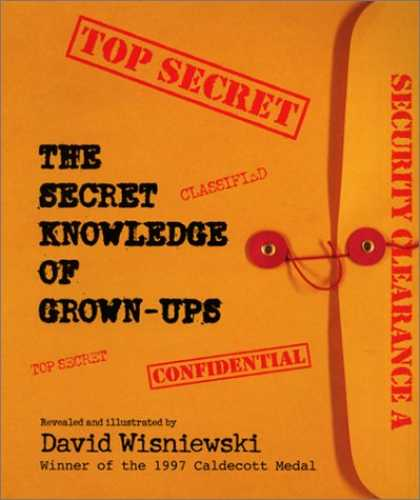
*The Yellow Kitchen (or, My Sun Shower)*

He showed up at the most perfect time of all—right when life at home became unbearable. I would not say he was an angel, per say; he had grown up loosely Catholic but had since sworn off any notion of God. I guess you could say he was one of the reasons why life at home was unbearable in the first place, but maybe that was just the catalyst for the disaster that struck my life, maybe it would have happened regardless, slowly but surely, I do not really know; I still am trying to pinpoint it, exactly. Basically, I hate it here. It all started when my mom had decided to quit drinking for the millionth time. I think it is seriously safe to say that once I found out he had recently quit smoking, I fell into that same trap as well, once more, even though I told myself that I would never ever fall for it again in my entire life—they never quit, really. None of them really ever do. They all bum cigarettes, telling themselves, “oh, it is just one.” But one plus one plus one a thousand times equals a thousand, and by that time it is not just one any more. The same goes with drinks. I probably would not have even started so much as batting an eyelash at him if I had know he had not really quit, but I did, and it was probably the best decision of my life, even though it shattered everything I had left at home. That is how great it felt and feels to this day. If mom knew he smoked she would probably hate him even more. How his smoking is different than her drinking beats me—smoking causes cancer and it is much more harmful, they say. The emotional tolls of alcohol are much, much greater; scar tissue whether it be physical or mental is permanent either way. Each is just as tangible as the other in my eyes (like in the Red Hot Chili Pepper’s song entitled “[Scar Tissue](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mzJj5-lubeM&ob=av3e)—” “Scar tissue that I wish you saw / Sarcastic mister know it all / Close your eyes and I will kiss you 'cause / With the birds I will share/ With the birds I will share / This lonely view and / With the birds I will share / This lonely view and…”). But back to mom’s drinking. Once she “quit,” she needed a project to work on or a hobby to take up, as was the pattern. Coincidentally, she never completed her projects; she never fulfilled he duties, just as she never really quit drinking like she said she would. She always, without fail, managed to relapse again. That is the one thing she always succeeded at in terms of her drinking— relapsing. Anyway, the first time she quit she started knitting. The second time she quit she made a giant castle out of the old bottle caps from her nemesis, booze (she shattered it on a drunk rampage when she got back on the juice the next time). The third time she quit resulted in her feeble attempt at learning to play the guitar—and, as for the fourth, fifth, and so on times that she quit, well, let us just say I have lost count by now. So, this last time, she started hoarding (I realize that the term "hoarding" is drastically overused, but it is definitely an appropriate word in this case, trust me). She began collecting items to store in an old bomb shelter my great- grandpa installed under a tool shed by our house amidst the chaos of World War II. It was never used, and my mom, for some crazy, inexplicable reason, felt the need to de- virginize it. My father was somewhere in Oklahoma, or maybe it was California or Nevada, I can never really be totally sure of his whereabouts. In fact, the only feature I really vividly remember about my dad is his giant, swollen, beer gut, and I am sure he still has it. My father has always moved around a lot, pretty much from family to family. They were his investment, I guess, not that he ever checked back on them; he is a classic case of the deadbeat dad, spreading his seed as much as possible, passing along his "desirable" evolutionary traits, without ever feeling the need to check back on his offspring. He sent me a hair barrette every year on my birthday, not that any barrette could tame my giant, curly Jew- fro. I wish I could find some meaning in the hair thingies, but, alas, I can’t. I am always desperately seeking symbolism in my life, and I usually fail to find it. The barrettes would have a flower on them, or a butterfly—like something for a little kid. Like I am daddy’s little girl or something—*please*, like I ever have been daddy's little girl. I may be little, but I am *not* a little girl, and I never really have been; I have always been really mature for my age. And I certainly have never been "daddy's" property (if I can even honestly call him my "dad") in any way, shape, or form, ever, never in my entire goddamn span of existence on this planet. Anyway, I wish I could say I am sentimental enough to hoard them all, all of the barrettes my dad sent me. I wish I could say that I keep them in a small, broken music box (Why in a broken music box? I do not know. Probably because it seems sentimental and mushy and symbolic or whatever. But I guess that is kind of a lame thing to think, is it not?), waiting for him to come home and come back to stay with us forever and ever and behave like a real dad by supporting and loving us. But I do not ever wait, and I have not in a long ass time. I am *so* over it by now. I am over the wanting him to come home at this point, the sitting on the doorstep and waiting. Maybe that is the problem, the irony of it all. I am not nostalgic enough for the symbolism to find its way in. Maybe the irony is symbolic—have I succeeded in achieving symbolism by being utterly impervious to meaning? Maybe. But I just can’t think that hard right now, it hurts my head way too much and I have enough things to deal with in my life at the moment. Which brings us right back to the beginning, or the end, or whatever. Ha, more symbolism, maybe. If I do not even know what symbolism is how can I truly know if I have it in my pathetic yet crazy existence? Am I trying way too hard to fit the symbolism in? It reminds me of a quote by Flannery O’Connor, “Week before last I went to Wesleyan and read “A Good Man Is Hard to Find.” After it I went to one of the classes where I was asked questions. There were a couple of young teachers there and one of them, an earnest type, started asking the questions. “Miss O’Connor,” he said, “why was the Misfit’s hat black?” I said most countrymen in Georgia wore black hats. He looked pretty disappointed. Then he said, “Miss O’Connor, the Misfit represents Christ, does he not?” “He does not,” I said. He looked crushed. “Well, Miss O’Connor,” he said, “what is the significance of the Misfit’s hat?” I said it was to cover his head; and after that he left me alone. Anyway, that’s what’s happening to the teaching of literature.” Anyway, maybe that means I *am* trying to hard to find symbolism and that I do not really need it. Or something. I do not really know actually. So, anyways, my mom started stocking the bomb shelter with canned and dried foods of all varieties—you name it, it was down there. I am surprised she did not take up canning and drying the food herself. The funniest part was how she started to buy canned meats even though she adhered herself, and, consequently, the entire family, to a strict vegan lifestyle. I did not mind it so much, she was always a vegetarian so I was raised as such, so this vegan thing was not too difficult to handle for my siblings and I. As for my stepfather, this was a different story. I frequently witnessed him sneaking Big Macs and chili cheese fries in the middle of the night, but my mom, who slept like a rock, was none the wiser. If she knew, though, all hell would break loose—I have a sneaking suspicion that is why my dad left when I was seven; he just could not handle her controlling nature any more. I never minded it, considering I usually agreed with her, until recently. This bomb shelter stuff was just too much for me; it was the straw that broke the camel’s back. Since we are Jewish, she became convinced that a bomb shelter would save us from the inevitable second Holocaust coming out way. There we were, a Jewish family in the outskirts of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and being Jewish made us already rare in these parts, which never bothered me, I suppose, because I never talked about it at school or even admitted I was Jewish. Sure, I was Bat Mitzvah-ed, but that is because I was forced into it by my mother. I can’t complain because I got a ton of money (which, consequently, I still keep in my savings. I am not sure what I am saving up for, exactly, but, you know, I guess it is for just in case...something. I suppose you could say that I am saving it up for a rainy day. And, in light of my current circumstances, it does not seem like such a bad idea now, after all) and a small party in my honor, but I really never felt connected to the Jewish faith. I did not invite any of my friends from school or even told them about my Bat Mitzvah (I did not actually ever have many good friends, but when I was studying Hebrew or meeting with the rabbi I pretty much kept it on the down low around the kids at school for the most part); if they had directly asked me if I was Jewish I would have told the truth—I am a horrible liar, I can barely get things past my gullible, unsuspecting mother—but I did not feel the need to tell anyone about my so- called religion. My last name probably gave it away, but my identity was largely unspoken. Throughout high school I was a wallflower and barely had any real friends. This was the case when I started college at the University of Pittsburgh this year, until I met *him*, but that was not until later in the year, and even then he did not have the guts to ask me out for months after I met him. That actually seems strange, how shy he is I mean. he is so good-looking that for months I had assumed that he was too cocky or full of himself to give me the time of day. As it turns out, it was just the opposite because he is actually fairly shy and incredibly self- conscious about his looks and himself as a person in general. It is not like he was my first boyfriend or anything. Well, sort of. I never had any real boyfriends, technically; I just had a few sexual partners who I dubbed my “boyfriends” so my mom would not question it (I would say that I took a few "lovers" in my day in order to sound much more sophisticated than I actually am, but our trysts were anything but mature. I am by no means elegant and the boys were anything but men. I am way too young to say that I took a "lover"—lovers are meant for women going through a mid- life crisis, divorcees, widows, or women who are creepy but empowered cougars, but never a young, seemingly innocent young lady in high school). They were all smart, sweet, guys. But I was not ready for a relationship and neither were they. Basically my mindset was “you and be baby ain’t nothin but mammals so let us do it like they do on the Discovery Channel.” I was not known as a whore, though, because there were only three of them, all in my senior year, and they were all wallflowers, nerds, like me. I did not fall in love with them by any means, but I think they fell in love with me after a while. Sadly, yet also amazingly, in a purely sexual relationship, love usually finds its way in a little (ok, a lot, love never half asses things) for one or both parties; they say you need love to live, that it comes in only second to water. I usually broke it off before they said they loves me, because I thought that way I would feel as bad, but they would have been too shy to admit their undying love, anyways, even though it was pretty obvious how they all felt about me (I am not sure what really makes me lovable, but I guess I should not really question it, I suppose). That way, I thought I would not risk feeling guilty, but I still do. They knew it and I knew it but I broke up with all of them anyways. I have a terrible guilt complex that is constantly eating away inside of me. This guilt complex of mine makes me feel bad for many things, not just the important ones like breaking a person’s heart. I still feel guilty about being rude to a barista at Starbucks about three years ago because she made my drink wrong; I still remember what she looked like—she had straight, burgundy-red hair, clearly from a bottle atop her square- shaped head. She had her ears pierced once in one ear and three in another; she wore two silver studs and two purple flowered earrings, also studs. I had asked her for a tall iced Chai tea latte (By the way, I *love* the descriptions of the Starbucks beverages on their website, they are *so* sexy especially considering they are just about drinks, and the description for the [Chai](http://www.starbucks.com/menu/drinks/tazo-tea/chai-latte?foodZone=9999)  is not so great or poetic, “The warm, aromatic flavors of chai tea have their roots in the ancient Ayurvedic tradition of India, where roadside tea merchants can be found preparing black tea with traditional healing spices like cardamom, cinnamon and black pepper. Featuring ingredients gathered from around the globe, our version of this beloved beverage is wonderfully sweet and spicy – and every bit as soothing,” but the description of the [Pumpkin Spice Latte](http://www.starbucks.com/menu/drinks/espresso/pumpkin-spice-latte?foodZone=9999) , a delectable seasonal Starbucks beverage, is particularly tantalizing, “The ideal vision of fall: bright days that grow cool and call for warm knits as we walk under leaves that curl red and gold in a soft wind. As friends come together to mark the end of summer and anticipate coming festivities, there is one warm treat that has come to stand above all others – one that we get asked for again and again and again because people love it so much. The Pumpkin Spice Latte is fall’s favorite drink. Signature espresso blended with the unmistakable spices of fall – cinnamon, nutmeg and clove – smooth with steamed milk and topped with delectably sweetened whipped cream. When it is time to fall back into fall, sweet and spicy pumpkin is sure to please;” the first line is clearly the sexiest and the most exciting to read. Those coffee descriptions really turn me on, oddly enough.) and before I knew it I had before me a tall Chai tea Frappuccino blended beverage instead of just a Chai Tea Latte, most commonly ordered as just a “Chai.” I should have just politely asked her to change my drink, and all would have been resolved, but instead I harshly dictated at her face and raised my voice slightly higher in an irritated fashion. I was not even in a rush, I just had a cold and was in a bad mood, but she did not know that. maybe she was having a bad day, too, and me getting annoyed with her for a simple mistake was the last thing she needed. Maybe it was the straw that broke the camel’s back for her already horrible day and this caused her to go back home and yell at her kids for no reason, all because I had turned her mood. See, this was almost a total of *three* years ago at this point, and I am one hundred percent sure she does not remember any of this, so why am I left with the curse of still feeling guilty about it? Anyway, if I am going to feel guilty about my tone of voice three years ago, what would stop me from feeling bad about breaking the hearts of three innocent boys? I know I should not feel guilty for not reciprocating the feelings they had for me, and I never led them on—I made it clear that it was strictly sex because that was all I ever thought I wanted, until now. But, still, the pangs of pure guilt remain smack- dab inside of my gut, wasting away and rotting inside of me to this very day, at this very second in time. Not a day goes by where I do not think about them and where they are now (My old sex buddies, that is, with the Starbucks barista not included; I never had sex with her, obviously. That would have been really weird.)—Harvard douche with his crooked grin and squinty, Asian eyes; community college dropout slash guitar player with the fiery red hair and huge personality (and dick, for that matter); finally there was, to put it bluntly, the gay one (he came out after I broke up with him; he thought he was in love with me then discovered otherwise when he thought I shook him to the core and broke his heart). They all pale in comparison to him, though. Although my mom still begs me to reconsider, to give Harvard guy a call to see how he is doing, if he wants to meet me for coffee or lunch or something. I keep telling her it would hardly make sense for me to meet for him, for the obvious reason that he goes to Harvard and is hardly every around the Burgh (Pittsburgh, that is), and she just throws her arms up and announces that I never listen to her so why does she even bother giving me advice any more? Even though I have listened to her my whole life and frankly I am sick and tired of it. Again, we are already Jewish, that makes us different enough, but this bomb shelter thing is just embarrassing. I want to fall to my knees and beg my mother to see a therapist, but no, she is a doctor, she would never seek help from someone “below” her (I seriously hope that I am never, ever like that if I decided to become a doctor, which happens to be the track I am looking into. I just honestly can't stand when people behave in such a pretentious, condescending manner). That is probably why she is just buying food and not canning or drying it on her own—her job consumes the rest of her life that is not filled with mindless and pointless hobbies. It makes me wonder if pre- med is the right choice for me, because I certainly do not want to end up like my mother. Her husband, my stepdad, a bloated, ugly fish of a man does not mind coming in second to her work and hobbies, because he is lucky that a beauty like her gives a beast like him the time of day. Okay, he is not a turd and he is not garbage, that is way to harsh; he is ugly as a troll but has a good heart. I used to be less superficial, but *he* spoiled me, with his gorgeous, tousled hair that always looks perfect and his god- like body sculpted from hiking and backpacking with his firefighter father (Who, consequently, is not too hard on the eyes, either. Is that weird to say? Probably, but what can I say, he is a total DILF and it is obviously just lookie but never any touchy anyways, obviously. Besides, looking at his dad gives me a glimpse of what my boyfriend will look like when he gets older and eventually reaches middle age, inevitable. If we are still together, that is). Anyway, things are bad here at my house, and they are getting progressively worse. I get hives when I think about staying, and I feel seriously nauseous when I think about leaving. I could stay with *him*, my boyfriend (there, I said it, as commit-ophobic as I am, he is my significant other and I am proud to say it!) and his family, but I would not want to impose. Plus, odd jobs would never cover my tuition and books, I need my mother’s support, and I do not want to leave my siblings, even though they have not been supporting me much lately. I love my family, I love them all, but I am looking back at my life and am realizing that as much as I went with the flow and the rules and regulations of my house, I have not been living my own life, the only damn life I have in this entire universe, the way I *want* to or the way I really, truly wanted then, either. But falling in love is what made me realize it. It made me realize the possibilities I could achieve and made me pinpoint the flaws of my family and how I have been living under their control. It sounds corny, but I honestly feel like I can fly when I am with him. He is not who I though I would end up being with; his name is generic and he is beautiful in a typical way, unlike the quirky, not-so-good-looking guys I have been attracted to in the past. He is not a protégé or a genius. But he *is* smart and he is witty and he is kind to me and he loves me as much as I love him, which is much more than I can ask for. I never dreamed I would fall in love ever, I thought I would end up an old maid, and, apparently, my mom thought I certainly would end up alone, too, or at least she acts like it considering how surprised she seems that I finally found somebody that I can just *be* with, whether it be going out to dinner, sitting around his house and just talking for hours, or just cuddling on the couch while watching "Pickers" reruns ("Pickers" is the most awesome show ever, by the way. I have never met anyone who has ever seen an episode of the show that does not end up liking it if not loving it and becoming addicted to the how). I fell in love with him so fast—it took less than a month. I know it is really truly real, though, because I have never felt anything like it with any other guy in my entire damn life. I am one hundred percent positive that everything anyone ever says about love is true because I believe that love always, without fail, manifests itself differently for every single person on this planet, because every person is unique and has his own way of expressing love and feeling love. For example, these quotes by Dr. Seuss are true: “We are all a little weird and life’s a little weird, and when we find someone whose weirdness is compatible with ours, we join up with them and fall in mutual weirdness and call it love;” “You know you're in love when you can't fall asleep because reality is finally better than your dreams.” And so is this one, by Leo Tolstoy, "All, everything that I understand, I understand only because I love." And Mark Twain, “Love is the irresistible desire to be irresistibly desired.” And, of course, Plato, "At the touch of love, everyone becomes a poet." I especially love this one by Pete Wentz: “Girls are like apples...the best ones are at the top of the trees. The boys don't want to reach for the good ones because they are afraid of falling and getting hurt. Instead, they just get the rotten apples that are on the ground that aren't as good, but easy. So the apples at the top think there is something wrong with them, when, in reality, they are amazing. They just have to wait for the right boy to come along, the one who's brave enough to climb all the way to the top of the tree...” And how could I ever forget good ‘ol William Shakespeare, “Love looks not with the eyes, but with the mind, And therefore is winged Cupid painted blind.” My favorites, though, are the ones from Winnie the Pooh: “If there ever comes a day when we can’t be together, keep me in your heart, I’ll stay there forever,” “Some people care too much. I think it’s called love,” and, finally, “Piglet: How do you spell love? Pooh: You don’t spell it, you feel it.” And that is *so* true—you will, without a shred of a doubt, feel it, and it will be the strongest feeling you will ever feel, and you will feel it so much that sometimes it might start to hurt but in a good way, kind of like when you (well, if you are a girl) lose your virginity, if you’re ready for it. The feeling I have for him is amazing, and unlike anything anyone has every explained about love. My little sisters had asked me what being in love felt like. I told them it was like a sun shower because it is so insanely unexpected and so utterly beautiful that you can’t even believe it is real, but to your absolute amazement, it is, somehow, even though you do not know how. (A sun shower is when it is sunny outside but it is drizzling rain at the same time, and it almost looks like pure glitter is falling from the sky.) How can I feel so totally and incredibly amazing about him when I feel so completely and utterly shattered everywhere else, like at home, at school, or wherever I happen to be when I am trying to scrape together some money from odd jobs just in case I can’t take it any more and decide to elope with him. Okay, that is crazy, we are way to young to do anything remotely like that, but anything can happen and I want to be ready for a rainy day. Not a sun-shower rainy day, but a scary thunder- clapping lighting-striking rainy day. Not to say that those are not beautiful, too, but you need to be more prepared for that kind of thing I suppose. I love that feeling, though, when you are curled up next to your hubby, reading a great book while he dozes off, as the thunder rumbles in the distance and lighting strikes just outside the window. It is so unbelievably scary and chaotic outside, yet you feel so safe in his arms like nothing can touch you except him. And his fingers. His gorgeous fingertips that touch your skin and make you tingle all over, as he tickles your arm and your belly. God, how did I get so lucky? And yet how did I land into such misfortune? How can one person smash you into a million tiny pieces while another gradually and gently puts you back together at the exact same time? I miss my dog that ran away. I think about him a lot. I feel like if I still had him maybe, just maybe, I would not be in this disgusting messy sticky situation that I am in right now, but that makes no sense. Whether Lewis, my adorable, smart, loyal toy dog was here or not, it would not matter. He could not fix the divide between my family and my love. But a more beautiful Cavalier King Charles Spaniel you could not imagine, if he could fix my life I am sure he would try to and succeed at doing so with flying colors just by wagging his tail and curling up into my lap, licking my hand as if to say that everything would be okay, always and forever with my puppy by my side. Oh, how I wish everything could be okay forever and ever, and I wish Lewis could still be here with me, sitting on my lap and barking and oh, how I hope that my mother would wrap her arms around me once more and tell me that she still loves me even though she does not agree with all of my decisions. If I stuck with her through alcohol poisoning and still love her and seek her approval, how can a silly boy come between us like this? He is not silly, though, he is kind and smart and why can’t she see how much he loves and adores me and worships the ground I walk on?! Lewis loved me, too. I could tell even though he could not say it. You can just tell with dogs. Lewis was as whimsical as the author he was named after; he was so quirky and yet so perfect that he must have been born in some sort of Wonderland, there was no other way to explain what he was like and how he acted and how truly amazing and extraordinary his personality was, even for a dog, especially for a dog. I look through the looking-glass, still, and see him peering up at me, panting from running around in crazy circles so much like he always did—he had the whole lawn at his disposal yet chose to run in circles! It amazed me how content he was doing just that; sometimes I wish I were a dog and had the simple life, too. I wish