to me. "They won't have nothin' on us after this. Once the bomb's on that bus, the only guy who's got anything'll be taken care of."

According to our inside guy, the only man who knew where we were hidin' out was headed to D.C. on that bus to tell the F.B.I. what he knew. "A life sentence I can deal with, Iceman. But the stool-pigeon told me we're doomed to death row." He exhaled cigarette smoke and repeated, "A life sentence I can deal with." "Yeah," I said, unsurprised by the news. "There ain't no way to make a prison break from death."

Our only luck: the F.B.I. had no idea where we were, and was scourin' the country for a clue. And if nothing got in our way plantin' our bomb, it'd stay like that.

We spotted a black fedora in the crowd. A man came into view outside the bus, dressed exactly like every other businessman in the station with a chubby face only we recognized. When he saw us next to the pillar he gave a subtle thumbs-up and boarded with the suede satchel slung over his shoulder. "Okay, he's on," Grange muttered. He patted my shoulder real heavy and flicked his cigarette. Specks of ash flew from it like gnats.

"I'll stay and make sure the bus don't come back," I told him.

"It won't." He laughed, and it rattled round in his throat like a machine gun firing. "Our guy'll get off at the next station, and it'll go off 'fore anyone notices, so don't worry. See ya round, Iceman." Grange left. It was one-thirty. The bomb was gonna go off at three.

I saw a woman in a mahogany fur coat. The coat I'd got Lola looked just like it; first thing I ever bought for someone else. I hadn't told Grange this was my last job. I knew he'd disapprove, but he wouldn't stop me, though he might complain, "Well, Ice, she sure has goddamn changed you."

She had changed me. I saw there was more to life than this. Right now it was too dangerous for her to be near me, and she was going away. Maybe I'd never be able to marry her or give her a life she deserved, but if the feds got off me we could be together. I smiled around my cigarette.

As the thick plumes of smoke drifted away from my face, I realized the woman was Lola. She was carryin' two bags. I almost went to help her, but realized I should stay at the pillar, in case anyone recognized me. I remembered now she'd said she'd leave "next Tuesday"—I hadn't made the connection with the date 'til now.

Lola tossed her hair over her shoulder imperiously and held her chin high as she began to walk purposefully in the direction of the doomed bus. My cigarette fell from my mouth and singed my hand. I didn't notice.

I moved through the crowd. The bus would leave in enough time to stop her.

Stopping her meant exposing myself. I could be recognized off the wanted posters, so numerous here they could be wallpaper. If I spoke to her, tried to stop her, I'd be noticed. I paused not five feet from the pillar and watched the bus swallow her. Stoppin' her'd mean putting my ass on the line. I'd be caught. Couldn't risk it.

My ears were ringing so much I couldn't think. There were people all round me talking and the rumble of luggage wheels. The bus belched smoke from its dirty grilles and with a huff slowly rolled forward. It sped up as it went, stopped with a squeak as it turned to exit the station, and lurched forward again.

And it was gone.

The acrid smell of pollution clogged my nose and I gagged. It seemed like the station was tiltin' and I watched the large white-rimmed black clock. The hour hand and the second hand, so white they glowed against the black clock face, crossed at the two. I watched the longer one, and each time it moved I heard it. It wasn't like a tick, but a resounding thump. The hour hand reached the four when I realized the bus would never return and I left with the thump of my pulse in my ears.

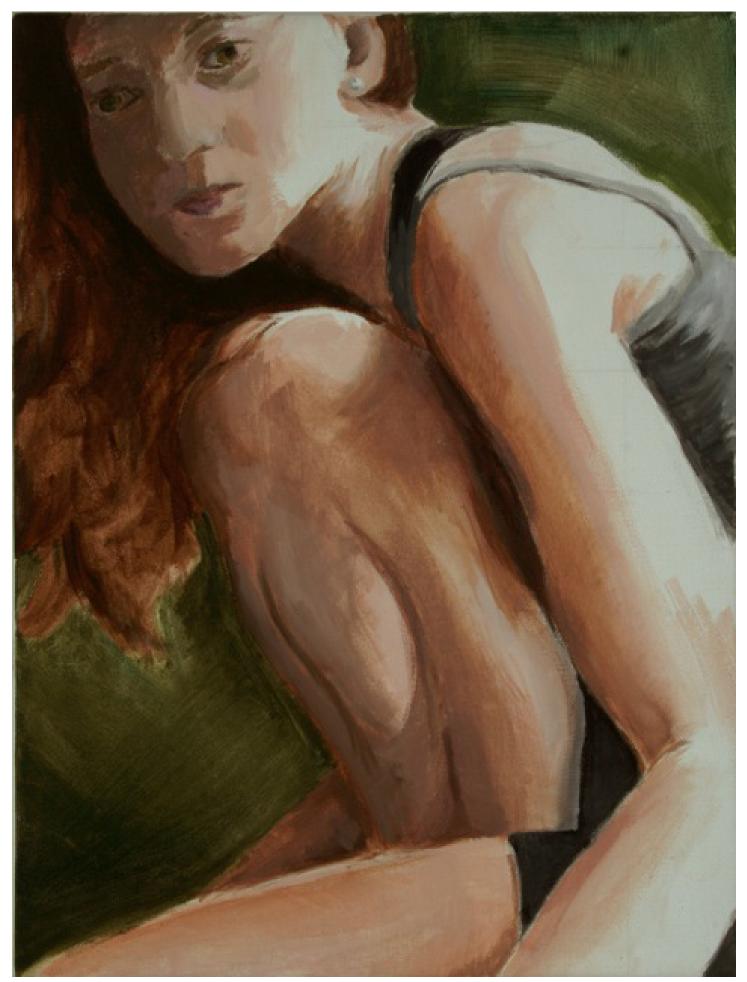
I climbed into my car with a thick haze clouding my vision. It didn't make sense. Wasn't she my life? Hadn't I thought I'd give everything for her? I had given everythin', too. I realized too late I'd ran a red light. Didn't matter. I ran another on purpose. I noticed through the numb that a cop was tryin' to pull me over. I did, not knowing where my passivity came from, realizing if I was arrested now it woulda all been for nothing.

"Do you realize you just ran two red lights?" the policeman said. "I'm going to have to give you a ticket."

"Don't I look familiar to you? You haven't seen my face anywhere?" I said without intonation. Somewhere in the miasma of my mind I noticed I felt sick.

He raised an eyebrow at me. "Who do you think you are? I got bigger things to worry about than you, kid. Don't make excuses. With a car this nice, you can definitely afford to pay a ticket. You could pay for anything. Hell, if Iceman Preston had your money he could pay off our informant. By the way, I hear the informant's headed to D.C. this afternoon. Pretty soon we'll know exactly where the Iceman is." He chuckled, lazily scribbled on his pad and handed me the ticket. With a nod in my direction he turned and headed for the coffee shop across the street.

Coulda paid off their informant. My hands shook as I put the car in gear.



I always wonder where people come from. Yesterday I sat in the library looking at the New York City skyline afforded to me by a seat in front of the window. The sky was beginning to get darker and lights twinkled on across the river. I was writing a very long and laborious paper and was frustrated at the fact that my pages written to hours spent ratio was basically one-to-one. I sat staring into space. A man walked in carrying a plastic bag with what looked to be a few magazines inside of it. He had a beard and wore a black leather jacket and jeans and beat-up sneakers. He sat in an armchair and fell asleep, his legs propped up on a table. He remained in seated position – he was, it seemed, someone well-adjusted to falling asleep at any place and any time. He looked too well-dressed to be homeless, although he had an unkempt air that set him apart from everyone else sitting around me. I thought to myself that if I were ever homeless or in need of a warm place to sleep that a library would probably be my first choice.

When I looked up from my computer an hour or so later, he was no longer there. I hadn't seen him leave and wondered where he went. I looked back at the glittering city and the unobtrusive black sky. It looked peaceful from where I was, but I knew that the wind was frigid and unforgiving. I found myself hoping that the man would find another refuge wherever he went. Unable to focus on my essay anymore, I looked around and realized that I didn't know where any of these people came from. There was a woman whose hair fell into her face as she penciled words into a notebook that looked like the one I keep in my bedside table. There was an old woman with blue eye shadow, bright pink lips, falsely bronzed skin. There was a tall, skinny young man leaning against a bookcase and reading the New Yorker. I wondered what I looked like to all of them. I tried to see myself through another's eyes – thin, knees pulled to chest, a hole in her leggings, staring at a computer screen. I wondered if they even looked at me. I wondered if anyone looked at strangers as much as I did.

—Lena Rubin



Parallel Windows

I can't help but feel sorry for being broken. If only I could keep a mental grip on my physical debilitations I wouldn't be in this mess. I thought I was invincible. I used to be able to breathe in the soft greenery of the outer world, but I have been condemned to a chamber of white. I have been hospitalized twenty three times before turning fifteen. This would have driven my parents into deep debt, yet I was lucky enough to have parents who were beyond rich. Kids used to ask if my blood flowed green. To be honest I would rather have green blood than be stuck having this toxic muck pulsate throughout my body.