a tiny dog treat could sent me into a spiral of overwhelming joy, and yet it takes much, much more than that. Is ignorance bliss? I am not so sure. But ignorance is definitely ignorance at best and that can’t be too good, then, I suppose. Sometimes, though, I wish I did not know what I know. And I do not even know much! So how can knowledge be power? Is it power or is it depression and they just do not want to tell you that or else we would all act like panting, running, jumping, crazy, barking dogs. But would that really be so bad? Perhaps not, but I do not think I would like smelling butts and I like the missionary position (do they still call it that?), but if I was a dog would I even know the difference? Probably not. I am not sure if my mother ever really liked that dog. I am not sure if she ever really liked me for who I am as I am right now and ever was. The crazy thing is, I am the only biological daughter that she kept to raise and take care of for herself. The rest of her kids were the result of teen pregnancy, there were two of them, twins, actually, and she put them up for adoption. She had me later in life, after a late start in Medical school and before my father started a new family. My siblings are all much younger, and they are all adopted from Africa. It is weird to have black siblings, I have to admit, but it does not bother them as much as it bothers me which is nice to know but also embarrassing to admit. I wish I could say I wanted to meet my older siblings, the twins, but to be honest I do not even know if they were boys or girls, let alone fraternal or identical. And I do not really want to bother figuring it out. Life is not a movie. We do not all want to go looking for our long- lost siblings or our birth fathers. And, no, it is not always because we are scared of failure or rejection or of the truth. It is not necessarily because we are content with our lives just as they are and do not want anything messing that up. No. Usually, it is usually because we do not think about it or do not care. It is legitimately as simple as that. I mean it is not like the twins have gone looking for us, either, and I think it is for similar reasons. So it is whatever. I would say I am over it, but there is nothing to get over. I never cared in the first place. Life is not a movie or a novel. And life is not shit, and life is not butterflies. And life is not symbolism—but you are lucky if you find it hidden somewhere, and it happens in little specks, tiny glimmers, like glitter amidst a beautiful, surreal sun shower (According to Kurt Vonnegut in his *Breakfast of Champions*, “Symbolism can be so beautiful, sometimes”). And, no, I am not talking strip club glitter, just sun shower rainy sparkly sunny amazing falling glitter. Not strip club- esque glitter at all. Get your mind out of the gutter. People’s minds are in the gutter a lot. Everyone is obsessed with sex. The media, every song in the world, every poem, novel, movie, what have you, is all about sex or at least has some sexual undertones. I mean do not get me wrong because I think sex is great. Amazing. Fireworks, whatever. The whole damn show. I loooove it (I mean, if the guys knows what he is doing, that is, of course; and they rarely do, actually, but that is beside the point because my guy knows what he is doing and it is uh-maze-ing just saying). My boyfriend calls me a sex addict, which is not far from the truth, actually. He also calls me a child because I am so immature and crazy. I always tell him, though, that I will outgrow being a child, but if he is dating a child that makes him a pedophile, and he will not outgrow that—it’ll be on the records forever. I really get a kick out of that; he does not, so much, or at least he says he does not but I have seen him smirk at it so it is all good and fine in the end. Anyways, I am a nympho. And I think it is probably because my grandpa told me everything there is to know about sex when I was only six, and I mean everything, so I blossomed or matured or whatever early on I guess you could say. I love my grandpa. Besides my guy, he is the only person I can really talk to in my situation slash ever. My boyfriend is so funny, he always acts like the big shot man and acts like he is the boss of me but he is all talk. He claims he refuses to jump through hoops but he does just that, every damn day, in small, subtle ways, but even though they are small things, but that is just perfectly fine with me and as it turns out it is actually much, *much* better than just "fine," in fact, because as many of us know, tiny gestures can be the grandest. I love him for it, for being strong in ways he does not even know he is strong. Like by just being there for me and listening. Or by buying me a box of chocolates or bringing me coffee during class just for the hell of it, just because he loves me and know it will make me happy and smile if only for a moment. It does not seem like much, but most guys would be gone by now. He is staying by my side because he loves me so much and could not bear to leave me and live without me constantly by his side whether I am there physically or not just as I could not handle losing him or living a day without him in my life. Anyways, nobody wants to hear that mushy stuff, really ever—not even me. But besides sex it is all anyone can talk about!!! Mostly sex though. Even though sex is not love, but it can still for damn sure get confusing and blurry for people at times. That seems to happen quite a lot, actually—the sex fog in a relationship can cause you to think you are deeply in love either because you lost your virginity to this person or the sex is just that amazing. Anyways, my grandpa knew I was mature for my age so he told me allllll about the birds and the bees at an extremely early age, although at the time I thought I was soooo old and mature. When I look at the six year olds I babysit for occasionally, I think it is impossible for them to understand about sex for at least 20 years (ok that is a slight exaggeration, but still). Hell, I barely understand it all—does anyone?? I wish I could talk to my mom about it but I can’t. I want to know if it is normal how quickly I orgasm, and how to give good head or what guys expect us to do and how to get them to respect our boundaries as women, not that I have many boundaries in that respect. One of my younger sisters (I have 3 by the way—they are 8, 9, an 13, none of which are fun ages to deal with in girls), the oldest, who is coming of age I guess you could say, asked me how I thought sex felt for a guy. I hope that does not mean she is having sex already, but I am not sure what else it could mean. I sort of shrugged off her question—I do that a lot—and it probably is not good or nice or sisterly. My sisters probably need a strong female role model and as much as I want to try I never have tried to provide that for them, even though my mom is not who they should be watching when they want to see how they should act. But am I the right person for them to look up to, then? I am not so sure, maybe I am. But maybe I am not. And even if I am not my mom sure as hell is not, either so I suppose I am their best bet (even though I looked up to my mom for the most part and turned out okay, but she has been getting worse and worse and not just in terms of being a role model as the years go by and her alcohol abuse gets worse). I am their best bet even though they do not know it quite yet (that rhymed—I am a poet and I did not even know it! Wow I am such a pathetic loser, but it is cool with me because I am fun! Or at least I think I am pretty fun!). I should probably demonstrate for them that I am a capable role model a lot more but form some reason I just do not. I wish I felt more connected to my siblings. It is not the adoption thing and it is not a race thing. It is an I- am- just- fucking- weird- thing. I am a black sheep everywhere I go and I know it, and that is a bona- fide fact of my life, my dear friends, and nobody can ever convince me otherwise. It probably does not bother me as much as it should, though—nothing ever does. I used to be a big crier but I think I used up all my tears. Plus my boyfriend is so chill all the time and he helps me relax more than he will ever know, because when I am with him I am so chill that he probably does not even know what I am like when I am not calm and relaxed, except that one time when we went camping together and a toad hopped into out tent. It freaked me the fuck out I could not sleep all night so we just had sex after I cried from fear. It was a weird night to say the least but the toad was god- sent because I came like 5 times that night. That is probably too much information, am I right? It is also sort of hypocritical and I hate hypocrites. It is hypocritical because I complain about everyone’s obsession with sex but it is all I can think or talk about!! But I am allowed to be hypocritical, I am still a teenager after all, for another year at least, and that means I am allowed to be sexual and unreasonable and hormonal. As for my stepfather, that is another story. He is an adult, and when I call him out on his hypocrisy all he can say is “this is not about me!!” But it is, because is not that, like, the definition of hypocrisy? Whatever. Adults are crazy. My parents are crazy. I am crazy. Everyone is crazy. The world is crazy. The universe is crazy. What the fuck. I need to take a bubble bath. My brain hurts and bubble baths always help. Why do people say baths are just bathing in your own filth?? I mean how dirty could you possible be that you even have that much filth, what ever that even *means*, in the first place? I heard my stepdad talking about me to my mom the other day. He said I was like the Titanic, sinking, and should not you tell the people on the boat if the ship is sinking and that they are all going to die? So I get a boyfriend that they do not approve of and all of a sudden I am crashing into an iceberg, a like I am a fucking walking, talking natural disaster of a person? Screw that bullshit my parents always tend to sling about all over the place. Nobody understands me! I say that in all seriousness and with as little drama as possible. Yes I definitely realize how cliché that sounds and, trust me, I know all teenagers say that nobody understands them but it is really the honest- to- god truth in my individual case, and you can probably see that about me and my family. My mom’s parents are the people I am closest to. I do not know the grandparents on my dad’s side and I do not care to know them, because if they produced my son of a bitch father they could not be to great (it is always nice to blame the parents, is not it? When in doubt, blame the parents—that is something I say a hell of a lot because it happens to ring true in a lot of, if not in most, situations in life). My grandma likes to scrapbook a lot. She is the scrapbooking queen. When I was a young girl I always loved looking through her albums, especially the black- and- white ones, where I could see photos of when my grandma was thin and gorgeous and my mother and her older sister were young and fair and seemingly innocent. I think the reason why my mom is the way she is—controlling yet unsuspecting—is because of her older sister, who is older than her by exactly two years. My mom’s sister is fat and mean, but mean in a sneaky way; she is mean in a way that you can’t outright say she is being mean, but everyone knows that she is. And it is scary to confront her, but nobody but me ever does. I feel so totally different and weird compared to the rest of my family, like I am some sort of strange outsider (I feel adopted, which is odd for me to say considering my step sisters were actually adopted but they are more in this family than I am or at least it seems that way); maybe that is why they are all ostracizing me, acting like I have leprosy or something. All I did was get a boyfriend! How is that such a big deal?! I do not understand it. I am not going to stop focusing on my studies, and he loves me and makes me happier than I have ever been—why is that not enough for everybody? It could not be because I am pregnant—nobody knows about that. Yet. Not even the father of the baby (who, *yes*, is my boyfriend, no worries, even though that does not make my situation any less stressful or confusing by any means). It is still early on right now; I am only three weeks along at the moment, which means I still have time to make an informed decision that is not abrupt or harsh or spontaneous. But I do not even have so much as a lead on what that decision will be. God, I could really use a bubble bath right now. My back hurts and my feet are blistered from going running every morning. Working out is my new thing that I do to get out of the house. I walk and mildly run (when I say “mildly run” I actually mean literally jog for about one and a half minutes, maybe two minutes, if that, not even enough for an entire song to play on my iPod, and stop to just walk again) for about 2 hours every day at a trail by my house. I wonder if running is okay for the baby, but I secretly hope it is not so that nature can make this decision for me. I heard that upwards of forty or fifty percent of pregnancies end in miscarriage(a statistic I heard about in my Bioethics class that I took last year in the fall)—is it horrible that I want to be one of them? This baby—no, this fetus, this ball of cells—will only make my mom and her husband even madder than they already are, if that is even a possibility, because they are pretty damned livid. There are things I love and hate about running in the morning. I love that it gives me an excuse not to wear a shirt, just a sports bra and shorts. I hate wearing clothes; I can’t wait until I finally get my own place and I can just walk around naked all the time. That will be amazing. I would not want to join a nudist colony (Did you hear about the sign on the nudist colony? It said “clothed for winter.” HA! I love puns so much. You got to love a good pun—to me, they are the highest forms of all comedy, in my opinion. My grandpa sends me a new pun every morning over email; we both get a kick out of them, especially me.) or anything because I feel like if *everyone’s* naked *all* the time, it takes the fun out of being naked, you know what I mean? Kind of like you have to be sad to know how amazing happy feels like. Also, it takes sex appeal away, because everyone is constantly putting everything out there. But I still love having an excuse to wear less clothing. And it is not really a “look at me I am so hot in my sports bra look at my belly button piercing and slim body and nice abs and hot, long legs” sexual thing, it is mostly just a “I want to be as comfortable as I possibly can be when I go to work out because the comfortable clothes are the only thing I really like about working out besides getting to leave my house more often” thing. Ok, it is kind of a sexual thing, too; I suppose I should just go ahead and admit that. I happen to just like getting all that attention a little bit (okay, I like the attention a little bit more than a little bit; I probably enjoy the attention much more than I should, but oh, well, we all have our weird things about us, our strange vices and such), the feeling of eyes on my body even if only for a split second when I pass people on the trail. I know it is bad, but I like the envy and the up-down looks (ever notice how guys always feel like they are being subtle but they never are? My grandpa always says, “Look, but do not stare!” especially when a woman is wearing, as he puts it, “come- fuck- me- boots.” It is pretty damn funny. But yea guys are clueless in general, as a rule of thumb). But what I hate about running (okay, okay, just walking for the most part) are the smiles people give me as I pass them and the cheery “good morning!”s. I get it, they are just trying to be nice and friendly, but I can’t help how much it really, truly bugs the living crap out of me. I dread the eye contact as people pass me, and I pray for someone to be riding on a bike, speeding past, instead of a walker or a jogger or a runner so that the incredibly, unnecessarily awkward passing can go by much more quickly than it normally would. I am not the best at smiling; I always feel like I look fake, so I just prefer for people to ignore me as I walk past. But I guess people like to pretend to be nice. I say “pretend to be nice” because most people are not actually nice—they just want people to *think* they are (which, coincidentally, is worse than just being mean because faking niceness means you are being mean *and* that you are a liar, too), and that is a straight-up fact. I can say this with confidence because most of the people I love or have loved in the past have, at some moment in our relationship, typically marking its abrupt end, stabbed me in the back at one point in time. And, may I just say, even though I prefer the bikers on the trail to pass me, it freaks me out when they yell “left!” because I still get confused between my left and right (I have to put my hands up to see which side males an “L” shape, and whichever side does is on the left, but a lot of times I forget what an “L” looks like slash what direction it goes in just for a split second and then I just end up embarrassing myself even further than I already did, which I do a lot. Let us just say I have had my fair share of embarrassing/ ditzy/ klutzy/ blonde moments in the past). I had a guy say to me once, “you do not know direction? I thought you were smart!” And I *am* smart, but there are different kinds of smart and I can be incredibly ditzy and borderline mentally retarded at times. Another thing I hate about bikers is when I am driving behind one. I have no sympathy for them, I do not care if they are trying to save money on gas, or whatever their situation is, no no no, nope, I just do not care. I just hate them. It is sort of irrational and petty, I realize, but I love beeping at them and giving them the finger. Okay, you caught me (I told you I was a terrible liar), so I have never actually done that before, but I have always fantasized about it. I am too chicken to actually really do it when I am driving, though. Anyway, as much as I pray for them to pass me instead of the walkers or the joggers or the runners, I hate goddamn bikers on that trail (can you tell I just hate most people in general because most people or fucking stupid or nasty or mean or some other horrible shit). That being said, I love how I feel after I am done working out. My aunt is always telling me that I am either to fat or too skinny, I need to work out more or I need to eat more. Nothing ever satisfies her no matter what the situation is or even if you do *exactly* what she tells you to do or *exactly* what you know she wants you to do; it gets incredibly annoying and irritating and just simply unbearable, not that I care what that dumb- ass cunt thinks because she is just a bitch, simple as that, and I should not care what she thinks by any means. She is just a horrible person to be around, nobody ever enjoys her company, and, actually, I honestly feel really bad that my mom grew up with her, but she did not really because her household was not super traditional (nothing in my family ever is traditional, actually, or at least it is almost never traditional or normal); my mom and my mom’s sister both went to boarding school. So what made my aunt the way she is? What made her turn into such a fookin crazy bitch? Why is she so goddamn intolerable to be around? That is easy. You could generalize all those questions to one simple question—why is everyone the way that they are? Their parents. That is it—the answer to all those questions is only two words, not even requiring an entire sentence, just a little fragment of a phrase. Why do therapists even exist to sort through people’s insane, ridiculous, detailed problems? Because the people that raised those people that go see the therapists fucked them up and then, in most cases, royally fucked them over, as well. It happens to everyone and it is a vicious cycle. Everyone is fucked up and it is always easy to blame the parents because that is where the blame should go in every case. The parents deserve to be blamed because they blamed their parents and so on and so forth. Now, I love my grandparents, dearly, but they, very clearly, and there is no doubt about it, were horrible parents. A lot of the time the best grandparents were the worst parents when they were younger, I think. In fact, most people are better as grandparents than parents because they do not actually have to raise their grandkid usually, so they can spoil them and love them unconditionally without any ramifications (except, maybe, from their own kids, who they fucked up already—can you see a cycle coming into play now?). My grandparents sent my mom and her sister to boarding school pretty much the second they each turned thirteen, respectively. They never stayed out, they traveled everywhere and moved a lot, so I guess they thought it was best for their girls to stay put in one place. I guess they were right, in a weird way, but it would have been better for my mom and her sister to, yes, stay put, but to stay put with their parents, I think. That is just my honest to god opinion. But I guess all parents make mistakes when raising their kids, and I think my grandparents always tried to make up for it with their grandkids (which I think most grandparents do fairly often), especially with me. Since I am the oldest, it is no secret that I am the favored child. I guess I would not say “favored,” but I am special to them because I was their first grandchild (and their only biological grandchild, because of the fact that my siblings are all adopted, their other two biological grandkids, the twins, are god knows where with some other family, and my mom’s sister never had any kids because nobody in their right mind would put up with such an annoying fat person; I know annoying fat people get married all the time but my aunt is even worse, she is a rare breed plus she is picky, herself, and she definitely cannot afford to be picky in the slightest) and their first chance to get it right this time. I wonder if my mom would see that as an opportunity for her if she finds out I am pregnant and if I decide that I *am* going to keep the baby.My baby. Hot damn, my baby. It feels so incredibly weird saying "my baby" (well I guess it is not technically a baby yet, but still, I can't help but think about it as a real baby). I know it is not really "my baby" yet or at least it most likely never will be but it still feels so weird to say that: "my baby."God, I feel as if I am waaay too frickin young to make a massive, colossal, life- changing decision like this, but, then again, with the joys of sex come the responsibility that goes with sex, like using protection and getting tested and such. But we *did* use protection—every time! We used a condom every single damn time!!! So how could this happen?! I realize it is way too late to regret how it happened because I am in this already and there is no going back, so why bother thinking that way and freaking out but I can't really help myself from doing just that—freaking out, that is. I am scared shitless, to be open and honest with you. Because there really are a freaking laundry list of reasons to freak out because with a new life comes so much responsibility, not to mention money problems while the hope of finishing up with my college education or having a stable career goes down the tubes so quickly and abruptly along with the rest of my youth at a time when I should be having fun and having the time of my life, not taking care of a baby with my new boyfriend. This whole situation is just so crazy; I need to spend some relaxing minus any baby thoughts with a soak in the tub immediately if not sooner. I was thinking about my options the other day. I am fairly certain that I will either keep the thing (er, the baby) or have an abortion. There is no way I am giving my baby up for adoption. It is not because I am worried that it—*my baby*—will end up in a bad home; no, that is not it. That is not it at all. That could not be it, because my mom adopted all three of my sweet, little sisters from Africa and they live in a pretty much loving and caring home (whether crazy or not) with us. But it is hard for me to pinpoint exactly why; I just get a funny feeling about adoption. Is not it weird when you know in your heart that you do not want to do something or you know in your gut that you need to do something but you can’t really explain to other people or even to yourself *why*? I think that I am super, incredibly hesitant about adoption as an option because I will always regret giving my baby up, letting him or her be happy with another family without me in their life directly. An open adoption could prevent that a little, but it would not be enough. Maybe that is selfish, but I do not think I could handle something that is genetically mine to belong to someone else. And what if my boyfriend and I get married (knock on wood!) and want kids, which we definitely will, and we already have one that slipped through our fingers and is living without us? I do not know why as I said but the thought just perturbs me. Notice how adoption and abortion are just two letters away from each other, and each of those letters are off by just two letters in the alphabet. Two letters, two decisions. How poetic. The *d* in adoption is only 2 letters away, forwards, from the *b* in abortion, and the *p* in adoption is two letters behind the letter *r* in abortion. So is it two letters off in each direction because the choices cancel each other out or they both equal the same or it does not matter which I choose or—there I go, trying to make symbolism happen, trying to decode the words on their own so that maybe, just *maybe*, the words themselves can make a decision for me. But life does not work that way. It never works the way you want it to. The same goes for technology, but that is beside the point, even though I have this strange, irrational fear that robots will take over the world someday (my boyfriend fears some sort of zombie apocalypse, but I know that the robots are what we should really be worried about). Sometimes when I think about space it makes me realize how miniscule my problems are (my problems are also practically nothing compared to Harry Potter’s—that nerdy wizard has got it *rough*! The poor guy… Literally my life is perfect compared to that of Harry Potter’s), because space is so vast which makes my problems seem so god damned tiny in comparison. When I think about the infinite power of space and it is enormity, I think of this [cartoon](http://calmblueoceans.com/18/) that my boyfriend sent me:



It basically justifies eating an entire cake based on the assumption that the cake is super de duper tiny compared to the entire world slash universe. So basically space makes me realize a) that I am not alone in my problems (ahhh aliens! The thought freaks me out that there must be aliens out there considering how big space is. Thinking about aliens reminds me of my favorite [quote](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kkCwFkOZoOY) from Men in Black, “A person is smart. People are dumb, panicky, dangerous animals and you know it.” Fact.) and b) my problems maybe are not so big compared to other people’s problems and how many more problems I could have and maybe how good I have it compared to those poor aliens out there that have to deal with corrosive acid rain out there in other planets (yes there is acid rain on earth, but it will not like burn your skin or anything like on these hypothetical, made- up planets that I am envisioning in my mind). I also realize how small my problems are when I think about the smallest creatures, bugs, or even the tiniest particles, atoms or quarks or whatever, and realize how many of them there are compared to how little of me there is. Sure, they are small, but they make up *everything* (quarks, not bugs, obviously). Thinking about this baby inside me is making me think a lot about my future; not the future as it will be now, the future as I had planned on before. For some reason I have always envisioned the future as having my own house, my own place away from my mom and siblings and step dad. That is, I guess symbolically, what the future means to me. I have been collecting a plethora of yellow kitchen supplies that I find by rummaging through yard sales and by wandering about antique shops—I look for yellow casserole dishes, yellow- handled silverware, anything yellow. I especially love it when I can find a cheap piece of Fiesta Ware, which for me is top- notch in dinnerware when it comes to the color and style I am into for my future kitchen:

I plan to use these items when I have my own place. Maybe my taste will change, maybe something will break, but as long as I have my yellow kitchenware I see hope for the future. I have hope that even if I live in a run- down shack or crappy apartment, I will have a cheerful, sunflower- colored kitchen. I wonder if the baby inside me will postpone me living alone with a yellow kitchen or hasten it (will my mom kick me out or make me stay? Which is worse? I am not so sure). I also think about the future in terms of how I do not want to lose my childhood or my youth too soon, and a baby will certainly do that. I always think about ways I can preserve my youth (I did this even before I found out I was pregnant), which manifests itself in an endeavor I like to call “The Fun Room.” The Fun Room will pretty much guarantee that I will always have a connection to my childhood and be able to just let go and have fun. I feel as if something kind of switches inside of people when they become adults in a way—maybe it is because they have full time jobs, maybe it is because they have to raise children and have money burdens, or maybe it is just a literal switch that a bug inside your head turns on when you grow up and eventually turn thirty (that seems like something that would be in *The Secret Knowledge of Grown- Ups* , a book that describes stuff that adults know that kids do not know about yet like the reason you cant blow bubbles in your milk is not because it is rude, but it is because your face will get sucked in the glass if you do. Stuff like that—it is sort of a collection of mini- conspiracy theories for kids about what their parents make them do, why their parents *say* they make them do those things, and why their parents *really* make them do those things. It is a really fun book and I used to *love* it when I was a kid. I still love it because I still feel like a kid sometimes; actually, I honestly feel like a little, silly, rambunctious kid a lot of the time still, like when I have the sudden urge to jump into a fountain just for the fun of it, not thinking about whether or not I am allowed or my clothes getting wet or what other people will say. But I do not do it because maybe the bug in my head already has his grubby little bug hands on the switch in my head, making me aware of common decency and public rules). The bug would flip the switch and you suddenly would not like to swing or jump on trampolines or use bubble gum flavored toothpaste and L-Oreal Kids Toy Story Giddy-up-and-go Mango shampoo (those old L’Oreal kids [commercials](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NHzYEN1lS2Q) remind me so much of my childhood—I remember one commercial declared “L’Oreal Kids, new Strawberry Smoothie Shampoo, because we are worth it too!” I have yet to find another shampoo that smells as good as L’Oreal Kids, which is why I still use it. The grape conditioner is such a classic, by the way. I love that shit. The L’Oreal Kids commercial caused me to find several other blast- from- the- past nineties- eque commercials, like the one for [Gooze](http://www.youtube.com/watch?NR=1&v=a8BO2xrWwWA) on Nickelodeon and I wonder wonder what is in a [Wonderball](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F-z_WSTjr7c)—those things tasted like shit, but they were exciting as hell for an elementary school- aged kid. Also, may I just say how much I miss those old Nickelodeon cartoons like Catdog and Rocket Power and The Angry Beavers and Hey Arnold; most cartoon television shows suck now, besides Spongebob and Phineas and Ferb). I still like to do all those things, and I wonder, what will make the switch flip for me? I am hoping having the fun room (which I have already described to my boyfriend to make sure he would never let me forget about it; he is better at remembering things than I am) will delay the flipping of the switch, whether by postponing it for a few more years or making it not work entirely. Okay, I know there is no switch, really, but still—it is a metaphorical switch or whatever that means. It’s there. Anyway, the fun room will be kind of like a living room or a family room, only way more fun and crazy and jacked up, kind of like a hyper living room or a family room on drugs or caffeine for the kid- friendly description. One wall will be painted with chalkboard paint, one will be a giant whiteboard, and one will be painted white and able to be painted on a little every day so that the entire room is like an art project in progress that will be constantly changing and getting vamped up and redone. There will be beanbags and pillows and blankets everywhere, all over the floor, and also a couch, perhaps a pull out couch or just a big one, so you can watch television or play video games or take a nap. There would be new forts constructed weekly or daily or whenever we feel like it to goof around it at our (me and my family’s) will and the canopies will have handmade glittery paper stars hanging from them to set the ambiance of the room. There would be a giant bookshelf housing every book imaginable as well as a bunch of fun board games and DVDs and even a couple aged VHSs (probably some [Wee Sing Silly Songs](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=37gdLbO7gpI) videos—“A horse and a flea and three blind mice

Sat on a curbstone shooting dice

The horse he slipped and fell on the flea

"Whoops," said the flea, "There is a horse on me!"

Boom, boom, ain't it great to be crazy?

Boom, boom, ain't it great to be crazy?

Giddy and foolish the whole day through

Boom, boom, ain't it great to be crazy?

Way down South where bananas grow

A flea stepped on an elephant's toe

The elephant cried, with tears in his eyes

"Why do not you pick on someone your own size?"

Boom, boom, ain't it great to be crazy?

Boom, boom, ain't it great to be crazy?

Giddy and foolish the whole day through

Boom, boom, ain't it great to be crazy?

Way up North where there is ice and snow

There lived a penguin and his name was Joe

He got so tired of black and white

He wore pink slacks to the dance last night!

Boom, boom, ain't it great to be crazy?

Boom, boom, ain't it great to be crazy?

Giddy and foolish the whole day through

Boom, boom, ain't it great to be crazy?–”

I love*, love, LOVE* this song!! It is the story of my life. The being crazy part, not the animals doing weird things part, although that would be awesome. I also love the [“I am a Nut”](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9EljjMXpQZc) song—“ I am an acorn, small and round

Lying on the cold, cold ground

Everyone walks over me

That is why I am cracked you see

I am a nut!

I am a nut!

I am a nut!

Called myself on the telephone

Just to hear my golden tone

Asked me out for a little date

Picked me up about half past eight

I am a nut!

I am a nut!

I am a nut!

Took myself to the movie show

Stayed too late and said "Let us go"

Took my hand and led me out

Drove me home and gave a shout!

I am a nut!

I am a nut!

I am a nut!”