I usually find myself alone in my bleached box either reading a book or fondling my contact case. The two orbs are a reminder of the room I have been ensnared in. They are as bleached as the hospital and are meant to cure one of my many ailments. I can't resist trying to crush it. Although unlike the hospital, the contact case has its flaws. It's marred by a black ink splotch on its back as well as a myriad of bruises across its soft polypropylene shell. It's shaped like a face with cartoonishly huge surprised eyes: one green, one pale. My parents do come and visit when they have the time. This isn't often and they don't offer much company. They generally greet me with the usual "How has our Joshua been doing? Good? Well that's good sweetheart." There isn't usually much more for us to say to each other, so they retreat back to the world of the living. In terms of finding real company in the hospital, there was this girl across the hall. At first all I could do was look at her through her door's window, which I knew whole-heartedly was a little creepy. I didn't care how creepy it was, I needed someone.

She tended to look down a lot. I couldn't see what she was looking at due to the restriction of the small window that granted me her presence, but she did so constantly. Then came the fateful day that she looked up and saw me. She gave me a sad sort of smile. At that very moment I started to make an elaborate plan to steal into her room. The plan's execution was flawless; I passed unseen past my door through the hallway and into her room without much of an issue.

When I opened the door I found her in her hospital bed looking down at a water bottle lying on her lap. Startled, she looked up and greeted me with her sad smile. She seemed to be several years older than I am and she was stunning. She had wavy stark black hair cut short. Her high cheekbones framed her perfect nose and shaped her pale freckled face. She was an unusual beauty. The rest of her body was hidden beneath the sheets. Plasma and a blood bag hung next to her bed. What seemed to be men's clothes were piled up on a chair near the door, underneath were shoes lacking laces.

"What are you in here for?" she asked politely.

"I can't stop bleeding," I said reluctantly. "Well I have now, but they want to make sure what happened a week ago doesn't transpire again."

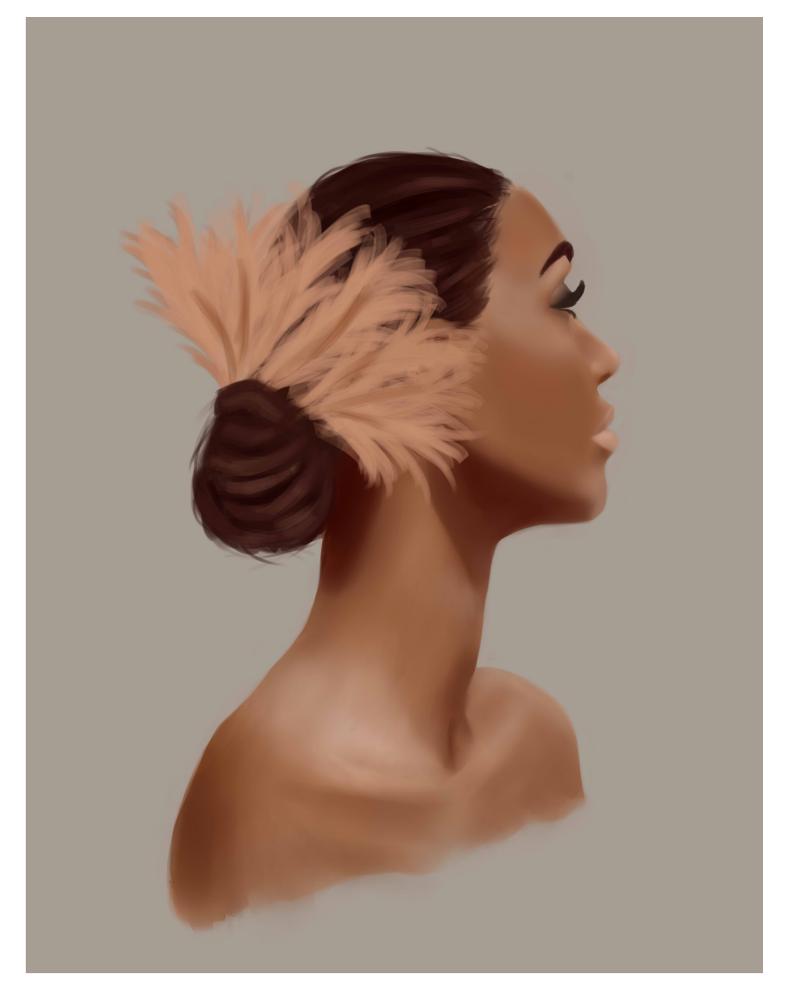
Her grin grew broader "Well what a coincidence, I can't either. "

Shocked I asked, "You're a hemophiliac too?"

Her grin faded while she tried respond, "Well no... You see..." She paused to inhale as if choking on her own words. "I want to be a man..." She eyed me suspiciously as if she was looking for some form of contempt on my face.

Yes I was completely taken aback, and in some ways disappointed, but I can't help but feel her pain. I know how it feels to be something that I don't want to be; I'm the anemic. I'm sheltered from the excitement and adventure of the world and if I had the ability to change it I certainly would. We ended up talking for quite some time, until I found it time to retreat back to my own cage. Before I got up to leave, she said, "Hey, just for the record my name is Joshua." I laughed. "Well what a coincidence—that's my name too."

-Sebastian Kane



goddess

octavia, take me to your tiny bedroom let's look at the pictures on the wall in your green nightgown, with your makeup off you look somewhere in between a child and an old woman, when with your slight, pubescent curves, you are somewhere in between a man and a woman. like all little girls, you want to be like the models, preserved forever in a magazine.

and venus, you're an angel in your cheap apartment, your halo of daylight radiates in from the window, where there are rare trees. you're a teenager again, now she. you were almost there.

let me watch you comb your hair into perfect spirals with gel against your forehead. let me see you walk for what you will never have. the energy coming from your fragile bodies is too great to be contained. venus, beautiful girl, legend in the ballroom, tough-talking on the street, nothing in the world.

they found your body curled up under a dingy hotel bed, fetal position. no one knew your name. you would do anything for money. it was the sad suburban men, they bought you dresses and loved you for your small hands.

venus, you said you stopped turning tricks. tiny blonde loudmouth, curly-haired skeleton, you are the closest things to holy i know.

-Hanna Pennington



Ariana Ray

Exit Through The Front Door Press your lips to the ground And flutter your eyes open To see the milky light fragment – Thirty shards scattered – Rose tinted, Blue-violet, Sunny yellows bled To green: You sit still in a house of colored glass.

Raise your crumpled form From the wood panel floor And expand. Back straightening, Hands pressing down, You place your body onto The heels of your feet And rise. You stand up in a house of angels.

Pivot on your left foot, About-face, And let you arms fall aside: Just march forward, Teetering in the beginning, Moving away from the cold Stare of the wood nailed Forebodingly to the wall – One step, two steps... You walk out of a house of God. —Gretchen Bogan <u>The Red Baron</u> Sometimes I wonder what dogs dream of. Maybe another juicy bone? Another walk in the park, with a squirrel to chase. Do dogs have nightmares? Surely a dog has dreamt of her master, Lying cold and dead in a coffin, with the food dish empty, the water bowl dirty.

Then I wonder, is that what he dreamt of, before his master was shot through the heart, and fell from the sky? And the day that he never came home, he howled for their walks on the airfield, with a giant red bird to chase. And he wondered why he didn't come home. He had always come home before.

What must it be like, when a dog outlives his master? And it wasn't because someone talked, like they said in the posters. It was because someone lied. Someone said, "There will be glory." And they believed him, but there wasn't. There was only a dog waiting for his master, and there was only war.

-Veronica Erdman

<u>Mama</u>

There's an awful steadiness hanging in the hallways of hospitals. The fluorescent lights beat softly on my eyelids and the local news flickers but the silence lies still like dirt on the floor. Every now and then you can hear the pages of petty magazines rustling or wheels on the tile. The nurse at the desk makes plans for what little of her evening she has left. I'm tempted to ask her to stop, put her life on hold even if it means being left to wade in the silence again. But I don't, because panic has his warm fingers wrapped around my wrist, holding me there.

Years pass in perpetual sameness. The lights, the tv, the silence. I can't sleep. I want to, because that's what you should be doing at three am, but I can't. The light is too bright and the vinyl chair too straight and panic is now on my shoulder with his tail curled around my neck, purring.

Minutes or millenniums later, the nurse calls me over. She tells me a bunch of things that I can't hear because that fluorescent light is too loud, but panic crawls out off my chest, down my leg and scuttles away. "You can say goodbye if you like."

The rooms in hospitals, unlike the rest of the building, have a waning to them. The room seems to drift in and out of reality, I can't remember when my hair became so heavy and started pulling my head into my neck, but then again I can't remember anything. Except I know I have to sit here until Mama wakes up.