Both of those awesome, hilarious songs are seriously representative of my childhood, probably because I am both crazy and a nut—ha- ha!) for old time’s sake. It will be the most amazing room ever; I can’t believe every house does not have one. Maybe I will become famous someday (well hopefully not because fame is scary but we are being hypothetical here) and everyone will start putting fun rooms in their house—I can start a revolution! A fun room revolution! Okay that makes no sense, but the topic of the fun room makes me really excited, and it is definitely going to happen! Also, I am going to have a trampoline outside my house. My mom would never let me have one, even an enclosed one, because she says it is dangerous and I have *always* wanted one. So that is what my dreams are—a yellow kitchen and a fun room and postponing the switch in my head from being pulled by that damned bug for as long as I possibly can. And I keep thinking, keep wondering if this baby in my stomach or uterus (ha—maybe I should not be a doctor after all! just kidding, I will learn, or at least I hope I will learn) or whatever will stop all of those amazing things from happening, or if it will make me better or stronger or able to break free or ahhh!! I do not know; this is *so* much to think about. A bubble bath sounds amazing right now. And what about med school and my childhood dream of becoming a doctor? Does that all go up in smoke because of this pregnancy? Or can I just abort this thing and end it? How much does an abortion cost? I am not sure how I can think about this any more! Maybe a bubble bath will clear my head. And do I really want to be a doctor? I am not so sure. I do not want to be as stressed out as my mom is, but I also do not want to have a crappy job with low pay—money is *definitely* an issue because I need to fund the fun room! But in all seriousness, I have wanted to be a doctor since I was a baby, but what if it is too hard? What if I can’t handle all the work. Okay, I am sure I can—let us be honest here I can handle *anything*—but as inaccurate as doctor shows on television (everyone makes fun of me because I say “television” instead of “TV” and “application” instead of app. If I am already behind the times my kids are probably going to think I am *so* old!) are, the show *Scrubs*, which is coincidentally the funniest, especially the episode where Turk does the [Safety Dance](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7-bIhCBSrzU) and all of the episodes which highlight the [bromance](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vij_OrKMWEI) and [guy love](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lL4L4Uv5rf0) (“Guy love, That is all it is, Guy love, He is mine, I am his, There is nothing gay about it in our eyes.”) between Turk and J.D. (who by the way are both doctors), is also the most accurate in terms of medical jargon, hospital life as a resident or a med student, etcetera. One time, an [episode](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b64Ca0763o8&feature=related) almost made me cry because I thought I could never remember all that medical stuff in the beginning of the song during the musical episode (“We are as close as…The vena cava and the aorta! We are best friends just like…Amoxicillin and clavulanic acid! The tibia, the fibula! The left and right ventricle! A hypodermic needle and a latex tourniquet! Diverticulitis and a barium enema!”) so how can I possibly become a doctor?? I am certifiably insane. I also want to stay in Pittsburgh to attend medical school. Because I live in Pittsburgh, I am pretty much destined to be a hardcore Steelers fan for the rest of my life. Our house pretty much looks like every other house in Pittsburgh, with Steelers rugs on our floors, a Steelers flag waving outside, and Terrible Towels in the bathroom to match the black and yellow shower curtain. We even have Steelers license plate covers, magnets, and bumper stickers to adorn our cars with so that we can drive in style with Steelers pride constantly by our side. If you think about it, the entire country is really Steeler Country, because no matter where a Pittsburgh resident moves, he or she will be a die- hard Steelers fan for the rest of his or her natural born existence. When Whiz Khalifa’s “[Black and Yellow](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UePtoxDhJSw&ob=av2e)” (“Yeah ah ha, you know what it is everything I do, I do it big Yeah ah ha, screaming thats nothin when I pulled out of the lot, thats stuntin reppin my town when you see me you know everything Black and yellow, black and yellow Black and yellow, black and yellow”) came out (you can say whatever you want about Lil Wayne’s mocking yet soft version entitled “Green and Yellow,” but its video has a staggering smaller number of YouTube views—about a measly 7 million as compared to a gargantuan 99 million, to be exact- ish) it pretty much became our unofficial national anthem of Steeler Country, accompanied by a Terrible Towel twirling in the wind as a sort- of salute in a way. Anyway, all Pittsburgh pride aside, I hope, I pray, I dream that I will be able to get into the medical school at the University of Pittsburgh, where I am studying undergrad on a pre- med track, but what if I do not get in?? What if my grade point average is not near good enough, or I do not participate in enough extra- curricular activities? What if what I am doing is not good enough to do what I want to do in life? I freak out about this every day. At least I have a man that loves me and is supporting me and will keep supporting me if I decide to tell him about this baby. It is funny, because I truly feel like he can read my mind sometimes—I honestly do not know how the heck he manages to do it, read my mind like a psychic. Like he always knows what I am thinking even without me having to say anything. He can always tell when something’s wrong and he can tell when I am cold and he can tell when I am sleepy even when I tell him I am perfectly and totally fine (maybe it is because I am a bad liar, but I am pretty sure it is more than that). Like the other day, I asked him what kind of tea he wanted at Starbucks, and he texted me “idc” (I do not care). And this annoyed me slightly (Okay, *slightly* more than slightly, if I just said slightly he would call my bluff here. My actual reaction was, *he does not care? He does not care?! How can he not care?! And, more importantly, why does not he care? Does that mean he does not care about me? I mean I totally care a lot because what if I get him the wrong one and he does not like it?! Will he be mad if I get him the wrong one but how am I supposed to know which one is the right one if he will not even tell me?! Ahhh I am so stressed out now!* And, yes, all of this stress was over a type of tea, but I am totally insane and my aforementioned guilt complex would prevent me from calming down about something so trivial like what type of tea I should get my boyfriend at Starbucks, never mind what *size* I should get him), because I wanted to know exactly which one he wanted so I could make him happy. So what did I do? I bought both. I texted him “you are going to hate me!” (jokingly, of course) because I knew he would not be happy that I got both, because he does not like when I pay for things (he is such a gentleman, sometimes stubbornly so, actually, but it does not really bother me at all because he is so damn adorable and sweet). And just when I was going to text him that he did not know me at all, because he *should* have known that I would buy both, he responded, “you bought both, did not you?” Which made me smile, it even made me giggle a little, because it means he knows me so well that he just *knew* somehow. It does not end there—when I brought him the two teas, somehow he *knew* which one I wanted (I did not even say anything! And I had never had tea with him before, so he could not just know from past experience), and took the other one, again, like the true gentleman he is. And that is just one of many examples when he just knows exactly what I want and what is going on without even asking. It is things like that that keep me going, that make me want to fight for our relationship and just be with him because I know how much he cares about me. Sometimes the romantic in me sees our relationship as forbidden, viewing us as star- crossed lovers and comparing us to Romeo and Juliet. Let us just hope my life ends better than theirs. Actually, as sick and tired I am of hearing spin- offs on Romeo and Juliet, it is all I can think about—how ironic is that? The one spin- off of Shakespeare that I *love* is the movie with good ‘ol Leonardo Di Caprio, bless his heart and that gorgeous head of hear and delicious mug of his. I love it because the original script of the play is all right there. But what I *do not* like, is when people think they know the Romeo and Juliet tale *so well* that they do not even bother reading it, or twist the story. Like Taylor Swift’s song “Love Story.” Has she ever read the play, even? And the real deal certainly does not have a story- book ending like in her [song](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8xg3vE8Ie_E&ob=av3e)

(“Romeo save me I have been feeling so alone

I keep waiting for you but you never come

Is this in my head? I do not know what to think

He knelt to the ground and pulled out a ring

And said, marry me Juliet

You will never have to be alone

I love you and that is all I really know

I talked to your dad, go pick out a white dress

It is a love story baby just say yes—"

Wait!!! No!!! That is not right *at all*! That does not actually happen in the end of the Shakespeare play; they die at the end of the real thing, so get it right and stop trying to make a masterpiece something that it is not by changing it, stupid young pop star icon girl!). As much as I dislike corny songs, especially corny songs with an equally cheesy, love- dovey video, when I listen to the song “[Halo](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bnVUHWCynig&ob=av2e)”

(“Remember those walls I built

Well, baby they are tumbling down

And they did not even put up a fight

They did not even make up a sound

I found a way to let you in

But I never really had a doubt

Standing in the light of your halo

I got my angel now

It is like I have been awakened

Every rule I had you breakin'

It is the risk that I am takin'

I ain't never gonna shut you out

Everywhere I am looking now

I am surrounded by your embrace

Baby I can see your halo

You know you are my saving grace

You are everything I need and more

It is written all over your face

Baby I can feel your halo

Pray it will not fade away

I can feel your halo halo halo

I can see your halo halo halo

I can feel your halo halo halo

I can see your halo halo halo

Hit me like a ray of sun

Burning through my darkest night

You are the only one that I want

Think I am addicted to your light

I swore I would never fall again

But this do not even feel like falling

Gravity can't forget

To pull me back to the ground again

[ Lyrics from: http://www.lyricsmode.com/lyrics/b/beyonce/halo.html ]

Feels like I have been awakened

Every rule I had you breakin'

The risk that I am takin'

I am never gonna shut you out

Everywhere I am looking now

I am surrounded by your embrace

Baby I can see your halo

You know you are my saving grace

You are everything I need and more

It is written all over your face

Baby I can feel your halo

Pray it will not fade away

I can feel your halo halo halo

I can see your halo halo halo

I can feel your halo halo halo

I can see your halo halo halo

I can feel your halo halo halo

I can see your halo halo halo

I can feel your halo halo halo

I can see your halo halo halo

Halo, halo

Everywhere I am looking now

I am surrounded by your embrace

Baby I can see your halo

You know you are my saving grace

You are everything I need and more

It is written all over your face

Baby I can feel your halo

Pray it will not fade away

I can feel your halo halo halo

I can see your halo halo halo

I can feel your halo halo halo

I can see your halo halo halo

I can feel your halo halo halo

I can see your halo halo halo

I can feel your halo halo halo

I can see your halo halo halo”)

by Beyoncé I always, without fail, think of him. I know that is totally silly and lame, but it is true. That is what love does to you—it turns you into a loser! Not really a *loser*, but it turns you into a ball of love and joy that can only be tolerated by people in loving relationships, and even though I am in one I still can’t stand anyone in a relationship but myself and my hubby. Listen to me, “my hubby.” I have officially dove off the deep end. But at least I will be drowning in a sea of loooove! AHH I need to stop myself from being so cheesy! Quick, think of something depressing. Hmmm, that is easy—how about *my entire life*! How about my tragic existence riddled with unbearable parents in an insane household and long- lost siblings and a dad who left and let us not forget this baby inside me, this unwanted pregnancy that will probably rot away my chances at ever getting a medical degree unless I put and end to it but I am still not sure how I truly feel about that! It is easy to be pro- choice; it is totally simple for me to rationalize my political leanings. But it is not so easy to make a decision on my own, to decide to have a abortion and actually, legitimately go for it. I just do not know what I am going to do. I want to soak in the tub, let the hot water caress my skin and the bubbles to tingle my toes. I need to get these thoughts out of my mind. These thoughts about my life being destroyed from the inside out and the outside in. And let us not forget Lewis, my precious, lovely dog. I still wonder about him and where he went; I wonder why he left me and if where he went off to is a better place than where I am and where he was. Maybe I did not show him I loved him enough—I do not know! I surely did. And when I say better place I sure as hell do not mean heaven (wow notice my choice of words, look at my heaven- hell juxtaposition that I have got going on there, totally *winning* from a literary standpoint) because I can’t even bear the thought, I can’t even confront the possibility that he might be dead. I would like to think somebody found him and is raising him in a happy home—a home of a Steelers fan of course (not hard to come by in Pittsburgh, and Lewis could not have possibly gotten much farther than the city, if that). The thing I love about living in Pittsburgh, or “Picksburgh,” is the lingo, also known as "Picksburghese." I am not great at speaking it because I technically do not live *in* the city of Pittsburgh, I live just outside of it, but I, the nerd that I am, tend to use a translation [website](http://www.pittsburghese.com/translator.shtml) so that I can comfortably talk about “yinz stillers” at the games to other raging Steelers fans without sounding like a total idiot or a spaz. For example, as the website so includes, when I want to say the Plege of Allegiance I simply must say, "I pledge allsegiance to da flag anna United States of America. And to da republic fer which it stands, one nation under Gawd, indivisible, wit liberty and jestice fer alls." And if I, for some odd reason, feel the need to quote the late President John F. Kennedy I should probably go with, "Ask not wah yinzes country can do fer you n'at. Ask wah yinz can do fer yinzes country.” It is easy- as- pie…sort of; it gets easier as you (or “yinz”!) get used to it, and growing up around Pittsburgh, or “Picksburgh,” of course, makes it a lot easier, too, because you get to hear the lingo a lot when you go into the city, which I obviously do quite often because I go to school there. With all my worries, I could use a laugh, and as I contemplate my life I can use Picksburghese, Hamlet- style to wonder silently to myself, "Or Not. Ats da question” (Or, because this one is a little harder to figure out, that is, “To be or not to be? That is the question”). Indeed, that is the question. I am way too tired to apply it to my own life, though, at this point. It is funny, because before I started dating met my boyfriend, the last time I was really happy was two years ago on Christmas—it was the last time we, as a family, were *all* happy, before this mess. As Jews, it is the tradition that on Christmas we order Chinese Food, so we followed to tradition in stride. My mom was not drinking at the time, and everyone was playing Monopoly—in fact, I had forgotten this hobby she took up, but board games were her thing that relapse, and we had taken up a short-lived tradition of family game night. I had suggested Uno once, but my stepdad shushed me, I could not say mention Uno to my mom because that was not a board game and the thought of playing cards may cause her to have an emotional breakdown or something. But it is whatever, because that night, that Christmas, we were *happy*. I remember I was the one who ordered the food. I spoke slowly to the woman on the other end, “…and the Vegetable Lo Mein with broccoli on the side, please.” I hoarsely said my order into the crackling receiver; my voice was raspy from the quickly declining temperatures. “Yes, I know!” replied the voice on the other end, “You order here all the time.” I smiled at the man’s words; they brought me a sweeping feeling content. Every year during Christmas (in fact, whenever we order Chinese no matter what time of year it is), my family and I order from the exact same Chinese restaurant as we had the year before, and the year before that and the year before that. This reminds me of the episode in “Sex and the City” when Miranda orders from the same Chinese take-out place every day, and the woman on the other line giggles ebulliently, predicting what Miranda will order, and being right every time. It was a weird moment, but I remember that I began to laugh- not a chuckle, not a giggle. It was a large full-hearted laugh that comes from deep inside your belly and comes out with such an impact that you cannot stop; it means you are overjoyed. And that I was; I felt like Santa Clause, if I ever believed in him, with a jovial smile and big, rosy cheeks. Everywhere I went, people would smile along with me and I would spread joy with the jingle of my bell and the spring in my step. I knew this was just a fairy tale, a myth, a fraud. Most people out there are pessimistic, worrying about what may get in their way and never searching for the silver lining. But I overlooked that. I was in too joyous of a mood to care about them. If they chose to lose seeing and feeling the fun in life to worry about insignificant specks of events, then that was their problem. Nothing could spoil my happiness. Then I did something truly strange, even for me—maybe it is because I am not used to short bursts of joy like that that occur for no particular reason. By animal instinct, I ran outside in the bitter cold of the night. Holiday lights had already been put up, and the neighborhood was a circle of shining merriment and never-ending happiness. The wind whispered into my ear and bit the top of my red nose. But the whipping cold and bitter frost swirled around me, past my body. I was secreting bright lights and warmth and joy as I had never felt it before. I had no idea what brought on this sudden pleasure and excitement, but I did not want it to stop. I twirled and twirled until all the tiny, colorful lights became a blur; I was twisting and turning in a colorful, wispy cloud of pure holiday cheer. Not the holiday cheer you see in commercials that involve material needs and desires. No—it was something deeper, more emotionally important than any toy or car or piece of clothing that could ever bring you pleasure. The smell of pine caressed my nostrils as I began to feel dizzy. Rather than stopping myself, I allowed myself to collapse to the cold ground and take in the grassy aroma. I wish I could say it was a white Christmas and that there was a fresh blanket of snow on the ground—but it was not, and there was not, and that did not even matter to me at the moment or at all. I began to laugh hysterically again, overpowered by a force greater than myself- the very happiness that can overcome you and pull you into a more natural, animalistic nature. I sprung up and ran, letting my hair fly in a crazy, tangled mess around me; I allowed the wind to press against my face, a blanket of oxygen. I ran and ran until I was out of breath, needing to burn off my excess energy. I skipped, I trotted, I sauntered, until all of a sudden I was back in my living room. Not remembering how I got back there, when I did, and how long I was running. All I knew was I was back, my family’s faces all around me. Glowing with the bright lights of our little Christmas tree (decorated top to bottom in Stars of David and other Jewish ornaments and Judaica, no less) and the mechanical menorahs we put up. I could smell the garlic-y noodles, the salty rice, the steamy vegetables. They were eating, chatting; they were happy. They were not quarreling; they were not nagging. They were simply content. Almost as overjoyed as I was when I was out in my yard, twirling and jumping and laughing. I did not know or remember much, but I do know that miracles can happen, and they were all right there, chatting and giggling, right in front of my eyes. And, at that moment I thought maybe, just *maybe*, if you believe enough, Santa Clause *does* exist. As corny as it sounds, for a moment I thought that maybe there is a part of Santa Clause in all of us—not a chubby fat man, but just a simple human being, who is happy with life, just as it is. That moment of pure ebullient joy and bliss even inspired me to write a poem entitled “Mark of Winter:”

Winter

First snowfall

White sheets of ice

Bitter frost

Whispering past my neck

Bright specks of light

Colors swirling

Music lacing through the wind

Frosted windows

Snowflakes drifting

Snow sprites bubbling up magic

Shining fairies creating miracles

Glowing windows

Trees sparkling

Sweet smelling pine

Hot apple cider

Taste of cinnamon

Jovial feelings

Love sweeping through the air

Thick pajamas

Big, cozy quilts

Hot chocolate with marshmallows

Burrowing squirrels

Hibernating bears

Snuggling by the fire

Frozen kisses

Heated hugs

Belly laughs

Wool socks

Fuzzy earmuffs

Signs of life

Beauty in the clouds

Family gatherings

Sweet rum cake

Jolly, filled homes

Light white mountaintops

Holiday merriment afoot

Unique, happy people

Air filled with hope

Solstice

In fact, this particular poem inspired an entire set of poems about Christmas and the holiday season, including a sestina, a ghazal, a prose poem, a free verse poem, and a found poem, in that order (this was around the time when I started to experiment with different poetic forms):

Christmas Eve

An open sleigh takes into flight

Embraced by crystals, a twinkling snow

Santa’s workshop out of sight

Sky dotted with stars gives off a glow

Into the arms of a chilly night

Sleeping children down below

Sweeping into a town below

A little reindeer slows his flight

Sparkling nose, a bright red glow

Sleigh can navigate through the night

Lands on a rooftop covered with snow

A tiny town, a beautiful sight

Not a mouse nor a girl nor a boy in sight

Once atop the roof, now below

All are asleep on this cold night

Except the saint with his cheerful glow

Hooves leaving prints on the untouched snow

Nine drowsy deer await their next flight

A group of reindeer commence their flight

Drawn into the chill of this icy night

Hopeful children down below

Lie in bed and await the sight

A slew of presents, their faces aglow

The sign of a visitor in the white, rumpled snow

Hoof prints and footprints dotting the snow

Little town now out of sight

The grinning, jolly man looks below

Deep in the heart of this frosty night

Bags filled with presents no longer in flight

The workshop near, a vision, it glows

Glimmering lights from the pine tree glow

Nearing the end of this nippy night

Nine sets of feet touch the ground below

Next year, a repeat of this very same flight

Sleepy reindeer fall asleep in the snow

Soon, a new eve will be in sight

Snow Globe

Carolers sing atop every stair

Cheerful bells ring in the spirit

Smells of cinnamon spice up the air

Gingerbread men taste of the spirit

Children toss snowballs, a double- dog dare

Smiles and laughter embody the spirit

Sparkling ornaments dangle with flair

Pine needles and lights grasp the spirit

A snowflake falls, the atmosphere fair

Microscopic design carries the spirit

Sprinkling of powder, over here, over there

Shake it again, recreate the spirit

Wonderland

A sprinkling of fairy dust decorates my eyelashes as I drift through cobbled corridors, past sticky, peppermint grins and into a wave of soft chimes. Their whispers start the fairies singing; twinkling lights guide me though this evergreen jungle. The jolly, white man invites me to dance; he removes his top hat and bows, revealing his black, broken smile and his pointy carrot nose. I curtsey in response and we sway atop flecks of white and skate over crystals that rest shoulder to shoulder. The earth is swirling as we rise up, twirling around the glimmering lights, past the luminous buildings, past the effervescent rooftops, past the chimneys (my breath looks like theirs). The sweet scent of pine flies with me, wafts past me and encircles me, bathing me in its aroma. As I touch the star I wonder why it fails to burn my skin, why it is not hot to the touch, why my hand does not jerk back as I meet its point. I am above everything and I hear nothing, but the laughter and song echo in my ears. My vision is hazy as a dreamy sensation sweeps over my quieted limbs and now the world stops spinning. It is still. Everything is still, still as the sleeping snow. Visions of sugarplums vanish along with the milk and cookies. I open my eyes and the blood rushes back.

Fragments

The soft, tinkling sounds of

Bells

Surround me

Like the tiny specks of white

Leaving a sprinkling of powder

In their wake.

Microscopic designs,

Each crystal unique,

Astound me

Like the whispering chimes

Following close behind me,

Subtly, gently.

I feel the hot breath of each

As they encircle me,

Tell me their secrets,

Draping me

In their chill,

In their music.

In Love With Christmas Music (And Proud of It)

Irresistible symphony

joyous outburst

tempted perspective

exquisite spirits soar

chiming

melting

nurtured jewel

compelling medley

choral season

confess love

utterly addicted lullaby

When I wrote those poems, they marked a really happy time in my life when I was pretty stable emotionally. But now I know that there really is no Santa Clause, no true god, and no mystical guardian angels in the world, and this notion inspired me to write a backlash to this poetry portfolio, in order to bring out the skeptic in me and show my feelings as they are now about the holiday season, in a poem entitled “’Tis the Season:”

I try to listen

When sleigh bells ring.

The snow fails to glisten  
As carolers sing.

Jingle bells

Cannot inspire.

I feel no warmth

From the fire.

No matter where

This open sleigh takes me

I do not care

That Santa is watching.

Not even

Frosty the Snowman

Can convince me

Of this

Winter wonderland.

As you can see, this poem is much more cynical, representing how my views as well as my overall emotional state have changed since that Christmas when we all were happy. I truly believe that the only *real* guardian angels in the world are real people, and *he* is like a guardian angel for me, and I am trying really hard not to think about how lame that sounds, because in all reality it is true. Before him, I do not know what I did to keep myself calm and collected and feeling safe. I remember when I was younger I used to write little stories. I started them, but I never finished them. They all had dark undertones. Sometimes I look through my old, unfinished journals and read them, and wonder what was going on in my head that stimulated such darkness. One of the stories I started, in elementary school at that, was about a deeply disturbed clown with a dark past:

“The smell of popcorn, cotton candy, and caramel apples wafted through the air while joyful music blared in the background. The little girl took it all in and sat on her sticky seat. But she did not care about how clean it was, for she was at the circus!

The tall, brown haired man, around his early thirties, felt a tugging on his shirt. “Yes, honey?” he asked as he stared at his daughter, smiling.

“Daddy, can I get cotton candy?” she asked with an expectant voice.

“I do not think that is a good idea, honey. You might get dirty and sticky. How about popcorn instead?”

“But daddy, I really want some cotton candy!” the little girl begged while staring hopefully at her father with big, green eyes.

“Alright. You know I can’t resist that face!” her father tickled her stomach and she laughed as he bought her the cotton candy and passed it to her. Now she was content. She sat in her chair swinging her feet back and forth while licking her fingers noisily. Suddenly her smile grew bigger and wider. The clown was center stage on a unicycle!

He had a white face with a big, red giant smile and pink rosy cheeks. His large, joyful red nose made him seem even happier. White gloves covered his big hands and a colorful collared shirt and rainbow suspenders covered his big beer belly. But this clown, despite his joyful exterior, had more skeletons in his closet than any circus- goer or performer for miles.

He announced that his name was Flappy, rode around in his unicicle for a little longer, hopped off, and the show began. He made his way to the cage of large, red- eyed, hungry tigers, and stepped up to the biggest, most ferocious one of the bunch. Flappy creeped his head into the tiger’s mouth filled with rows of sharp, white teeth and, seemingly submerged in the gullet of the ferocious beast for hours, he came out without a scratch.

The rest of the show got more and more exiting. Twenty people bicycled in a singe cylinder for five whole minutes. An elephant came in with a gymnast doing tricks on his back. Well- built men did an act on the trapeze. Then, for the finale, all the clowns got together and had a pie- fight.”

The funny thing is, the one thing that sticks out to me about the start of this story is how I never knew how to spell “exciting” correctly—I *always* omitted the “c.” In fact, I did this until I was about sixteen and got points deducted from a standard five- paragraph- essay- form paper due to that particular spelling error. I also remember that “chalkboard” was my favorite font ever—maybe *that is* why I never finished this story, because I was too busy experimenting with the fonts! But all joking aside, this is not the only story I started and never finished, but they got more and more dark as I went on. Another story I started, which I just decided to name “The Bet” because it appears to be untitled:

“It all started with a bet, a bet by two dumb kids who did not know any better. It was not supposed to be serious; it was a way to pass the time during a long, boring summer. I have to admit, it was fun at first, I had hoped it would never end. But like they say, be careful what you wish for. It was meant to make my life better, more lighthearted, but it has reformed into the complete opposite.

Now it really is not ending. I am stuck in a spiral and I keep going down. It is worse than any nightmare you will ever have. Every minute it sucks your life away, but there is no way for me or anyone else to stop it. In less than two months I have gone from telling everyone everything, to keeping everything a secret. I am living a lie, my life is one, big, horrible lie.

And you know what the worst part is? No one knows except me.

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I will start from the beginning. When I was an innocent child.”

And that is all I wrote for that. It is clearly not finished—it is barely even started. The Clown story and “The Bet” are both stories I wrote in elementary school, and my first year of junior high (when I also started getting more creative with my titles), I wrote one that was even darker, about a recovering drug addict who was only fifteen, entitled “The Getaway:”

“Outside it was silent. The night was so freezing cold that when Annabelle let out a single, small breath, a smoky mist swirled around her body like a blanket caressing her skin. It was pitch black, but by animal instinct she seemed to find her way, creeping past obstacles and pitter-pattering along the long, never-ending concrete plains, block by block in succession, until all she saw was a big, grey blur. It was her yellow brick road of disaster and depression, a path she wished she had never gone down. But she could not go back. The deed was done, and there was no undoing it.

She turned around and looked back at the porch that marked her entire childhood; she felt overwhelmed and jaded by all the memories. She remembered the creaky, wooden porch swing where her father read her stories. Now it was rotted and worn- down, held up by a single iron chain, the other dangled pathetically and wilted to the ground. She drew in the memories of the front step where she played make-believe at age five, put her treasures under the creaky floorboard at age ten, and had her first kiss at age thirteen. She wished she could still play make-believe and get away from this town, this shadowed, conservative, cruel town of Bowville, Kentucky that she once called home sweet home.

She traced the shadow of the big pine tree which her mother gleefully

decorated with Christmas lights and ornaments not so long ago. And Annabelle herself, a young, carefree child, was ecstatic when she, after all the decorations were put up, was finally allowed to be picked up by her father’s strong arms and put the angel on the top. Her mother always told her, “That is your guardian angel, Annie,” and she believed it. Now, at age fifteen, Annabelle knew that she had to be her own guardian angel. As a teenager, almost an adult, and no longer a child, the rug was swept out from underneath her and she inherited and carried so much weight on her shoulders. She received many responsibilities, lots of work, along with lots of rights, and much more with every single year. She had yet to realize that every year was not torture, it was a baby step. It is the decades and eras that shape lives, not just single years. So far this era of her life was not going as she had planned. Annabelle did not have that angel, her mother, to look out for her anymore. She had to make her own decisions and face the consequences of them.

She turned around and continued to walk; she tried to push away the tears. The tears that she cried for so long in the confines of her pink room, a color chosen by her three year old self, but it may as well have been black. It would not have mattered. The lights were always out regardless, because the darkness was a parallel universe to how she constantly felt, feared, dreaded, and anguished. She was not always a solemn person. There was a time when she was always happy, joyous, and ebullient. But that was then, another time in her life, and that time was a mere ten weeks before. Ten weeks before her life was pure bliss. It was as if she was always on a pedestal and would never come down. Annabelle was loved and adored by her classmates, and was constantly the center of attention.

Annabelle could never be considered a bad person; she was kind to everyone and strived for excellence. However, with arrogance and pride she assumed that she could do no wrong; that is exactly what people made her feel like every day. Because her peers worshipped her so, she barely ever questioned her actions. Her excessive pride led her to it. It was a single night, a rare occasion where someone in the sophomore class was having a party. All someone had to say was “Just try it, what harm could it do?” Annabelle thought it over, and the logic seemed right at the time. Really, how bad could it be? Suddenly, with barely any thought at all, Annabelle, straight- A student, ruined her life with one mere choice in one single second. It took one faulty decision over the course of one second, and her life went spiraling downward.

She fell in love with it at her first sniff, but it was not a sweet kind of love; it was far from it. It was the love of an addict. She could not get enough of the white powder. Annabelle loved the feelings and new emotions the high brought her. When she used it, all of a sudden her emotions became illuminated in big pictures and sounds and amazingly bright colors. It felt as if the time was stopping for a bit, and it was doing it just for her. It was the best feeling in the world. She did anything in her power to get it. No matter how many of her friends she hurt, no matter how much money her parents found missing from their wallets, she continued her hunt, and the build up became too much. She became moody all the time, and the only thing that could relieve her was the cocaine. One substance ruined her life. A whole ten weeks later after the late nights “studying” and weekend “art classes,” really a short path down the grey, cracked sidewalk to the woods near her house, so she could get high without getting caught. It was, indeed, her yellow brick road.

And the drug was her wizard.

And here she was, going down that path again. She knew it was bad, she knew she was slowly killing herself, creeping into an agonizing death because of the beautiful, white specks of heaven, like snow ready to enter her bloodstream, her nervous system, her muscles; it was penetrating her very soul. She shook her head vigorously, trying with all of her power, telling her self, “IT IS NOT BEATIFUL! ITS DISGUSTING, IT IS HORRIBLE!” Annabelle began screaming at the top of her lungs in her mind. Her psyche, her soul constantly shrieking gave her a migraine, a pounding in her head that could only be relieved by that pure white dust. She needed it now more than ever. Oh, why was the path so long? Where are the deep green treetops of seclusion where I can savor the feeling? How much farther do I have to go to relish the high that I oh, so want to hate, but I can’t help but love, without the apprehension, the pressure, the pure anxiety of getting caught?

For what seemed like an eternity frolicking about, life cycles whisking around her and time whirling past through the thick blanket of fog across the earth. Annabelle tried to reach her haven of the woods as quickly as she could, but her feet were dragging and her whole body felt bloated and heavy, although she never ate anymore. This was because eating never gave her far as much pleasure as the coke did. Oh the sweet, sweet coke. You are so close to me physically, in the pocket near my breast, warming my chest, yet so far away in regard to time. She tried to slap the thought out of her mind, but in her heart she felt it. She knew that she could never love anything as much as she loved this dangerous, evil, putrid drug.

This heaven of deep green and earthy brown that she escaped to, this sanctuary filled with fireflies and rabbits and peaceful critters that roam the earth was, in reality, a hell, a chaos, a pandemonium in disguise. The beautiful pine trees and creatures crawling, hopping, chirping around her, were all a mask, a blanket of disgust, for the relief of her addiction, a refuge from her withdrawal. She silently, almost sneakily, crept through the entrance of the jumble of enormous trees, low bushes, and bumpy, packed-in dirt. Into a sea of deep green leaves and thick, stringy, fuzzy vines she traveled, until she found herself in the dead center. The flat, grassy, mossy patch of relief and destruction that she knew too well, and in her heart knew she would know again and again, and many other horrible, restless nights in the future. An aerial bulls-eye, isolated from all other human life, it was just her and the cocaine in her sanctuary that night, plus all the creeping, slithering, shuffling, forest dwellers.

No one knew of this but her, the powder, and the wandering eyes of a big, grey spotted owl on a tall, nearby tree. When she looked at that owl, that speckled owl with the wandering eyes and soft, squeaky call, she knew it was judging her. The owl was judging her as everyone else would if she admitted her problem. That is why she could never admit her secret; she did not want people judging her. All she wanted was this phase to pass, although she knew it was not a phase, and it would not pass if she did not do something about it. Annabelle knew all this, and yet she was taking no action. She was worried about how hard it would be, how the withdrawal would overcome her until she could not bare it anymore. She did not want that feeling, all she wanted was the high to take her away, make her not worry and fret anymore; she longed for tranquility, the peacefulness of the mixture of that musky, forest smell and the colors, feelings, and emotions that the high brought her, that swept her off her feet like a boy used to. She did not need a boy anymore, she had a lover, and his name was cocaine. Cocaine could never hurt her feelings, or judge her, or push her around. No, cocaine could not do any of that. Yet, what it could do was much worse than any heartbreak or unanswered phone call. It could smother her, take over her life as it did, and it could also end it, as it would if she did not take action quickly.

She carefully removed the bag with the white powder from her right chest pocket and emptied it into her hand. Hungrily, she tilted back her head, lifted her hand up to her nose, and quickly snorted every bit of it. Once she was done, she began to walk back and noticed something tiny, glistening on the ground. She had spilled some. Begging herself not to do it, almost by instinct, she dropped to the ground, kneeled down, and ravenously snorted it off the ground. She was a wolf, scarfing down her prey, a vulture, picking on the bones of decaying flesh to ease her hunger. She could not stop it, the monster inside her. It was begging to take over, but Annabelle tried to keep it locked up. As much as she tried to hold back the monster, it unlatched its chains and broke through the prison that was her soul.