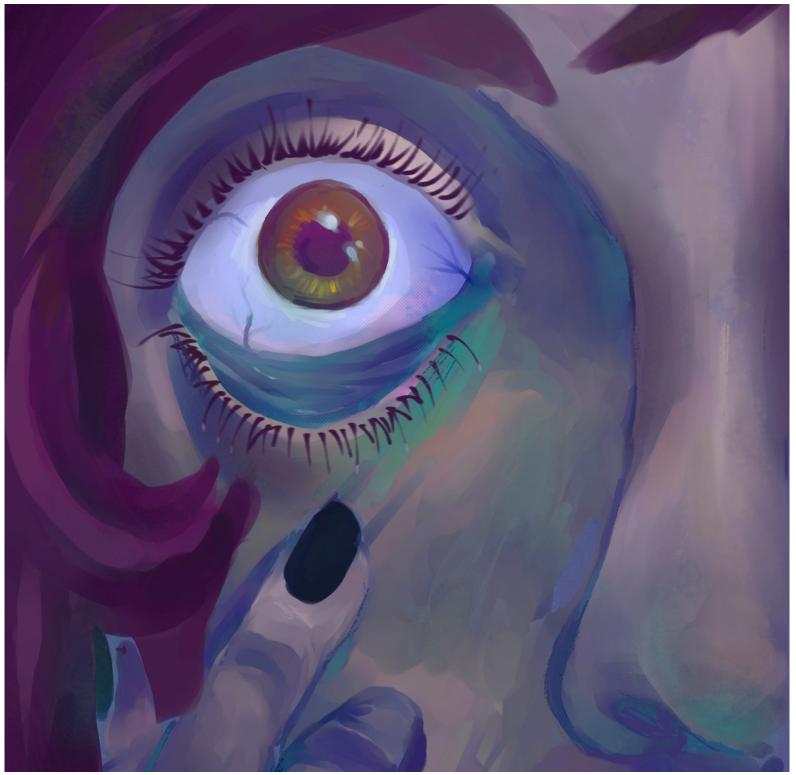
A nurse approaches me with a tissue. She pockets it when I say nothing. I haven't neared the bed. I can only see mounds of gauzy white sheets. This room only smells of cleanliness. Like sickness and an attempt to scrub it away. Clean and holy sadness. It doesn't smell like Mama. Maybe she was here once, but she's not now.

The same nurse with her hand on my shoulder walks me to the sliding doors. She asks me if I have a way home and I jingle my keys for her. Before I go, she holds a glass jar for me. I reach my hand in and close my fingers around a crinkly blue lollipop. The smell of it is sweet. For a second the lights and the silence don't cling to my cheeks. For a second I'm climbing the butter yellow counter of our kitchen. It smells like garlic.

"Don't even think about taking a sucker now."

"I won't, Mama."

But I do. And I know she heard the crackling of the wrapper that I'm furtively peeling, but she says nothing. She purses her lips and smirks.



Ivy Hedberg



Hanna Pennington

I just wanted to say hello.

The hello that smells like fresh orange peels exploded into millions of pieces, and tastes like a jar of jalapeno peppers on fire.

The hello that ticks in rhythmic patterns, like a clock, counting away the hours, and is encoded into the predetermined script of our lives.

The hello that is like an umbrella, catching a combative gust of wind in a persistent storm.

The hello that sounds like the cadence of an elite military force, marching towards victory.

The hello that looks like a lively flame, licking the side of the old brick fireplace, warming the hardened house. The house that sits on the corner of the intersection, and is bombarded by passing cars from all directions.

Because when I sat at home, Mom, unable to see you in the hospital – After a pair of steady hands sliced into your skull, and fixed your broken gear – all I wanted to do was to tell you that everything was alright. Tell you about my day. Tell you how much you mean to me, Mom. But I can't see you now, so all I want to say to you is, hello.



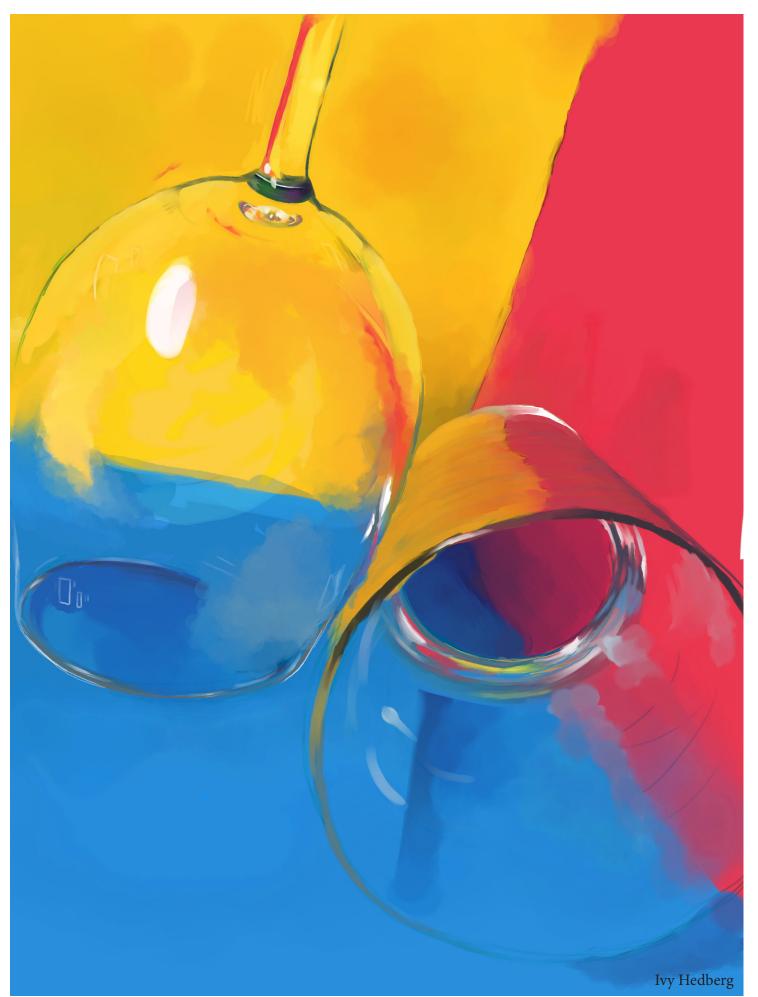
Michael Ganjehlou

-Nick Wilt

Advice

suck it up let it out you're a sharp shooter you'll make us proud go all the way but save yourself it's your choice, honey let me help you out you've got this honey you're not ready yet of course you'll experiment but you don't want regrets be careful be open be thoughtful be scared be ready be caring always be prepared be honest be shrewd and always be kind keep your wits about you a heart in love is blind you're too young you're too old you're growing up so fast! you've got all the time in the world but honey nothing lasts

-Jessica Dorsky



<u>The Fallen</u>

<u>Shaving</u>

Excited to trim the pubescent hairs on my upper lip, I reach for my razor to shave for the first time. My cracking 7th-grade voice says to my dad "Thanks for teaching me how!"

Shaving, at that time, was an exciting thing. Now it has turned into another one of my many daily routines in order to keep me looking "fresh" and "clean."

But today I don't want to shave. The process in the early morning just frustrates me especially since I now know it won't make a difference whether I am a groomed gentlemen or hairy beast.

The only thoughts running through my mind are "her" and "him" and how my thoughts of them in both the classroom and the playground have dramatically altered for the worse.

Did they want to hurt me or did they merely not know the pain and suffering that comes as an extra package to their "act?" Their evil and despicable act that has led me to the question of "why shave?" Why bother taking time out of my day to try and impress someone who isn't even watching? Someone who doesn't even care?

I realize I must continue with this over-achieving, stress-built life I have created for myself to suffer and weep in, yet there will always be a feeling of gloom when I shave.

When I finally pick up my razor and shaving cream, I think: how was this ever fun?

—Adam Willson

<u>The Jump</u>

A surreal leap over a stationary bar Resting five feet eight inches above the ground, Which I no longer belong to. I float through the air in a blissful trance Where I lose my sense of gravity and time, And watch the clear blue sky Fly past me faster than my mind can comprehend. Vertigo overwhelms my body And I forget what I am doing and why. My mind reconnects with reality, And I bring my legs up and over the bar; But then I land.

-Stephen Megos

We tow our childhood behind memories brimming over the edge, haphazardly falling along the road to adulthood. The path is laden by heavy footfalls of those beforetheir likeness etched into the dirt, fossilized for all to see. We observe their stories see how they tumbled through life and try to do the same; getting tossed out of the nest too early and asked to fly while our downy wings are still impotent. We gawk and flap and hope that the wind catches underneath so that we may soar for a moment as ephemeral as our childhood, until we've flown for so long that we become numb. We bite our tongues and hold our breath and watch our worlds flash by beneath us unprotesting, unrelenting. And with each thrust forward another memory will fall tumbling down until it crashes to the earth; a fallen angel, whose glass visage shatters into a million unsalvageable pieces which reflect our wrinkling faces and deny us a glimpse of our pastthe price we must pay for having seen the sky.