While she was breathing in the grassy aroma, she realized what she was doing. She was snorting cocaine off the ground just for the high, and she realized that her addiction, her problem, was beyond serious, beyond severe, and it was crucial for Annabelle to stop herself now. She had to quit before it literally led to her death. She was going to try to get help, no matter how hard or how thick the waters get, she would push through it, as she breezed though life just less than a year before. Annabelle was determined to save herself, before it was to late, and get back on that high pedestal she was once on. She knew there was always a space for her there, atop that pedestal; she just needed to twist a little bit to fit.“

At least that story had a conclusion, but it was even more dark and depressing and sad, and not much was going on in my life at the time to be sad about, at least not that I remember. But, then again, everything is dramatic and terrible in the mind of a middle school girl—when you are a girl at around age 12 or 13 you are awkward and everything is a *huge*, *enormous*, almost *gargantuan* deal, so no wonder I thought I was depressed. I know I saw myself as a victim when I was in middle school, but I was also a bitch and a bully to people who were even more victimized than I was, as little friends as I actually had. But even I can’t really remember what it was like to go to middle school and for me it was not too long ago. I mean, every adult has been a teen. Every adult knew what it was like at some point. Every adult claims to their child to still know the hardships of middle school, but do they really? They remember what it was like, but do they remember the gossiping and rumors from their heartless peers? Do they remember how the hallways were so crowded they were constantly late to class, and were embarrassed by the getting a detention from a thoughtless teacher? Do they remember the pressure to be perfect? The answer is no, because they, in fact, remember the *idea* of middle school, but they do not truly *remember*. They do not remember that one awesome teacher who let them cuss in class. They do not remember getting turned down by their crush. And they certainly do not remember their parents getting on their *very last nerve* day after terrorizing day. The bitchy preps, the vain jocks, and the smart ass geeks all make middle school a living hell for those less psycho. Sure, you can read teen novels, but no matter how many fictional young adult books you have read, the plots of those books are entirely different from actually being stuck in a teen novel, literally. Young, innocent middle school- aged kids may be crazy and weird, but they have one thing right that they ruminate upon again and again—life just sucks sometimes, does not it? Amen to that. Anyway, another story I wrote, which happens to be my personal favorite, was murder- mystery with a twist that, in my opinion, probably ended a little too abruptly, at least for my taste now, but that is probably because I did not feel like writing an entire novel in middle school, and who could blame me? This one is smartly entitled “Death Therapy:”

“He opened the lid of the steaming hot Colombian black coffee, and, as the steam rose up onto his face, he sipped it, loving the bitter taste as it burned his tongue. He walked out of the Starbucks and into his old, small Acura, which fulfilled all his transportation needs. A big car was not needed, it was only he and his wife, and they had no children. He savored the moments of his coffee break, because, after wards he knew he would be back in his small cramped home office, listening to endless speeches made by his patients. He was a tall man in his early fifties, wearing loose fitting beige slacks with a brown leather belt and a crisp, white collared shirt. In the pocket of his slacks were a small stack of business cards which read: Roger Williamson, Psychiatrist- M.D.

Dr. Williamson pulled up into his driveway and, with a jolt, just missed the old, beat up bicycle leaning against his garage. The paint was chipped, and there was crusted mud all over it. It seemed like it survived both World Wars and then some. He wondered why it was there; neither him nor his wife rode bikes. He assumed that his wife got it at a garage sale: she loved old, antique things. She was always telling him that real beauty is not physical appearance of an object- it is the story behind it. This bike, he thought, chuckling, certainly told a story.

Dr. Williamson entered the house expecting his wife’s usual, loud greeting and tight hug, but the house was quiet. Wondering why, he spotted his usually jolly wife curled up in a ball on the couch weeping softly to a soap opera. She watched her favorite soap every Tuesday at around three in the afternoon. He usually longed for the silence of Tuesday afternoons, but today it completely slipped his mind.

“I am home, Ava!” he called out to her. She waved him away and continued sobbing. Ava was a thin, rosy- cheeked, adventurous woman. She was a little on the short side but that did not stop her from rock climbing, bungee jumping, hiking, or anything that you can think of. However, she never rode bikes due to the tragic death of her golden retriever, who was hit by a bike and killed.

Dr. Williamson made his way up the long, wooden old- fashioned steps. The house was very old, it was built upon a cemetery in the early eighteen hundreds. That added to its beauty in Ava’s eyes- it was full of mysteries and most definitely told a story. Dr. Williamson grunted as he made the last step- he had back problems and working through a range of papers every day, jogging every morning, and twisting and turning all night with a mere four hours of sleep did not exactly nurture his pains.

He arrived into his small, cramped office stacked with papers, and behind those papers were a couple of large couch-like chairs array with rips and tears revealing their antiquity- they provided a broken-in, at ease feeling that makes a chair seem all the more comfortable. And through the books and papers and empty paper coffee cups- he saw a large, muscular, male arm encrusted with dirt, leaning against the chair’s armrest. He was not expecting any patients as far as he remembered, but he was a little slow today. Reaching into his back pocket, he pulled out his sleek black leather daily planner, and, the box with the date, Tuesday, October 24, was, indeed, empty.

As patient as Dr. Williamson was, he could not bear waiting any longer to see his visitor, he needed to fulfill his overflowing curiosity. He made his way behind his cluttered desk and the hand he saw before slowly revealed an untidy man wearing tattered jeans, a not-so-white-anymore white t-shirt ripped on one of the shoulders, grey wool socks with holes in eight of his ten toes, and horribly tattered sneakers which could not be considered shoes at all. The man had bloodshot eyes, long, brown, messy hair, and a dirty, unshaven face. Although the man was probably Dr. Williamson’s age (in fact, his features were eerily similar to those of Dr. Williamson, himself), he looked much older. It appeared as if he had been living on the streets. Despite his ragged exterior, he seemed very shy. His large, hairy hands were shiny with sweat and he was wringing them in his lap nervously.

Dr. Williamson, not disgruntled by the man’s looks at all, given all the other strange people he has tended to before, said, “If you want to get any help from me, you are going to have to speak up. Now, start talking. This is going to have to be a quick meeting, because of the looks of you. You do not appear as if you have the means to pay me. But I am willing to help you as much as I can. So what are you here for?”

“I…” the strange man whispered, a soft wind that was barely heard escaped his lips, but its presence felt so obvious.

“Well, we will start at the beginning, then. What is your name?” Dr. Williamson asked.

“B-B-B-Bill.” The man stuttered. “Bill Robinson.”

“Okay, we are getting somewhere. Can you tell me why you seek my help? What brings you here?”

“You ever heard of all those m-m-murders? About th-thirty years ago? In a little town in Alabama?” Bill uttered as much as his cracked lips could manage.

“Ah, yes, I was about twenty years old at the time. It was a very frightening episode. Did you have relatives die there? Friends, maybe?”

“N-n-o. That was me. The murderer I mean. Went to jail for thirty years. Just got out. I have been livin’ on the streets. I- uh- really do not know how to m-make a livin’, get on my feet.”

Dr. Williamson, dumbfounded, just listened, scribbling away on his notepad with a wide smile on his face, as if painted on like a doll’s. He was exited to get this written and placed as a reference. He would be flooded with paparazzi, news reporters, oh, how much attention he would get. He would become so incredibly rich if he helped Bill, the psycho murderer. Dr. Williamson he had to act nurturing, supporting, so Bill would trust him, confide in him. He would make money from all the crazy fools wanting help from Dr. Williamson, the man who saved the serial killer from- suicide! Yes! That is what he would tell the reporters! He would be rich… oh, so rich…

“When I was a kid, I was raised v-very religious.” Bill continued, “My mama told me that if I did anything wrong, the devil was behind the chairs I sat in, and he would get me. One day, when I was about fourteen, maybe fifteen right after I had stolen some gum from the grocery store, I heard something behind the sofa. I was so scared I grabbed a kitchen knife and stabbed it. I felt excitement, a rush of energy as the knife came down. Little did I know it was just my cat. I had killed my own cat! But it felt so good. I knew I needed to do it again. I was ravenous with greed, I could not stop myself- it was like there was another force beyond me pushing me, forcing me to kill. Soon, I grew a sense for it. Something within myself told me whom to kill at what time. Sometimes I was directed to kill my family, my friends. Other times it was just random people on the street, people in movie theatres, people in front of me in line, anyone! I just knew who was next.”

“Who did you remember killing the most vividly?”

“My young wife, Joanna.” Bill said almost suddenly, as if he knew the question was going to be asked, “She was beautiful, I did not want to do it, something just drove me to kill her, it was far, far beyond my control, or any human being’s control. If only I could have stopped it…” Bill’s voice cracked, and, suddenly, he broke down, burying his face in his hands, letting out soft sobs, his warm tears streaming down his face. “If only… if only… I could have…” Suddenly, every memory began flooding back.

I was coming back from work, and I was feeling- energized- I needed to fulfill my addiction. And being as young and restless as I was, I just had to do it right away, and my wife- she just happened to be the closest person there. I could not wait. I was so- ready. I can’t really explain it. It was just a feeling, an uncontrollable feeling. So, I did it. I killed her. She was curling her dark, thick, beautiful hair as I came in, because we were planning on going out to dinner. She seemed so happy to see me after I was at work all day. She hugged me with her long, tanned arms, and as she did so, I picked up the curling iron behind her and gave her several blows to the head. She screamed and collapsed; she shrieked at me to stop. But it was too late; I was on a roll. Blow after blow. Hit after hit. Not only did I hit her hard, but the hot iron burned her skin as well. Soon, the screaming was over, and I went to bed… as if nothing had ever happened.

It was silent. The only could that could be heard was Ava blow- drying her hair in the bathroom, but then the blow- drying stopped. Ava stormed in, her hair still damp and blow dryer in hand. “What is going on here, Roger? When I came into the bathroom, I thought you were talking to a patient. But I heard the whole thing. Why were you talking to yourself? There was no one there except you! You need help, Roger. You have a problem!” Ava said, setting down the blow- dryer. She was deeply worried for her husband, yet confused and angry that he confront her about his problem- whatever that may be- sooner.

“You are right, your right.” he answered as his wife hugged him, sobbing. Then, he reached behind her for the blow dryer.

And then he went to bed… as if nothing had ever happened.”

Gotta love a twist ending (and the fact that I spelled "excited" wrong, like "exited." And the fact that I wrote “your” instead of “you are” directly after I spelled “you are” in a grammatically correct fashion. Sometimes I find poor grammar hilarious, like in my old writing, but sometimes I find it endlessly annoying, like when other people have terrible grammar. Hypocritical, I know. Sue me). Maybe the stories are just stories, just imagination, and they have no real meaning, no true connection with reality—perhaps I just knew that dark stories are more appealing, but I do not know. Maybe I could sense my family’s problems bubbling over, about to explode. Another story that I wrote in middle school is pretty long, but there are so many loose ends that I have no idea what I was getting at, and I have no idea where the title “Father’s Daughter” came from—probably because I did not get to the meaning of the title before I stopped writing the piece altogether:

“The young woman walked down the streets of New York City in pure confidence. She was about twenty-one years old, and she was stunningly beautiful. She could have been a model, with her tall stature and thin figure, but that is not the career path she chose. Her brown hair was pulled in a messy, yet professional, bun that was held together by sleek, thin black barrette. Simple gold jewelry was all she wore on her neck and ears, and on her hand was a big, onyx stone ring set in gold. Her crisp, white linen shirt, complimented her skin perfectly with her golden tan. Her grey knee-length skirt with her black lacy slip just peeking through showed just enough of her long legs. Her matching grey jacket put together her look and made her look professional. That was exactly the look she as going for- professional. Her black high heels, although uncomfortable, made her look even taller than she already was, and she still walked with an elegant poise.

She was standing up straight and tall as she carried a black leather briefcase with her left hand. With her right, she hailed a cab. As she sat down, her back still straight and her posture spewing confidence, her skirt rode up a bit which showed off her beautiful, perfectly tan legs. “Brooks Publishing Company on seventeenth, please.” She told the driver. He nodded giving tacit consent and they were off.

She leaned back against the leather interior of the taxi and thought about the reason she was there. She was about to pitch her idea for a new book, and she felt exited yet nervous. She was confident about her idea, her publisher was sure to love it. The last book she wrote, Under The Tallest Oak Tree, was about the lives of five individuals who all find themselves under the tallest oak tree at the park at the day’s end- that is when their lives merge. She had written a bestseller at age 20. It had been such a hit that her publisher encouraged her to write more. She was hesitant at first; she loved her old job as a world news columnist for a small local paper in her hometown of Bridgedale, Ohio. But once she saw all the fame and fortune she received, she hopped on the next plane to New York and started a new novel- one she was sure would become another bestseller. She worked for the New York Post as a small-time news columnist to bring in money until she finished her new novel.

The cab came to a stop, jolting her forward as her daydream vanished. “Fifteen-fifty.” the driver told her. She handed him a twenty-dollar bill, and, with a bright, self-assured smile that showed off her white teeth and full lips, she walked out the door and onto the sidewalk. Convinced that her book would be a hit and that her publisher would be ecstatic about her idea, she entered the tall, glass building. Through the window, you could see a short, plump woman wearing a navy blue blazer and pants paired with a pink blouse smiling and ebullient. The young woman shook hands with the woman in the navy blue, her publisher, and they sat down at a desk. Her publisher behind the desk, her sitting straight and tall and ready to make her pitch in front of her publisher.

After she pitched her idea, she gave her publisher a sample of her writing. Her publisher skimmed through quickly, and came to an immediate conclusion, “I am sorry, but this story could never happen in real life. It is completely unrealistic.” She sat there in shock, she felt as if her heart had just been ripped out and stomped on. “It is a great idea, do not get me wrong…” her publisher went on as she talked with her hands, “…but the public wants reality. They want to feel connected, they want to feel as if they could be the character and go what they are going through. The critics would rip this book to shreds.” The young woman just sat there, her mouth open wide, wanting to say something, but the words just would not come out.

Finally, she stood up and mustered up the courage to say, in a barely audible and muffled voice, “”Thank you for your time.” She turned around to leave, still in utter shock, but her publisher pulled her back by her arm and looked straight into her worried eyes.

“Oh, honey, do not let this get you down!” her publisher tried to encourage her, patting her encouragingly on her back, “You will do fine! Keep writing! You just need some more experience, that is all. Someday you will write something amazing- you will surprise yourself!” She was surprised, but not at herself, she was surprised at what she was hearing come out at her publisher’s mouth. Her publisher was once a friend to her, now she was just a person standing in the way of her dreams, and she never let anyone stand in her way. She walked out the door, and, instead of feeling sad and discouraged, she was beginning to feel extremely angry.

“Who does she think she is?” More experience?” she grumbled under her breath, “I will show that bitch what more experience really is.” As she stormed onto the edge of the sidewalk and stretched out her arm to hail a cab, she had an idea that would be sure to gain her much more experience, more than her publisher had intended.

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20 years later

She brought the warm, steamy, coffee to her lips and took a long sip, the mug felt pleasantly warm and brought a tingle to her fingertips, right up to her beautifully French manicured nails. As the dark brown liquid touched her tongue a strong, nutty taste swished around her taste buds. Her white terrycloth robe felt wonderfully soft and warm against her skin, she was wearing nothing but her naked body and delicate, pale lilac silk underwear underneath. Although her body was not perfect, she was a lovely woman just the same. The tranquility and comforting feeling of a late Sunday morning brought a serene presence to her home and a hopeful silence wavering about the air. She loved her quiet moments where she could just stare at the window and contemplate the life she made for herself. Some days she wondered whether she deserved it.

The window’s glass mirrored a colorful and mesmerizing rainbow onto the expertly painted beige wall, a portrait of her family hung just a mere two inches away. Outside, the grass was freshly cut and the odor of a clear summer day filled the air. The sky was completely blue, with only a sprinkle of clouds and the shining sun hanging above; it looked almost surreal, like a painting.

The woman could hear the giggling of her daughter while her wonderful husband tickled her to joyous tears. Although the silence was broken, she enjoyed listening to her two young sons playing football; she knew that before long one would come crying with a complaint of a scratch or a bruise. But that would not bother her a bit. She was content knowing that they depended on her; they needed mommy to get a band-aid, kiss them, and make it all better. Her children’s laughter kept her going, her role as a devoted mother and wife kept her strong, and her job as a writer kept her from boredom.

She felt a tickle on her bare leg. She looked down to find her loyal golden retriever, Ernest Hemingway, nuzzling her with his big, black, wet nose, waiting for a cuddle. She set her coffee down onto the small, antique, coffee table and scooped him up into her arms. He licked her face and she laughed loudly through her white and uniquely crooked teeth, an echo that wavered through the whole house. She just sat there with the dog in her lap for a minute, finally energized to star her day.

She set Hemingway on the floor and touched her naked feet to the cold, hard, wooden ground. She treaded down the hall to the kitchen, coffee cup in hand, and set it in the marble sink, telling herself she will tend to it later.

She turned back down the hall and turned a corner to get to the wooden staircase, which swirled up to the next level of her house. She clutched the shiny marble handle as she slowly made her way up and around the stairs. When she finally reached the top, she walked down the hall past her four year old daughter’s room, filled with the dolls and trinkets of her childhood, her five year old son’s room, a Spiderman haven, and her ten year old son’s room where the walls were unseen behind all the Nirvana, KISS, and Van Halen posters; the floor was home to a single drum set and anything else that was dropped or thrown down there.

Her daughter’s name is Cayenne, French for hot spice, her young son’s is Casimir, Slavic for peacemaker, and her older son’s is Jamil, Arabic for handsome. She chose strange yet beautiful names for her children because her name, Deborah Rander, and her husband’s name, Richard Aston, were too plain to her. And, as it turned out, there names perfectly fit their personality. Cayenne was feisty, full of ebullience, and added her own spice to everything. Casimir, although a constant vexation, could break up the bickering between his two siblings easily. Jamil, as everyone can tell, will grow up to be very good looking. He was even asked to be a model in a Pampers commercial when he was merely one year old.

She stepped in front of a large, pale blue painted room one side holding a single desk equipped with her laptop and all the papers, notebooks, and books created a blanket for the floor. The other side of the room, however, contained a mere closet in the corner, and there was an empty floor space for peace and relaxation. This room was where she wrote and did yoga. She was a journalist for a local newspaper in Charlotte, North Carolina called The Charlotte Tribune; she also wrote novels and short stories for pleasure.