—Emma Dietz

Metropolis

As I beam through the subway All echoes wash away in noise While the cars above drive away, Trying to run home from the city For them the city is a fray Full of monsters and thugs, Only good for thrills in the day. Yet at night the concrete of the jungle, Manufactures the things you fear always As the lights of New York tend to not illuminate In every ally and crevice something wants slay. But your reality self fabricates. As these dangers never go away. The metropolis is a universal phenomenon That invades all places in night and day

-Gabe Coleman

Loaf

Painted walls of chrome and white Reasons to reflect a passing night Everything was said in spite I'm glad you're happy, I'm alright.

Your lawn is cut, unkempt pristine Your teeth are yellow, but now they're clean Entitled woman, a self-claimed queen Rounded shoulders, angled and lean.

Paranoia strikes at last Sunlight fleeting, a cold, hard blast Screw you all, your eyes all glassed We're friends for now, but that too will pass.

Gee, look at me I'm as happy as could be The sun is shining down with glee

Happy days. Oh my. Oh me.

-Andriana Cunningham

Veronica Erdman

<u>Uncanny</u>

The first time, I passed it off as a simple coincidence. I stepped off a bustling subway car into a dense crowd and buzzing chatter, and a few feet away, among the blurring waves of motion, I saw a small girl. She trailed behind her father, clutching his hand. The resemblance was vague at first, not quite startling. The first thing I noticed was her hair – thick, wavy, and marginally indistinctive except for its color, a rich auburn that matched mine exactly. Since childhood, my hair had been a source of unending compliments from family, friends, even well-meaning strangers. From what I could see, the girl looked to be around six or seven. I still couldn't make out her face clearly, so I moved as close as I could through the swarm of people. At the sight of her muddled dark eyes, wide mouth, and pale skin dusted haphazardly with freckles, I was unable to believe my eyes. She bore an unsettling resemblance to the way I looked as a child. Everything about her, down to her crooked smile, recalled a long-ago likeness of myself, the sort which existed only in faded photos veiled by thin plastic in photo albums. I studied her every movement with incredulous fixation but soon enough she and her father were pulled through the fast-moving crowd and out of my line of vision. When recalling the incident to my friends later, I was unable to articulate myself without sounding completely ridiculous. And so I convinced myself that it was just that – a chance occurrence met with my superstitious nature, not requiring of any intense rumination, something destined to be forgotten soon.

One evening a few weeks later, I was walking to meet a friend a couple of blocks away from my apartment. And once again, in the monotone blur of people quickly making their way to their projected destinations, I spotted a girl with the same unmistakable bright auburn hair. This girl was older, in her teens – I guessed about ten years younger than I. She was flanked by two of her friends, the girlish lilt of their chatter trailing behind them. Once again, I attempted to move closer to her, walking as fast as I could, until I was nearly in stride with the trio of girls. When she tilted her head, a gasp whispered in between my lips, and I pressed my lips together to prevent it from escaping. Her features were my features, a carbon copy, only set in rewind by a handful of years. I stopped and squeezed my eyes shut, thinking that I was in a dream, either that or that this girl was a delusion or a figment of my imagination, a desert mirage of magic, anything but genuine. When I opened my eyes, she was still there, now several paces ahead of me, and soon enough she was out of sight. My head reeled.

The ghost likenesses kept appearing over the next few weeks, and I realized that they were becoming older and older by a handful of years each time I encountered them. Though I must have expected that soon enough, I would see a duplicate of myself, exactly the age I was, I was unmoved when it happened. It was bizarre in the way that hearing one's voice on a recording is bizarre – like an out-of-body experience. Unlike the young girl and the teenager, this woman was alone. I saw her while I was riding the bus on my way downtown – once the bus made its first stop she walked on and sat across from me. She mirrored my every mannerism, my every physical idiosyncrasy – from the way her shoulders sat just a little off kilter to the slight slouch of her willowy silhouette. After glancing down at my outfit, I realized she wore an exact replica. Her pale forearms were exposed, and I could see on her right side the scar I'd gotten from falling off my bike as a child. Mouth agape, I pressed my hand to the spot on my right arm, to the identical faded pink mark, in simultaneous horror and morbid fascination.

We were sitting only feet away from each other. Why did no one else on the bus realize anything out of the ordinary? Was it because she was truly a ghost, or something of equivalence, visible only to me? And why didn't she realize that she was me, that I was her? When she'd glanced a few times in my direction, her eyes had seemed to glance right through me. Was I a ghost to her? Impulsively, I called to her – "Katherine!" and realized only after blurting my own name out loud into the air how strange it sounded; she did not hear me.

I couldn't shake the increasing fear I'd felt with the sight of each ghost of myself. The feeling became intertwined with my everyday actions – whenever in a public place, I would keep a vigilant lookout for the next one, bracing myself. My head brimmed during every waking moment with questions that I could never fathom answers to. Why was this happening? Was any of it real? What was the meaning of all of it? And in the back of my mind lurked the creeping reality that these ghosts were becoming older each time I saw them. The last one I'd seen looked to be about forty. I knew that they would begin to appear older and older, and I was afraid that the image of myself as an aged woman, ugly, withering away, would be far too much to bear. And after that? Would I see my own bare skeleton wandering the streets? Would I be faced with death, my very own death, in this very tangible way? Death is what we are all scared of, what we all try to avoid thinking about. We try to ignore the inevitability of time's quick passing, but how could I do so while being presented with these corporeal promises of exactly what was to come?

Three months later, I saw the last of the ghosts. When walking into a crowded restaurant one night, she

was sitting at a table by the window, handing a check to a waiter. She looked about eighty. Despite her silvery, thinning hair, it was unmistakable that she was me, and I began to tremble, dread-filled. Her arms and face were painted with veins and discoloration, her posture hunched. The fact I would look like this someday struck into the deepest recesses of my heart or my soul or whatever vehicle forces us to feel – I was unable to look at her any longer. Horrified, I began to walk away, but before I could, she turned – I turned – to face me. I could tell that she actually saw me, her pupils making undeniable contact with mine, unlike the version of myself I saw on the bus. And surreally, but genuinely, she smiled at me, wrinkles around her wide mouth deepening. I attempted to speak, to bring the frantic questions occupying my whirling brain into the open. But no words came out.

Instead, she spoke. "I am you, Katherine,"

"I... I know," I breathed.

"I may be old, wrinkled, not as capable as I once was. But I want you to know that I am happy." Something about her eyes and the crinkled skin around them told me was sincere. "You will be like this one day, exactly like this, in fact. I know that you are dreading it. But I want you to know that you can be as happy as you want no matter how old you are. There's no need to worry." She smiled again and paused, her eyes studying me. "Trust me."

Her words justified my living and breathing existence. And I trusted her, of course I trusted her. I took her words to heart and carried them close to me in the following months, years, and decades and leaned on them whenever I felt unbalanced or lost. After all, who can you trust if not yourself?

—Lena Rubin

"¡Oyé, gringa!"

A little boy runs up to me with a box of green chicles and an open palm. His big, glassy eyes are the only clean thing about him: his brown skin is smudged with yellow dirt and his shirt is covered with aging stains. His oily hair sticks up in the back, the corners of his mouth exaggerated by dry, white spit. I take a packet and hand him a two-peso coin, knowing that I have just bought the title "gringa sucker." The rest of the dirt-encrusted children swarm my personal bubble, holding up red, yellow, blue boxes of chewing gum above their heads. The packages glint in the sunlight, the clear plastic encasing four squares of the most artificial substance ever tasted. I gather a piece from each vendor, taking my time about it, making a show of my choices more for myself than for the children. Like a surreal ceramist, I feel as though I'm planning my next great piece, clutching the tiles of green, yellow, red, and blue in my hand. I pay for the packets of color and the children run off. I toss the gum in the trash.

I take a left down Calle Orizaba and run my fingers along the familiar walls of the warm stucco. I have lost blood before to the rough clumps of paint that tear at my skin, but I can't resist. The color of this town pulls at my senses and I need to make a sacrifice. I look up at the church looming on my right and lose track of my feet. The yellow angles are so sharp against the deep blue of the equatorial sky; I never could have imagined the striking power of a poor man's bell tower. "¡Oye! ¡Gringa!" pulls me back down to earth and the little man who is calling out to me. His hands are cracked and permanently cupped, I think that if he stretched out his fingers his skin would split and bleed. He wears a heavy cross around his neck and a look of hunger upon his face. He wants me to buy one of his paper flowers or at least not to run him over. The cry could justify either one so I buy a flower and step out of the way.

A family of dogs sniff at the empty bags of chips, the candy wrappers, the orange peels that have wedged themselves between the cobblestones and crumbling mortar. Their gaunt, grimy bodies pulse with hunger, unsatisfied by the residue from a passing parade. I have just caught up to the celebration: big masks, popping colors, and gaudy costumes make me itch for a sketchbook and acrylics. I stumble through the crowd of the tacky and the magnificent and am struck by the mash up of religion, beauty, and dirt. I mentally exchange my sketchbook for a camera as I see a little girl pass neon rosaries to her siblings, aunts, and uncles. The beads click under the thump of stomping feet and I know I could never capture the dusty light refracting through the green plastic she slips into their hands. I have lived in this country long enough to know that the dirt under her fingernails makes her dress of muslin that much more beautiful, but not long enough not to lose my breath at the sight of it.

The First Day

On the second floor of a building in the Lower West Side, there is a door in the middle of the hallway with a brass number 7 nailed crookedly above the peephole. Behind it lies a tiny bedroom, a kitchen with cracked tiles, and the mess you made without meaning to. You have been standing against the wall across from it for the past five minutes, the tiredness of the work day bearing down upon your shoulders. Your fingers trace the grooves of your key, and you notice the green paint around the doorframe is beginning to peel. This is all almost enough to distract you. Almost.

The whole thing was painfully simple. You were stupid, you made a mistake, and you got caught. There is no question of whether or not you were wrong, no grey area from which you could gain leverage. You have acknowledged this time after time today; you have faced this from every possible angle. And yet in spite of this there is a trepidation that holds you in place, muscles locked, mere feet from the doorway. You note, not for the first time this week, that there are a lot of things about yourself that you don't understand.

By some miracle or impulse you find yourself beginning to move forward. Unsurprisingly, the door is unlocked. The first thing you see is the bags. Two of them sit upright to the right of the door, the third lies open and half-filled on the coffee table. It takes you a couple of moments to notice him, off to the side in the kitchen, pulling his selection of mugs down from the cupboard. He has not turned around, but you can tell by the stiffness of his movement that he knows you're there. His hair is slightly tousled and he's wearing the same "I Look Better After a Shot" t-shirt that he fell asleep in yesterday. You notice as he pauses his rummaging. He braces his arms on the counter, back folded forward, shoulder blades pressing out against the fabric of his shirt.

He's waiting for you to speak.

Suddenly everything that you have prepared over the course of the day for this moment is inadequate. You can only get so far with an apology, and then what? I made a mistake. I still care about you. I want to make this work. It is all a given, it is assumed, it has been said a hundred times before. It could all be true and none of it would mean a thing.

You would rather talk about the winter where the heater broke, and the two of you sat awake in front of the metal oven for half the night. Or the time you both got drunk and locked yourselves out of the apartment, and were found huddled together in the hallway by a neighbor the next day. Or the time you tried to drive ten hours down from upstate in the middle of the night, just to get back by the time he woke up, and even after the tire went flat you still succeeded. You want to say that things have ways of working out. But then again, maybe you're cutting yourself too much slack.

He won't even face you. You wish he would. He once had this way of looking at you, only you, that was equal parts innocent and intense. Back then, it had stirred something wonderful in you. You don't deserve it at this point; you hardly deserve forgiveness. Yet against all odds you find yourself longing for that look, more than anything.

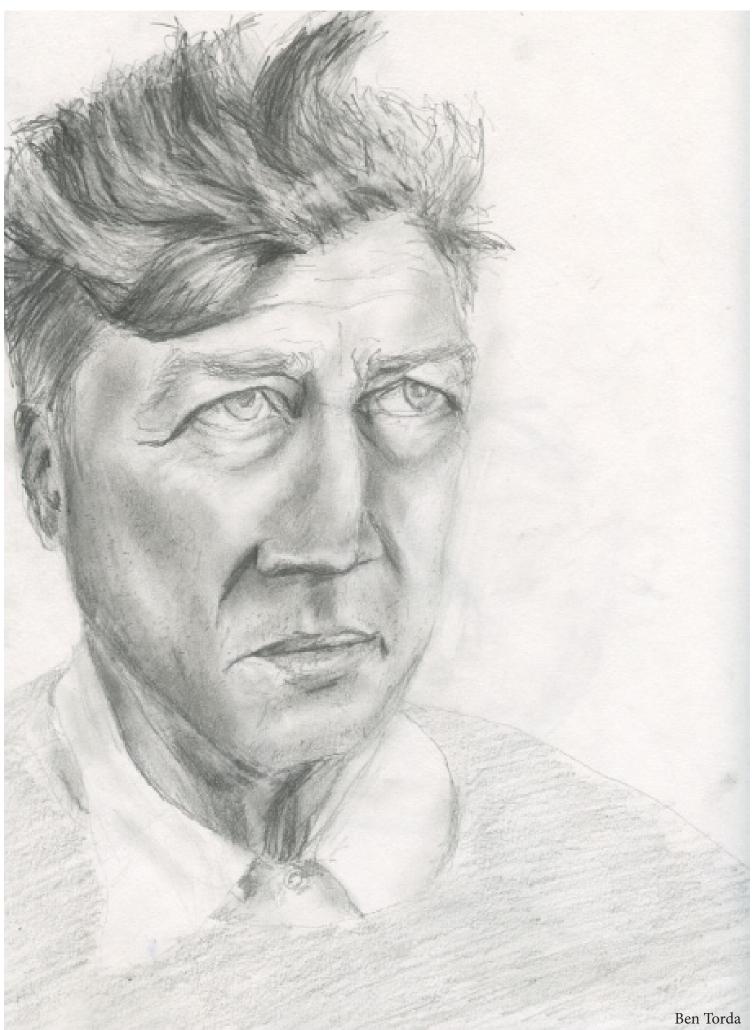
"I want to start again." It comes out before you can catch it, before you had even processed it as a thought. Your words hang, unperturbed, in the soft and broken space between the two of you. You seek for a panicked moment to add something, to explain yourself, but you find there is nothing left to say.

Watching him from the doorway, you are swept with a sudden wave of hope. It is terrible and unfounded, and yet you let it linger, just for the moment. The day is ending; the grey-blue light of the New York City skyline bleeds through the window behind the coffee table. And when he turns to you, brow furrowed in confusion, or perhaps frustration, you can't help searching in spite of yourself for something warm and lost in his eyes.

—Sophie Swiderski



Hanna Pennington



I Cannot Die

I cannot die. I am now several centuries old, yet I haven't aged at all; I have no wrinkles, no back problems and take no medications. I have celebrated more birthdays than there are days in a year, but I still maintain a running tally, just to keep the irony alive. I sit here on my hotel room balcony, at my wooden desk, and write these words with my Holiday Inn pen, not out of a need to tell my story, or gain the fame and appreciation of a world I scarcely recognize anymore. I write out of boredom. My life is like eating the same dish over and over again, or the torture of a long car ride with a broken radio that will only play one song. I am the Midas of the twenty-first century, but the irony is that where he feared starvation, I suffer for the lack of it.

Looking up from my desk, I can see the capital of New Delhi sprawled out over acres and acres, a labyrinth of towers and concrete buildings, topped off by picturesque domes and minarets. The metropolis, in all its bustle and noise and glory, no longer impresses me; I've been living too long and seen too many cities to be stirred so easily. One thing, however, does move me. Every year, as I sit out on the balcony and write, the city changes before me. There are always new buildings, new construction projects, new skyscrapers. Last night, I had a dream that a team of architects set up headquarters on my forehead, and would carry out their designs, constantly tearing down my nose and rebuilding it, remodeling the eyes, deepening the wrinkles. I didn't brush my teeth that morning for fear that I would find no surprises in the mirror.

I have been living in Delhi for decades now. I stay at hotels mainly (it's surprising how interest accumulates over generations), but I often relocate, to keep up the pretense of a real life. The Holiday Inn I am currently staying in is my favorite; it's the closest to the spot where this all began. That place, a small back road in Delhi, doesn't exist anymore; it has long since made way for a shop for women's clothing. Centuries ago, however, when I was in my thirties and in India for my honeymoon, it did.

I remember the day quite well, given all the time that has elapsed. It was hot and dry, as the first of April generally is in the tropics, and the patches of sky that showed through the packed rooftops were cloudless, washed out blue. The narrowness of the alley particularly stuck in my mind; my wife and I could barely walk side by side, and we had to practically climb over some children playing in the road. There was a beggar slumped over at the far end of the street, with a brown shawl wrapped over his hunched shoulders. Wanting to impress my recently married wife, I pulled out my wallet and took out several tarnished rupee coins, dropping them into the dirty cup sitting by his bare feet. He looked up with an astonished grin, revealing a mouth consisting of a few black teeth. "Thank you, Sahib," he rasped. He grabbed the front of my shirt and pulled himself up enough to whisper in my ear, "You are a good man. Name any boon you wish, Sahib, and it will come true." I had dealt with my share of crazies in the past, and anger in front of my wife would not bode well, so I carefully disentangled his fingers from my shirt and humored the old man, answering back with a curt: "Very well then. Immortality," before taking my wife's hand and walking on. I turned back just soon enough to see the aged man mouth, "Be careful what you wish for, Sahib," his voice drowned out by the screams of the children playing in the background. Those words would haunt me for the remainder of my endless life.