She entered the refuge from everyday life she created for herself; it was a place to get away from all the stress and paranoia, a bastion from the rest of the world. She closed the door and locked it, as if shutting out all her woes and problems. She carefully peeled off her robe and shut it in the little corner closet, in exchange for her robe she pulled out her yoga mat and her radio. The instant the radio was plugged in an ocean of peaceful and serene songs began flowing out.

She unrolled the bright blue mat onto the floor and began with stretching. She bent down to touch her toes and slowly pulled herself up, bone by bone clicking into place, she stretched her back up until she was standing perfectly straight and neutral. Next she stretched her right arm behind her back, tugging on her elbow. She proceeded to the left. She moved on to stretch the rest of her body, preparing it for the workout. Her left leg. Her right leg. Her stomach. Her wrists. Her feet. Each body part was beautiful and special in its own way- from her little feet to the muscles on her legs, to the perfect arch on her back, to her long, elegant, neck.

When her stretching was complete, she moved on to a series of simple posing. She twisted her arms around one another and pressed her hands together, palm to palm, skin to skin, flesh to flesh, as if praying, and bent her right leg around her left. Then her left leg around her right. Eagle.

She held herself up with her arms and stretched onto the ground, lifting her head as if calling out to the sun. Up dog.

She pulled herself down on all fours, and stared at the beige carpeted ground. Down dog.

Pose after pose, her tense muscles became more and more relaxed. She ended in a traditional pose. Sitting on the floor, she crossed her legs Indian style, pressed her index fingers to her thumbs, held up her arms, and hummed softly. She had found her center.

By the end her body was glistening with sweat from concentration and exhaustion. Panting, she rolled up her mat and tucked her radio away, re-covering herself with the robe. She was ready for a nice, cleansing, and relaxing shower as a start to her hectic day filled with work and kids.

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As she opened the shower door, hot steam escaped and crept up to cover the mirror like a blanket of snow on the hard ground of winter. She dried herself off with a fluffy white towel and slipped on her robe. She walked onto the cold tile floors towards the mirror, grabbed a small white towel, and wiped the steam off of it. Staring at her smudged reflection, she wondered how she would ever get through the day. Her calm mornings always led her to crazy afternoons and nights.

While brushing her teeth, she allowed the brush to massage every single one of her teeth, her gums, her tongue, her taste buds tickled by the sharp, mint flavor. She lifted her brush to her scalp, making sure it stroked every strand of her long, wavy, brown hair. She washed her face, making sure that the sweet-smelling, soapy bubbles got into every single one of her pours and touched every bit of her skin. In the morning, she liked things to be slow and precise, a contrast to her fast moving afternoons. She hated feeling rushed.

She carefully applied her mascara with a delicate brush, turning all her lashes thick and black. Chic pink powder lightly brushed her eyelids and light pink lipstick left a moist imprint on her beautiful, full lips. Finally, a dusting of light pink blushed covered the apples of her cheeks. She did not like to overload on make- up because it was such a hassle, but she still liked looking girly and being noticed.

Tying her hair up into a slick bun, she gracefully slid across the floor out of her bathroom and into the large master bedroom, which her and her husband shared. The walls were painted a dark, wine- colored burgundy, which matched the curtains, bedspread, pillows, and blankets, with a touch of gold here and there. Her outfit was already picked out from the night before, as it always was. She slipped on her medium- rise navy blue jeans one leg at a time, her light pink tank top, and a jean jacket that perfectly matched the color and style of her jeans. Her light pink heels and purse, naturally, matched her top. All the pink made her feel girly and carefree.

As she was walking down the stairs, she heard the loud voices of her children who were getting bored playing in the backyard, so they came back into the house to play. Naturally, they were already bickering.

“That is mine! Give it back!” Cayenne wailed at her brother.

“You have to share! Dad says!” Deborah heard Casmir’s ineffectual screams.

“Ouch! That hurt! Daddy!!!!” Deborah knew that right when she got down the stairs, the morning tumult would begin.

Before she even hit the last step, her purse and shoes in hand, she was already being beckoned. A daylong hiatus had already appeared to ruin her perfect morning. Her daughter approached her, tugging on the wrist of her jacket, “Mommy!!!! Casimir hit me! And Jamil laughed!” Cayenne screamed.

Her mother held her hand and walked towards the front door. She grasped her daughter’s small shoulders and sympathized, “Cayenne, sweetie, I am sorry. I will talk to them. Where is your father?” she asked as she set down her shoes and hung up her purse.

Jamil and Casimir popped out from behind the kitchen counter and Jamil said, “He is taking a dump.”

“Yeah, he is taking a dump” Casimir repeated, laughing at his own words.

“Casimir! Jamil, what are you teaching Casimir to say?” she asked, taking Jamil aside.

“Nothing mom, he just says whatever I say.” Jamil said.

“Mommy, are you a bitch?” Casimir said in a giggly voice five feet away, ready to run from punishment.

“Casimir!” she exclaimed. He began to run away but she pulled him by the collar of his red and yellow shirt. “You are not in trouble, Jamil is.” Casimir giggled hysterically at his brother’s punishment “But,” his mother continued, “Do not you ever say those words again, deal?”

“Deal!” Casimir ran to chase Cayenne around the house.

“Now, Jamil-“ but before she could say anything, Casimir came running past her, and Cayenne began to scream and cry.

“Casimir broke my dolly! Fix it!” Cayenne wailed.

“I will, honey, but can’t you see I am talking to Jamil? Please put it on the counter I will get to it later.” she said, contemplating the rocky start of her day.

“Okay mommy…” Cayenne sniffled.

Casimir then ran towards her with a broken toy airplane in his hands, “Mommy, I broke my airplane. Can you fix it?”

“Please just put it on the counter!” she said, frustrated, “Richard! Where are you?”

“Right here, Deborah!” her husband answered, dressed in grey sweatpants and ratty red t-shirt, newspaper in hand.

“Finally! Richard, can’t you see I am being pummeled here?” she complained.

“Sorry, I was in the bathroom…” he replied.

“Yeah, I know that, but-” Cayenne stormed in with her hand wrapped around nose, and a scowl on her face.

“Ew, what smells? Gross, daddy!” Cayenne exclaimed.

“What, is it a crime to go to the bathroom around here now?” Richard asked.

“No, but it would help if you did not take so long!” Deborah answered, pushing back her hair that was already in a mess. She was already feeling stressed and fed up, “Please just help me get them settled!”

“Okay, guys? Everyone over here! Now!” the children all gathered around her husband, “Mommy is very busy guys. So why do not you go downstairs and read or play toys, and come to me if you have any problems, alright?” Jamil and Casimir ran to their basement while Cayenne traveled behind, “Now be good, guys, or I am going to have to separate you!” Richard yelled after his children.

“Okay!” they all exclaimed in unison. Both Richard and Deborah knew that they would be fighting and whining again shortly.

“What a morning!” Deborah said, exasperated, as she walked into the living room with Richard. She flopped onto the couch, and he sat beside her.

“They are so cute, are not they?” Richard asked his wife.

“Yeah, I love them to death. But they are just so goddamn exhausting sometimes!” Deborah admitted.

“They all have my eyes, you know.” Richard stated. All of their children had the same grey stormy eyes just like Richard, and the same thick, brown hair as their mother. Deborah tried to reply, but no sound came out. A lump grew in her throat.

No, they could not possibly have your eyes. Deborah thought.

“Honey? Honey?” Richard asked a silent Deborah. But she did not answer him- she was deeply lost in thought.

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One night, a night that was no different from any other weeknight, the whole family enjoyed a wonderful dinner of homemade pesto sauce and spaghetti together, cooked by Deborah with help from Cayenne. Deborah’s cooking was like nectar and ambrosia to the rest of the family. Afterward, her and Richard found themselves cleaning up piles and piles of dirty and grimy dishes, as they did every night. Richard touched the sponge to the plate, scrubbing and scrubbing back and forth in a constant, gentle circular motion. Once the plate was covered in the pink, light, soapy bubbles, he picked up the plate with his giant, yellow rubber glove and handed it to Deborah. She whisked the plate away from Richard’s hands with the same yellow gloves as his and turned the big, silver knob of the large, tub-like, granite sink. The perfectly clear, filtered water flowed out steadily as Deborah placed the plate under the flow, and the soapy bubbles quickly dripped into the drain. She then gently rubbed the plate with a pale pink kitchen towel, it was now sparkling clean, and carefully placed it on top of the stack of the rest of the shiny, beige plates. This repeated in an incessant cycle until all the dished were so shiny that you could see your reflection in each and every one of them.

Deborah was lifting a stack of dishes in the cupboard when she saw a flash of her daughter’s delicate pink and white lace nightgown in the doorway, followed by Hemingway’s wagging tail, “Hi, sweetie. Why are not you sleeping?” a yawning Deborah asked Cayenne, who came into the kitchen, Hemingway by her side.

“You look sleepy, honey, why do not you go back upstairs to your room? I will come tuck you in.” Richard offered, drying his hands on the blue towel hanging on the oven’s handle.

“I am tired but I just can’t fall asleep,” little Cayenne answered, rubbing her eyes with her adorably small hands.

Lifting his precious daughter up into his arms, he smiled and said, “Oh, I get it. I will go upstairs to check for the monsters.”

“Daddy! It is not that! The monsters are on vacation!” Cayenne exclaimed.

“Well, then, what is it, sweetheart?” Richard tried to understand what was wrong.

“My nose is all stuffy!” she complained, wiggling around so her father would put her down.

“Oh, great, it is allergy season again! I will go get the allergy medicine!” Deborah announced as she made her way to the medicine cabinet in the bathroom.

She slowly opened the door as she searched for the medicine. Ibuprofen, mouthwash, toothpicks, calcium tablets, vitamins, band-aids, aha! Children’s Tylenol.

Just as she reached for the bottle she heard her husband say to her daughter, “I always get allergies too, honey, it must be in our genes.” he laughed.

Startled, Deborah knocked down all the bottles in the cabinet. Pills flew everywhere. Shocked, she just stared at the pills in awe. They rolled around and around and around on the cold tile floor. Around and around and around. White and blue and brown. The swirls of color circled around in her mind, endless, invariable, interminable. The pink liquid Tylenol oozed across the floor and mixed in with the rest of the colors. She felt hypnotized by the swirls blending together to form one big blob of confusion. Deborah suddenly had a huge, agonizing headache, but it felt more like a brain tumor. Letting out a yelp, she tripped on the small, oval pills and the thick, blood-like Tylenol, and fell to the floor.

She was so struck that she did not even see Richard come in to help her, “Honey, are you okay? What happened in here?” Opening her eyes, Deborah felt his hand on her arm and she aggressively pushed him away, “Honey? are you okay? You are shaking!” He gazed at the array of pills on the floor, wondering how they got there.

“Oh, sorry, I was just a little startled, that is all.” Deborah lied as she allowed Richard to pull her off the floor.

“A little startled? You look like you just saw a ghost or something!” Richard exclaimed. He began to pick up the pills and depositing them in the trashcan, confused by his wife’s sudden outburst. Richard ran out of the bathroom and quickly returned, paper towels in hand. Still aghast, Richard sopped up the Tylenol with bunches of the paper towels he grabbed from the kitchen and threw them in the trash. He continued to pick up pills and bottles and wipe up the Tylenol until the mess was clean and the bathroom was looking close to the way it looked before the unwelcome tumult.

Cayenne, standing in the background in complete and utter shock, saw all this and yelled, “Mommy! You are bleeding!” Deborah looked down to see blood flowing from a long gash traveling straight down her leg. She clasped the cut with her palm, lifting up her hand to find a thick layer of blood- warm, sticky, and bright red in color.

“How did this happen?” Richard cried, “You must have cut your leg on one of the broken bottles!” he stood up and gazed into the open cabinet, searching for the box of Spiderman band-aids Casimir picked out.

“Daddy! Quick! Mommy needs a band-aid! Get mommy a band-aid!” Cayenne screamed and implored. She might only be a helpless and vulnerable four year old who was terrified of blood, but she knew what to do in emergencies whether she was afraid or not.

“Um, guys? What just happened?” Jamil asked, Casimir by his side.

“Blood! Cool!” Casimir exclaimed as he gazed at his mother’s long gash just under her knee.

“Oh, no!” Deborah wailed as she dabbed her cut with a tissue, “I must have waken up the boys!” she buried her head in her hands, wanting to cry, and looked up at her two sons, “I am sorry, guys. I just, I, uh, accidentally dropped some pill bottles.” her voice cracked as she spoke.

“Some? Mom, it sounded like an earthquake down here!” Jamil admitted as he pulled Casimir and Cayenne away. He looked up at his father, and he gave him a look that said, “I will deal with this. Go upstairs.” He nodded his head in placid consent, “I will take Casimir and Cayenne upstairs to sleep.”

“Thanks, honey, you are a big help.” Deborah told Jamil as she began to apply the large bandage that Richard handed to her.

“But I do not want to sleep! I want to help mommy!” Cayenne cried.

“I am fine now, go ahead and sleep, sweetie.” Deborah said, stroking Cayenne’s arm.

“No!” Cayenne said, persistently.

Richard scooped her up in his big arms and said, “Up we go! It is time to sleep, baby.”

“Fine.” Cayenne angrily muttered. Richard carried Cayenne up the stairs, leaving Jamil and Casimir behind.

“You sure you are all right, mom?” Jamil asked, worried.

“I will be soon. Go ahead to sleep, guys. You have school tomorrow.” Deborah ordered.

“Alright mom. Tell me if you need help.” As the oldest, Jamil was very protective and helpful.

“Yeah, me too.” Casimir eagerly offered, “If you need help, ask me too!”

“Okay, sweetie. Got to sleep now, okay?” Deborah stood up to shoo her sons off; she knew they would be cranky in the morning if they did not get a good night’s sleep.

“Okay, goodnight mom!” Jamil said, running down the hall to get to the stairs.

“Goodnight!” Casimir exclaimed, running after his older brother.

“Night, honey.” Deborah whispered. She looked up and saw that the once white bathroom wall and tiles had tiny splatters of blood scattered around them, marring them forever as a constant reminder of that night. Once her children were out of sight, she grabbed her leg and cursed under her breath. She could not let her family see her in pain. Still shaking from her unexpected fall, she limped across the hall, feeling a stinging, agonizing pain shooting through her leg with every step. She passed the stairs and shuffled towards the large, black leather couch. When she reached the foot of the couch, the pain running through her leg was so unbearable that she immediately collapsed against the comfortable cushions, sinking into the pile of sweet smelling leather. Deborah lay on the couch, motionless, until about ten minutes later she heard quiet footsteps tiptoeing down the hallway. Deborah sat up with a jolt and pretended to read her copy of InStyle. She saw her husband in the doorway.

“Alright, what was that all about?” Richard asked her.

“Nothing. It was nothing. Just an accident.” Deborah answered.

“Well it was obviously an accident. But why? Why are you all of a sudden so nervous?” Richard pressed her.

“Well.. I am just nervous about the parent teacher conference for Jamil next week. You know he is not doing very well in math, so…” Deborah lied.

“Oh, do not worry about him. He is a smart guy. He will do fine!” Richard reassured her.

“I guess… I just want him to have a good job, like you.”

“I doubt he will become a cardiologist, Deb. He can barely put together a lego.” Richard joked. Deborah giggled happily, “I am glad to see you laugh, Deb. You have been really tense recently. You know that you do not have to worry- the conference will go perfectly fine.” Deborah nodded, her husband’s compassionate words made her feel a lot better. “Now let us go to bed.” Richard said. He put his arm around Deborah’s shoulder as they walked out the living room and up the stairs to the bedroom.

Maybe everything will be okay. Deborah thought to herself, although she knew that those words were anything but true.

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Sighing, Deborah opened the door of her gold Honda Odyssey and stepped out. She pulled her compact mirror out of her purse and quickly made sure her hair still looked respectable after hurrying to get everyone’s breakfasts ready that morning. She locked the doors with a push of a button on her key, and pressed it once more to hear a long beep, telling her that the doors were securely locked. Deborah enjoyed feeling safe and secure, who does not?

She was really not in the mood to go to the parent-teacher conference with Jamil’s math teacher, Robert Applebaum. Not only did she have better things to do, but she knew he was not doing well in math, so why did she need someone to tell her in person and criticize her son? In addition, Mr. Applebaum was very hard on Jamil, because he was in the highest math class. If he was not doing well in the highest class, why do not they move him down to an easier level? Deborah wondered silently. Although the school was private and very expensive, she disliked the way it handled situations similar to this. The worst part about Mr. Applabaum, however, was the fact that his great- great- grandfather, Joseph Applebaum, started the small private school in Charlotte, North Carolina. This made him act stuck up and very vain.

She walked down the hot, grey, bumpy gravel parking lot towards the large, red brick building, The Joseph Applebaum School and Learning Center, her black heels making her ankles red and sore. When she finally reached the large, heavy, double doors, she smoothed the wrinkles out of her black button down jacket and matching skirt with the palms of her hands, and pushed open the door with a grunt, her muscles straining. Entering the eerie, empty hallway, she closed her eyes and deeply inhaled the smell of freshly sharpened pencils and crisp, unused paper, a smell that was very comforting and relaxing to her. She walked down the hall past the various classrooms until she reached her destination, a room towards the end of the hallway, near the back exit, with a door labeled, “Mr. Applebaum- Math”.