And that brings us to now. Back to the same city. To this balcony, to this day, just one of the tens of thousands that make up the fruitless tragedy of this life. I know the routine. Tomorrow is the first day of a new month, and I will spend it searching for that wizened man, in hopes that I can atone, and repeal my curse. I will never find him, and will go to a nearby bar and drink coconut arrack, till I stumble home to my hotel room and pass out. That morning I will proceed to watch hotel movies and read books for the next few days. Perhaps this time I will reread <u>War and Peace</u>; the length and unfulfillment of the book brings some comfort. Then, after I have exhausted all of the possibilities, I will begin to write. I will write out of boredom, but it will begin to bring me some relief, and some hope. And as I slowly fill another notebook with my poems and novels and short stories, that hope will grow, and when the receptionist downstairs finally flips her calendar, I will have the courage to again go out and look for that man, and my cycle will repeat, and my future will again be as my past, and time, for me, will stand still.

-Haris Nair

Folding Laundry with Harry Potter

A pair of wire-rimmed glasses sits crookedly on his nose And the scar is just visible beneath a tuft of his messy hair His arms move laboriously As he crisply folds another shirt

Under his breath, he seems to be muttering Some spells or incantations When I ask him what he is up to He tells me he is reviewing for his O.W.L. exam And could I please not bother him

Ok, sorry, I say Maybe there's some sort of spell you could chant That would speed all this up?

He rolls his eyes at me, As if you don't know the rules, he says in a dismissive way. I mean, didn't you read the books ten times like everybody else? And we continue with our tedious folding in silence

Finally, we are ready to haul the folded laundry upstairs As I follow Harry up the basement steps, Something falls from a hole in his pocket

I reach to pick it up, And see the orange vial containing Adderall

Wait!, I shout after Harry, You dropped something!

He turns, embarrassed and angry too. Wow, I say. Who knew?

Nobody's supposed to see that, he mutters. This time, his wand comes out without hesitation and the vial goes up in smoke.

Ok, he says, finally softening. Just please don't tell anyone.

Only if you'll take me flying, I answer, all business.

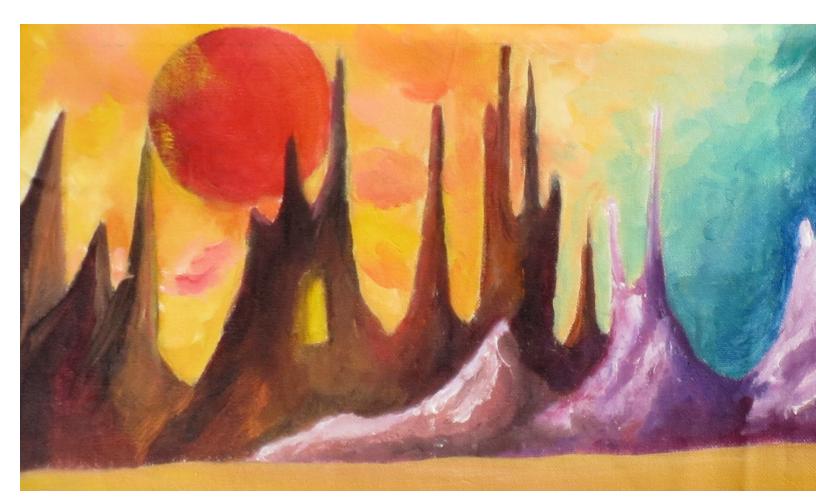
—Abby Skolnik



Each day the man woke up to the halfhearted blare of his alarm clock. It had given up long before he had. Upon rising from his bed, he would find that the thermostat had dropped the temperature overnight once again. He would go out into the hall, and shivering, make his way to the nefarious contraption. It could always be found perched in the same little alcove on its wall, unmoving. The depression on the wall had clearly at some point been meant for a fuse box, but the old family that lived there had changed their plans. They didn't want a fuse box, or the house that came with it. The man's hand would hover over the array of buttons and dials, trying to make sense of them in his early morning stupor. He would then stumble down the hall like a monkey in a fishtank, and turn right into the kitchen for breakfast.

Open cupboard. Remove Raisin Bran. Close cupboard. Grope through the frost-covered depths of the fridge to find the milk. A bowl and spoon would be resting on the kitchen counter, where they had sat unmoved for the past four weeks. The man could never be quite certain what the bowl and spoon did when he was away, and he sometimes liked to imagine that they went off and led happy lives together. He would then dismiss the thought. It made him jealous. Once breakfast was finished he would glance over at the coffee pot next to the oven. It was always empty. The man didn't want to spoil its day, so he left it alone. Then he would rise, shaking, and move from the kitchen to the bathroom, making a straight line through the zigzagging hallway until he found the second door on the right. The rest was a blur. It was his morning routine during the dark ages.

But today, it wasn't. The alarm clock, after many years of faithful service, had grown sick and tired of being ignored on the night stand for its entire life. In a final, desperate attempt to make a difference in the world, its tiny screen flashed the word "goodbye," right before it turned dark for the last time. Ironically, its last and most helpful contribution to the world was to go unnoticed, as the man slept undisturbed a few inches away. When he woke some hours later, he saw the sunbeams sifting through the closed shutters outside his window. He blinked once, in a daze, and then blinked once more. Slowly, he rose from his bed, and looked over at the derelict alarm clock beside him. After prodding it once to no avail, he sat down for a moment to assess his position.



Unsure quite what to do in this foreign situation, the man decided to do what he knew best. He waddled out of his room and down the hall to check on the thermostat. The thermostat, delighted to have been spared the alarm clock's daily cacophony for the first time in years, had, in its jubilee, forgotten to lower the temperature that morning. When the man approached and then inspected it, he found himself with even more questions. He was disoriented, and even somewhat uncomfortable, with the recent turn of events.

Instead of turning right into the kitchen, as he always did, the man found himself wandering toward the living room. The room's dusty surfaces reflected its long-time neglect. Not entirely sure where his feet were taking him, the man decided to give them the benefit of the doubt and didn't resist. He was almost surprised, but not really, when they led him to a small framed photo resting on the mantelpiece above the fireplace. The man stood there staring at the photo inside for a long time. He smiled at a distant memory, and then frowned at a more recent one. Reaching out, somewhat uncertainly, the man turned the frame face down on the mantelpiece. When he went into the kitchen, he made himself scrambled eggs and a cup of hot coffee.

—Loren Heubert-Aubry



People Magazine, 1984

I can remember my ribs cracking the way we used to crack wishbones on Thanksgiving, and you would never tell me what you wished for, but I told you every time.

I swam and I swam, I remember, until I broke the surface, and all I did was touch my lips, caramelized by the air I hadn't breathed in years.

I became a rock on a rock on a rock, so heavy I swore I'd sink, and anyway, reaching the surface wasn't all I had thought it would be.

But I was on a lifeboat, with saltines and 2 flares, and the captain was searching for a crew member, the waves tossing him playfully, tendrils of algae wrapping round his dark hair, a wreath, a crown, as he climbed the waves, scaling the foam, and for a second, I would have sworn he was a king, but he disappeared into the film of sea air, and they all guessed he had been found by a shark, the hammerheads lurking.

We sent a flare up, for you, from me, like that 4th of July, remember? when we sat on the jetty and watched the fireworks crack and pop, until it got too loud, and we had to leave.

So 8 crew members, salt filled lungs, eyes lit with hallucinations, were pulled onto a Norwegian Tanker, revived the rocks on rocks on rocks lifted, afloat on land.

As the jagged remains of the Pride of Baltimore settled into their new anchorage on the ocean floor, a sea of reporters, foaming at the mouth, washed onto the deck of the tanker.

I pushed past so quickly, I didn't think to look for you, intoxicated by the gentle way of the land.

—Juliana Baldassarre



Gretchen Bogan

<u>Harry</u>

Witnessing the worst of my friends come out when full-on battles between them and their siblings come up, I've often felt thankful for the general peace and privacy that comes from the solitude of being an only child. It's never been easy for me to grasp how such irrational words like *I hate you, leave me alone, no one cares about you* could be thrown around a house and have that be considered the norm. Once when discussing the selfishness of another sibling-less friend I was told, "but even though you don't have siblings you're not like that, probably because you have such close friends." It was nice to hear, but there's a striking contrast to me between the relationships between siblings and friends. Regularly I'm left to wonder what it would be like if I were not an only child. Not as some other only children may ponder the possibility, however, because at one time I was not.

Countless times, teachers, new friends, and other parents have asked me if I have any siblings. The answer is always no, but it never has ended plainly on my lips. There is more to that 'no.' The answer really is, 'not anymore.' That's not the sort of answer I give in simple conversation, that's depressing. Nonetheless, my brother crosses my mind every day. I did not know him; there is no everlasting memory of him that I can visualize. We were 6 months old when he died, much too early for an imprint to be made on my recollection. There's nothing he's done to affect me, nothing has happened to directly alter my cognitive processes. It's what did not happen that has molded me so significantly.

Had he lived, I would not be sitting right now in the house I live in. My family would have moved to a bigger house in a different town, and I would go through elementary school making friends that aren't the ones I talk to and see every day. I'd have a go-to buddy to sit on the bus with every morning. There would be boys at my house after school. As I would grow older, maybe even boys my friends and I have crushes on would be sleeping in a room right next to us. There would be someone to constantly compare myself to, grades and sports and how our parents treated us. A boy would have lost his father at too young an age, before he could teach him to shave or drive a car. There would be someone who looks very much like me, but with shorter hair and probably taller and maybe blue eyes instead of brown. Maybe boys would treat me differently because that's what happens when a girl has a brother, out of fear or just awkwardness. Hopefully he would be able to protect me, if I ever needed it.

My mother would not treat me so protectively. I am her only child, the one to be nurtured and cultivated and sent through life as properly as one could be. For all I know, she has double the motherly love stored up inside of her, and sometimes the overwhelming amount of it cascaded onto me is just a reflex that she can't help but have.

We would have both grown up and gone off to college and gotten married and settled down with our own families and our relationship would have survived the loss of our parents and outlasted our childhood friendships, despite the bickering and slandering that comes with siblinghood. Maybe we would have drifted apart, leading lives too different to have enough space for each other in them. But the chronicle being told is completely speculation, whatever way it goes.

Some say there is an indubitable connection between twins, something that binds them neurologically and emotionally. Occasionally I wonder if I could have had that at so young an age, and if it's still there or it's completely severed or it has some unknown effect on the way I think. Since I was little I recognized how important it was to my mother to not lose him in my memory, in subtle ways like still sleeping with his baby blanket or naming stuffed animals after him or wondering what kind of person he'd be like. It's really up to us to do so, because no one outside of our family can imagine it as we can.

I've grown up with basically all of the attention on me, and especially now it's becoming more and more overbearing. But there's a constant twinge in my head that it was not all always meant for me, and that's when my thoughts turn to him. He never spoke, for all I consciously know he did nothing to actually change me, but knowing that he so much as existed has impacted me in ways very few people could ever do.

—Sammi Aibinder



Julia Curbera

Maybe A Daughter

Look at me baby With your brown brown eyes So full of sweet nothing If I could stay in them I would But all too soon they will be full Of cultural clashing combinations And there will be no room for me No I will be drowned out by warm colors And pretty boys Who tell you things that they heard Pushed out by trees that you think you can't climb Sports you can't play Food you can't eat Replaced with women you want to be Pinned up or lying flat in vogue The weight of the world on the teal dress No smile on her coral lips Baby your lips are not supposed to be coral But I won't say that As you are crushed by books that you try to read So fast but not fast enough Because you say you love them And when I say chicken soup is good for the soul You say "what soul?" And I don't know how to answer Because as the numbers you don't understand swirl in front of Those brown brown eyes And pretty boys on the other line She's a bitch and she's a ho Don't you like her I don't know And all the games You don't have time Because you need to work And things are fine The shower's running And so are you The toilet's flushing From my view And you are perfect Don't you know And you say "I killed a spider with my soul"

-Jessica Dorsky

Shooting Star

No one else saw the shooting star. It fell in a clumsy spiral and disappeared behind the trees. I loved the way it slid off the earlobe of some distant universe, a pearl earring lost one careless drunken evening. I imagine it kept falling past distant earths, where distant dreamers wished on it, distant lovers kissed on it. When does it stop falling? When it collides with a comet and shatters, its ashes sprinkling unsuspecting heads?

When it falls into orbit with a lonely moon, doomed to circle into oblivion? When it slips into a black hole, reemerges somewhere too foreign to be described? Science tells us it's not really a star, but a meteoroid that enters the atmosphere, burns and vaporizes as it approaches earth. But that night I felt young, young enough to ignore the reality of the universe, so I let myself jump, and scream, and I pretended there was a story.

—Miranda Willson

Remember Again

You are letdown, the times I told him that no, we could never be, no matter how much he pleaded. If there were a memory to define the word us it would be the scent of worn-in flannel, or the times when the air smelled like rosemary, drifting and carefree.

You are the heartbeat of stumbling home to the too-still blue room with the frilly curtains and white matching furniture, smelling of 3 for \$10 and one too many bottles, or maybe the lonely dripdripdrip of water that drizzles from the swimsuit hanging in the bathroom. You are the color of when the last clouds still clinging to the sky turn from an illuminated pink to a murky blue-grey; the color of 2 in the morning, when everything is so quiet you can feel the earth shifting and moving under the weight of your worn-out tennis shoes not yesterday anymore, but right before it feels like tomorrow.

> And I am the hum of a car stalling in the driveway, with the stereo playing that Beach Boys song we used to listen to, all ready, waiting to go somewhere. Anywhere.

> > I'm just a mix of all these things, the letdown and the heartbeats and the in-between,

but with me I also carry the answers to your questions

of who and what and why you are that you remember and forget and will remember again.

—Sophia May

Ditching the Coupe for the Coop

When most upper middle class teenagers in America are asked what they want for their seventeenth birthday, the answer is simple: a car. Affluent teenagers across the nation wait (somewhat) patiently for the day when the denouement of a trip to the car dealership is a complimentary espresso, the pleasing jangle of keys on a college-branded lanyard and the perpetual parental mutter about the increased insurance. I, however had a birthday wish that was a tad more... foul.

For the first four months of my junior year in high school, I left my small public school in New York and headed to Maine for an experience that was both as progressive and traditional as it gets. Chewonki is a semester-long boarding school in backcountry New England. It is located on 400 acres of land that has been used in as many ways as a Maine menu can incorporate lobster. The land has been used for pasture during the Merino sheep boom, the trees logged for English ships in the nearby town of Bath, and the red clay used in a brick factory. Finally, the land is being used for both recreational and educational purposes- a camp in the summer and a school the rest of the year.

We lived in small, Thoreau-like cabins with a wood stove, camping matches and a pile of wood to keep seven teenagers "warm" in the chilly Maine weather. We woke early, groggily grabbed headlamps from our bedside tables and headed to morning farm chores in the dark azure mist. Our first stop was the dining hall. Not for a quick snack or cup of coffee, but to turn on the industrial dishwasher (later used to wash the buckets) and lug six to twelve buckets full of the heterogeneous food waste known as compost. Off we trotted along the dirt road, seven female vagabonds taking turns pulling the cart of buckets. We arrived at the farm in time to see the struggling late autumn sun rise behind the juxtaposition of an old barn and a state-of-the-art, power generating wind turbine. Alas, there is no time to dawdle on the farm so off we went to our individual duties. Bex mucked the stalls, I milked the cow, Minah collected eggs and fed the chickens, Tessie brought the sheep hay and water, Nora beautified the horse, and Abby and Sophie recorded the temperature and then turned a five foot pile of compost. We felt like time travelers, working separately but contributing to a common goal in unison- a volunteer railroad chain gang.

Forty-five minutes later, the animals were well fed and clean, the barn swept, and our arms full with a small bounty for the kitchen. Walking into the dining hall for breakfast, the farm chore crew felt like soldiers back from battle. Heads nodded our way as we stripped off our Carhartts and work gloves before savagely devouring the local feast of a buffet.

Classes were next- science spent exploring a salt marsh to discover how that ecosystem works, measuring the oscillation of a tree in terms of a sine curve in math and debating our abortion views in ethics. Hours later we crawled into bed, hair somewhat in dreadlocks, dirt beneath our nails, brains and stomachs so full we don't know how they'll keep expanding.

And here I am, four months older, stronger, wiser, and healthier; enjoying my family while experiencing the bittersweet taste of missing far away friends. Though I am getting reacquainted with my cellphone and computer, I often feel the pull of the simplicity of a farm-less suburban life. My dad- a lawyer in mind but a handy man at heart- takes me to Home Depot and helps me pick out 2 by 2s and 4 by 4s and lots of other metal objects that probably don't have names. We ride home with the trunk bungee corded and unload all the materials in the garage. Over the next month we will hammer, nail, hinge, buzzsaw, measure, and paint red the chicken coop for my two new laying hens. For my seventeenth birthday we are building a shelter in my garage so I can feel more at home at home.

—Emma Solomon





<u>Tearstained</u>

The baby screamed a milk-stained cry, The kind of cry that wakes the windowpanes. The crumb-spotted toddler rushed over, Picture of compassion. He scooped the baby up with his soft applesauce arms, Gently kissed him, then rested his cheek on the baby's head. It's a dusty yellow motion, seen a thousand times before, In proud prairie women and disaster movies, in black funeral suits, after a fall When the windowpanes wake and a tearstained cry calls the mother.

Or in his son at the train station, when he points to the pen on the tracks,

Eyes lit with discovery.

But he shakes his head and tugs the kid along,

His footsteps clambering for space.

"It's gone forever, we can never

get it now," he says,

full of casseroles and lox.

His son looks back, but he strides confidently on,

But his jacket wilts, the platform ends and they stop walking.

He talks so he won't have to think of the time he was rocked

Like that baby, when the voice could be kept away.

He scoops up his son, and looks at his eyelashes

Soon to close

At the Grandmother's house where she can't hear,

But she can't stand the pitter-patter of his son's socks.

And he will look at the bottom of his teacup and see the pen on the tracks,

And feel the cobweb on his shoulder, because

He will have to kiss his son and rest his cheek on his tearstained head, because

He knows that pens fall on tracks and you can't get them back.

—Lyra Fuchs



Rebecca Reeve

Day After Day

Day after day, The Day begins just like the day before yesterday A trip to school and the man in gray Into the classroom where the light shines everyday Class starts. The children scavenge for a seat, Like blood-thirsty vultures Waiting for their prey Hidden within the labyrinth Of wood and steel Is the perfect seat, Waiting to be revealed. The lessons begin The education has begun to pour in Work is to be done And chatter is to be shunned. As time runs away, The children begin to stare They wonder what time Will they be able to escape the nest And continue on their very own quest When school is over Opaque hearts flutter Few hollow footsteps echoing down the hall, Followed by a stampede of loud, ominous sounds The children disperse Disconnecting from the world They split apart and go their separate ways To home. I go Wandering through the jungle of wild children and cars The sight of pumpkin-like orange and pomegranate red leaves The smell of wet concrete I enter the dark portal, To spend the rest of the day Trying to figure out, If tomorrow will be different from today.

Hattie Schapiro

The Pot Lid, the Glow Stick, and the Color That Never Was

There is no such thing as the color pink. I don't mean metaphorically, like, *oh*, *I'm symbolically rejecting the color pink as a metaphor for the social construct of femininity*, I mean, literally, pink isn't real. Look at a chart of all the kinds of light in the universe if you don't believe me. The visible light spectrum, the tiny sliver of those lights that we can see, starts at red and ends at violet, and in between it melts orange to yellow to green and blue and indigo-violet. And there is no pink in it. Not a drop.

The theory is that the brain wants to wrap the visible light spectrum into a continuous circle, one end feeding smoothly into another like an ouroboros, but it can't because where the violet should meet the red there is a gap of light that simply doesn't exist. Pink is the solution: the color the neurons firing in our brains came up with to resolve the paradox, the sticky patch of gum the brain smoothed over the gap to form a perfect little bridge from beginning to end.

Which really makes you wonder what the hell pink is. What color all those crowded aisles of girl's toys are. What miles of plastic flamingos in formation on suburban lawns look like to anyone else. I dyed my hair pink in third grade; it was when I still had soft straight baby-girl hair, and it was spun soft and thin like cotton candy. What would it have looked like, if I could have seen into the gap where the color pink never was?

My friend Daisy broke a pink glow stick once at a sleepover, and it's a sight I'll never forget: her cool blue-tile bathroom, splattered in frothy pink bioluminescence like the scene of a cyberpunk crime. I mean, it was the scene of a crime, but it was also kind of beautiful. There were seven of us crammed into that luminous little bathroom, and we felt that beauty even on the edges of our "*oh-shit*" panic and 2AM hysteria, so much so that none of us really wanted to clean it up right away. If you'd been there, you'd know. Light is beautiful in darkness. And pink is pretty beautiful, too. Our hesitation passed pretty quickly because we had to clean it up, like, *now-ish*, before Daisy's mom woke up, before the light faded and left a tacky stain on the walls, before the sun rose and hid the glow away, but we stifled our wonder with snickers and expressions of amazement that Daisy had managed to wreak as much havoc as she had with nothing but that damn glow stick.

The scariest line of thought about pink is the realization of how fragile and fallible sight is. Sight! Sight is the sense upon which I weigh most of my decisions, is it not? I think of myself as a girl with an aesthetic bent, someone who loves color so much she paints it in her hair to remember it by; how should it affect me that I might not even be seeing it correctly? Here's the thing: I'm bothered by things like all the lights and colors I might be missing out on by having human eyes that can only read the visible light spectrum. Finding out the colors I can see might not even be real is cause for an existential crisis.

Annie Dillard wrote extensively about seeing and the great sin of never being able to do it correctly. On the annual Perseid meteor shower, she wrote, "I wail all day for the shooting stars I miss. They're out there shooting down...But at dawn what looks like a blue dome clamps down on me like a lid on a pot. The stars and planets could smash and I'd never know." And that is the cruel heart of the matter—the stars and planets could spin out billions of colors like fat spiders on luminous webs but I'm stuck underneath a pot lid with "ROY G BIV" printed on its underside.

All melodramatic agony about the fact that I cannot see in ultraviolet aside, there is something a little bit magical about pink. If the color pink is a construct of our brains, then that means that there probably isn't another animal out there that can see it the same way we do. Which is to say, pink is mine. Did my ancestors see magentas and roses the same way I do? Do chimpanzees? Did it prove evolutionarily beneficial to see a color that might not exist? What would it look like to anyone else? I can't fathom any new colors in my head, everything I come up with is brighter version of what I've already seen. What would anyone else see?

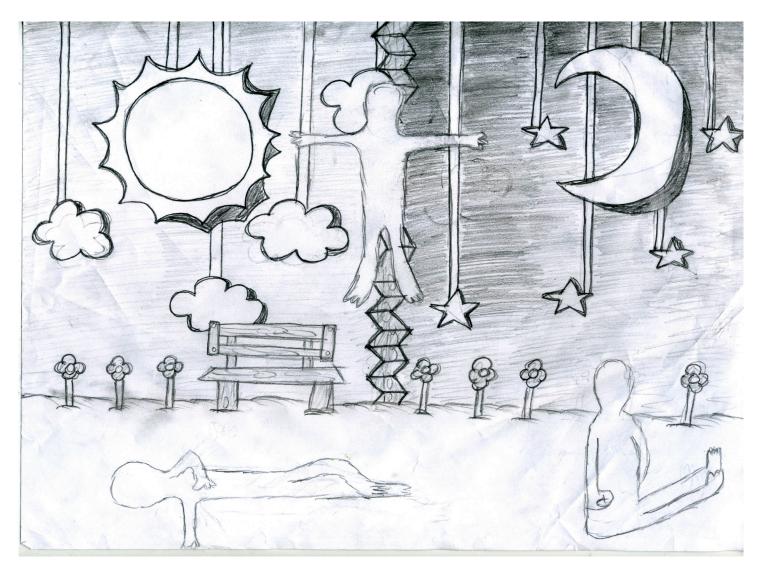
We cleaned up the glow stick that Daisy spilled as fast as we could, but the rustling of paper towels and spritzing cleaner fluids and hisses of pain when someone stepped on someone else's toe was bound to draw some attention. I was in charge of the doorway to the bathroom, where we were worried that the splatters would stain the wood.

Picture this: I'm standing on the threshold of Luminous Goop Central, and the doorway to Daisy's mom's room is on the wall perpendicular to this door, less than a breath away. And as we clean, I hear it creaking. I look up from my work and I can see the door moving as if in slow motion. It's over. Her mom is coming out, she'll see the mess we made, and then we'll never get to have a sleepover at Daisy's again.

It came to me in a burst, like a flashbulb going off. I reached out, and before she could see the dimming glow, I switched the lights on. Poof. Goodbye, glow stick. Goodbye, pink. I mean, there were still seven girls crammed inside a bathroom, now holding paper towels and Windex for no apparent reason. We got a hell of a weird look, but apparently a choked out "Hi! Just, y'know, doin' some cleaning!" suffices at 2:30 in the morning when you're too groggy to even care what the hell your daughter's weird friends are doing. What mattered was that Daisy's mom never even knew all the pink was there.

Maybe there's pink somewhere out there in the universe, real pink, the kind we think we see. Maybe it's a fluorescent magenta, or a dusty rose, or the blanched color of Pepto-Bismol, tucked into the luminous threads of an ultraviolet light only birds and satellites can see. I guess for now I can be satisfied with the colors I can see, even if they might not technically exist.

—Ivy Hedberg



Michael Ganjehlou

We twist and turn and create a horrific dance that lasts until you & th or I realize our heads will never mend and the cow needs to be milked. And we continue to spin because your eyes are hooks in my flesh and even though the cow needs to be milked and our heads will never Mend we continue to spin and furn in our norrific dance that will last until the sun burns, the water frics and the world ceases to spin. Even then we will continue to dance, our minds norting and my flesh bleeding and your eyes are tearing with strain.

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Write Something		

Draw A Picture