She sucked in her breath deeply, and quickly jutted open the door. “Hello Mr. Applebaum, it is nice to see you.” She lied, shaking his hand.

“Call me Robert, Deb. I have been Jamil’s math teacher for a couple years now, we are officially at a first-name basis.” he said, proudly. She nodded as she soaked in the disturbing nickname he gave her and his fake friendliness. Robert sat down at his desk and offered, “Deb. Please. Sit down. Make yourself comfortable.” Deborah looked for a chair, her lips pursed, and was at a loss. She pulled up one of the short chairs for children at a small desk and sat down. She wiggled uncomfortable, trying to get situated in the tiny chair, but she was at a loss. Robert just sat there, staring, making their encounter even more awkward. “Now, to the point!” Robert finally exclaimed with an over- enunciated finger pointed into the air, “I am sure you know why I asked you to come here today...” He waited for some sort of answer from Deborah.

Deborah began, “Yes, Jamil has told me…”

“…The reason I asked you here is because Jamil is not doing every well in my class. He is getting passing scores, mostly C’s, but his scores are not good enough for the highest level math class that you requested him to be put in.” Robert interrupted.

“But I never requested-“ Deborah began, but Robert continued to swallow her words. She continued to squirm in the chair. She was hoping he would offer her another chair, like maybe one in another classroom, but he did not. He just kept babbling on.

“He is, indeed a smart boy, but he needs to stop slacking.” Deborah knew that Jamil did not slack. He put in many hours of studying for math every night. She knew the real reason why he was doing poorly- the pressure form Mr. Applebaum. She was thinking about saying something, and even opened her mouth to do so, but Deborah knew better than to mention this. Robert continued, “And, as you know, my great- great grandfather started this private school, and the importance of my family name here is profuse. I am a very well- known figure here, and I can’t let a couple children get in the way of our above average status. Do you see what I am saying?”

Vain stupid jerk! “Yes.” Deborah muttered through her gritted teeth.

“Great.” Robert replied. “You know, I really feel for you. I understand that mathematical ability is genetic. Jamil must have taken after you, not his father. You all, after all, a writer.” He smiled menacingly at her.

Jerk! Deborah screamed to herself. Jerk! Jerk! Jerk! Nodding, she shook Roberts hand once more and stormed out of the building, hot tears running down her cheeks.

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When Deborah got home after the Robert Applebaum math fiasco, she pushed open the door to her house and wanted to scream. She did not, because the kids were home and she did not want to worry them. As she came in she dropped her purse down to the ground, and heard Richard stumbling about inn the kitchen.

Richard heard Deborah come in and exclaimed, “Hey, honey! How was the conference? I am sure it was not fun, but…” When he walked over to her and saw her red splotchy face, he knew something had gone very wrong. “What happened? Did he hurt you! Did that asshole Robert Applebaum hurt you?” he screamed while pounding his fist into his hand. Richard was already enraged, and he was still oblivious to what had happened.

Deborah gently put her hands on her husband’s chest, “No, no he did not hurt me.” She said quietly, almost shyly. She did not want to get Richard too upset. But she could not keep her cool. She began to sob again and buried her head in his chest. He put her arms around her and let her hot, salty tears soak into the cotton fabric of his shirt.

Richard finally gently pulled her off of him and placed his warm hands on her cold shoulders, “Honey, here is what we are going to do. You go lay down on the couch, kick off your shoes, get comfy, and I will go get you a glass of water. I will make sure the kids did not hear anything, then I will come to hear what happened, alright?” Deborah nodded and broke away from Richard. She stumbled into the living room and sank down into the leather of the couch. What a great husband. She thought. She heard the sink squeak and trickling water pour into a glass.

When she opened her eyes she saw her husband leaning over her, tall glass filled with cool, clear, filtered water in hand. He set it down on the coffee table and said, “Here is your water. I will be back in a minute.” Deborah sat up and lifted the glass to her dry lips. She gulped down the water. She drank and drank until all the water was gone and she was satisfied. She wiped the tiny speckles of sweat off the top of her lip. She was burning up. She pulled off her jacket and dropped it to the floor. When Richard returned, he was calm and ready to listen, and Deborah sat up straight, showing tacitly that she was ready to talk.

“Okay, now. Tell me everything.” Richard offered. “Or not, if you are too tired to talk, do whatever. You can always tell me later.” Richard put his large, warm hands over her small, cold ones.

He is so understanding. “No, I can tell you.” Deborah mustered up the confidence to tell him what happened, and started to tell the story of her afternoon, “Well, when I drove up to Jamil’s school I was already upset and did not want to be there. There was this- this strange feeling that overcame me, like I should not be there, or maybe something bad was going to happen.” she said, holding back her tears and shuddering. “I walked down the long hallways, and there was an eerie coldness about it. It felt like there was, I do not know how to explain this- a kind of uncanny presence all around me. So when I got to the classroom where Robert Applebaum was, I was already not in the best of moods. It was very awkward in a way, because it was only him and I in this big, empty classroom. So we got to talking about how Jamil is not living up to ‘the schools standards’ and whatever.” she motioned the quotation marks with her hands. “Then he said that Jamil…” she could not hold it in anymore. She burst into a frenzy of sobs and tears. Richard held her close and she clutched his shirt. She shuddered and sobbed, until she was sucked dry of her tears. She continued, “He said that Jamil must have gotten his math genes from me and not you because I am just a writer.” After she heard the words again, only this time coming out of her mouth, she began to weep again, burying her face in her hands.

Richard put his arm around his sobbing wife and muttered “Bastard” that was all he had to say, because Deborah already knew that he cared.”

First of all, I spelled “excited” (I spelled it without the “c” again, like “exited,” for the millionth time) wrong again, but besides that, I suppose it is a good start to a story, but I have no idea where I was going with it. There seems to be something sketchy going on what with the allusions to her husband not being the father of his children and something about gaining “more experience” in some sort of creepy way, but I clearly did not give any details. I added some notes to the end of the story which I do not understand, and the title “Father’s Daughter” is still confusing to me—I wish I could see what I was trying to get at so maybe now I can attempt to finish the story or novel or whatever I was writing. Who knows what was going on in the head of a girl in middle school—the girl does not even know half the time. So far, though, every single character I have written about has some sort of dark past, and I wish I knew what that meant. But, later, as I got more mature and reached high school age, I started writing more poetry than short stories. There was a period in high school, during my sophomore year I think it was, that I went through a truly bleak time. My friends had abandoned me and I felt like I was strictly in isolation, and I had no comfort but my writing, and, most of all, my poetry. I used to mainly do free verse, because I was not accustomed to any forms other than the Haiku (actually, when I was really young, I wrote a bunch of acrostic poems; I was pretty much obsessed with them. I thought they were so cool—the highest form of poetry. Boy was I wrong. Actually, and this is ironically so, acrostic poems are the easiest poems to write while at the same time they are the most difficult poems to fully master. I mean, seriously, when you think about it, like really ponder it, when is the last time you read a well- written, cohesive, meaningful acrostic poem if ever? Which means it is difficult to write meaningful ones, and therefore it is the hardest type of poetry to master because of its bad repuation. Kind of like stream of consciousness in prose. But that is beside the point, I suppose…), and this is what I came up with:

“But I am Not Bleeding

It bubbles, flows, bursts like lava

It pops, startling all neighboring creatures

It begs to come out

Strong forces surrounding it

Keep it from busting open

It needs to break free

But it cannot

It desires to pull away

But it is not allowed

It craves for open space

That cannot be obtained

I have to speak my mind

It is necessary to tell the truth

My thoughts come creeping out

It is time to let loose

Need to share the feeling

Deep emotions

Bottled up in this thing

This complex mind

Oh, these people

Pretending to be my true friend

They stab me

Deep into my back

But I am not bleeding

Part of me calls them “best friend”

The other part knows the truth

But I cannot tell them

I have to endure the

Fake laughs

And the

Feigned smiles

But I am not bleeding”

Later, I started experimenting with different poetic forms—I explored ghazals, sonnets, sestinas, prose poems, and, of course, my personal favorite, found poems. But, when all was said and done, and I realized that all of my relationships with people were sick and twisted, I fell back on free verse and poured my heart out. I also started writing short stories again, and this time I incorporated themes from my own shattered relationships, pouring my own emotion into my works such as in the short story “Bitter Fluoride:”

“The door opens with a quick *swoosh*, out of my control—my weak arms are no match for the howling wind. A wind so strong that I can actually hear it whistling through the walls of this suffocating building. The trees rustle and I wish I was there, amidst their free- flowing limbs. The wind sings and the trees dance—I long to be a part of their melody. The branches point to me, beckon to me, pull me in. They want me there, yet I am trapped in here. Here, where it smells putrid and the walls are colored a dull grey. The paint is chipping, but why should I care? Not even a fresh coat of paint could cover up the gloominess of this place.

Nobody wants to be here. I do not want to be here; the patients certainly do not want to be here. I can see them now, frowning at the sight of their calendar. No one on the face of the earth looks forward to this type of appointment. The six months between each visit seems to fly by for these people, making these mundane teeth cleanings seem more frequent than they are.

But for me, they are, indeed, frequent. While most get six months in between each moment of agony, I get five minutes at the most. But what are my other options? What other job can I, a man trained in the field of dentistry, get, other than a position as a dentist? There are no other options for me. I have accepted this long ago, but my acceptance does not make any day easier than the last. In fact, it makes it less so.

No choice.

I have no other choice. No other choice but to endure smelling the bitter fluoride and hearing the disturbing, gritty noises that metal instruments make against plaque- ridden teeth.

No choice at all.

Yes, I have accepted this. But this—this job, this life—is still unbearable. In my thin, blue, papery mask I feel suffocated. For the rest of my life I will be forced to listen to patient’s muffled words as I poke and prod at their teeth. Every day until I retire I will have to watch the dopey grins that form on children’s faces upon receiving a bouncy- ball after a routine teeth- cleaning. I will never understand the momentary excitement that can be found in a “No Cavities!” sticker that somebody will find tucked amidst gravel on a playground later that day.

Daisy is my only joy. She is the only person that has the ability to pull me out of my misery. I do not know what she sees in me, and I never will. God, am I lucky to have her, this goddess that was stupid enough to agree to marry me. I am a dentist with yellow teeth—not very promising. I would not call myself unattractive. In fact, Daisy finds me to be handsome. But I still can’t believe it, her love for me. It makes all the sense in the world for me to love her— she is beautiful and bubbly and a wonderful lady. Yes, it makes perfect sense that I fell in love with her. But it is still hard for me to believe how she could ever love a fool like me.

The only thing in the world other than Daisy that makes me happy is the birds. The birds wings allow them to fly anywhere, yet I can’t even escape from this prison cell that is called a dentist’s office. I wish I had wings. I wish I could fly away. I can barely function in here. I am a zombie, the walking dead. Daisy and the birds make me feel alive. But they are not here. My eyes are glazed over and my body feels stiff.

Coffee. Maybe coffee can pull me out of this stupor. Not fresh. Instant. Bitter. Not strong enough. Maybe sugar will help. But there is none here. Coffee creamer? The plain kind, although I would prefer vanilla. As I sit, stirring this flavorless crap, the cream swirling with the coffee forms the distinct shape of an eagle. But, as most things do, the image vanished just as quickly as it came.

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Lunch hour.

My only break between the sounds of screaming toddlers, the constant chattering of teenagers complaining about their braces, and the “adults” whining to me about the bill.

I wonder what Daisy packed for me today. With my luck, the same thing as every day. Bologna on white.

Not just any white bread—fluffy, mushy Wonderbread, slightly moist because of the mayonnaise.

Mayonnaise. 100 calories per tablespoon. Perfect. Just what my beer gut needs.

Although unwillingly, I force myself to take a bite. I do not want the sandwich, but the monster in my stomach is grumbling audibly, begging for something other than instant coffee.

This bologna is hard for me to chew. It tastes of something that I can only describe as rubber.

All I can think about is Daisy, but even picturing her warm smile makes me sick. I can’t shake thoughts of this wedding out of my head. All sthe planning to be done is rattling my brain. My thoughts turn unmistakably sour, and even Daisy’s sweetness can’t get this sour taste out of my mouth.

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Work is finally over. As I walk to the woods that stretch behind my office, binoculars in hand, I try to avoid thinking about wedding planning. I need to clear my mind and shake the stench of fluoride from my nostrils. As I enter my favorite clearing, it is silent, as usual. The wind, it appears, has calmed, and the trees are no longer moving—they are not dancing around like they were before. Everything is still. There is not so much as a little bee buzzing around, and the ants that normally dot the ground are out of sight. The tall blades of grass stand straight up like soldiers in an army, ready to defend themselves from the tiny paws of a squirrel or the hooves of a deer. This is as peaceful of an afternoon as I could hope for. I breathe in and out steadily, and with each breath my worries escape and flutter away into the air.

The silence is suddenly and unexpectedly broken. A rustling in the bushes begs for my attention, and I can hear a girl’s voice screeching. “OW!” The noise startles me; I can feel myself jump.

As I come upon the thorny, berry- filled bushes, I connect the voice with a little face. Looking down at the figure, it is so small and frail that I initially think that I am talking to a doll. As the figure stirs and looks up at me I realize that it is not a doll, but a little girl.

The girl is wearing a white tutu that is now smudged with dirt. Her ballet slippers are worn; a tear in the front of one of them reveals three tiny, wiggling toes. Some distance above her toes, her knee is scraped up and bleeding. She is clutching it for dear life, and her gasping breaths make it obvious that she is trying not to cry. She puts on a tough façade.

I ask her what happened.

“I fell,” the tiny ballerina replied. “I fall a lot.”

I introduce myself as Ed, as I am hesitant to call myself Dr. White. “What are you doing here by yourself, little girl?” This was a mistake on my part. I should not have called her that.

She stands up tall and triumphantly. “My name is not ‘little girl.’ It is Leslie. Besides, I am not little even. I am a real- life ballerina.” Leslie’s spunkiness is refreshing to me—she makes me laugh.

Leslie seems to have forgotten about her scrape. She prances around the clearing giddily, like a tiny fawn. She picks a bright yellow dandelion, a miniature version of the sun, and tucks it behind her ear for decoration. She does not think; she simply acts on a whim, doing whatever she feels like. She frolics. She skips. So carefree.

She playfully pulls at my binoculars. She is curious, and asks me what they are for. I tell her that I am bird- watching. “Birds? Where?” she asks.

Although Leslie insists that she sees no birds, I, as I imagine fathers must do, teach her otherwise. I let her use my binoculars to see a woodpecker. I see her big, doe- eyes light up in excitement.

“Leslie! Leslie!” I hear a voice call in the distance.

A look of disappointment forms on Leslie’s face. “I better go,” she admits. I wave goodbye as she disappears into the trees, and the previous silence returns.  
 I finally get some time alone, but I can’t seem to get thoughts of the wedding out of my mind. The date is coming up soon—we should be getting married in less than two months, if all goes well. We need to pick a location, but we can’t seem to agree. Daisy is insisting on a traditional, church wedding. But I could not imagine getting married anywhere other than outside, in nature, where I can combine my love for the outdoors and my love for Daisy.

I can picture it perfectly, looking down the lush, grassy aisle strewn with flowers and seeing Daisy, my gorgeous Daisy, smiling at me. With her wavy, golden hair framing her face she looks like a goddess. Her long, white dress flows freely like the strands of her hair and she carries a bouquet of the most sweet- smelling, vibrant flowers you could ever imagine. I stride towards Daisy, and we stand hand in hand ready to say our vows.

I tell her how much I love her, how she is the best thing that ever happened to me. I tell her that I will never let her go and I let her know just how beautiful and perfect she is in my eyes. Her eyes fill with tears as I speak; she is touched by my words.

It is her turn to say her vows now. She parts her full, pink lips and says, “Ed, honey? It is time to go. We have dinner reservations with my parents, remember?”

Suddenly I am pulled out of my fantasy and back into a harsh reality. Daisy’s warm, smiling face, which I normally look forward to seeing, brings me no joy. I usually look at Daisy and see all that is good in the world, but today is different. I want to stay here and bask in the sounds of birds chirping and small creatures running around, just happy to be alive. Instead, I have to enter a world of judging eyes and expensive steak dinners. I look up at the trees, and the sky turns dark.

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The air is so humid and dense that it is almost difficult to walk through.

I neglect to open the passenger door for Daisy to show my uneasiness about dinner with her parents. It is the last thing I want to do right now—I would rather perform a root canal.

My mind is not with the present, it is somewhere in those dark grey clouds that clutter the sky. I start the car, and, inevitably, as the clouds have warned, rain lightly trickles onto the windshield. It is not enough for me to need to turn the wipers on, so I ignore it, the same way as I ignore Daisy when she asks, “Is something wrong?”

The rain is still falling slowly—just one or two drops every few seconds. The silence between Daisy and me is uncomfortable, but I do not intend to break it. I can’t think of anything to say, and I am not sure if I want to say anything at all.

“Tell me what is wrong, Ed,” Daisy says. “You know you can tell me anything.”

I do not respond.

Daisy picks a fight about the temperature in the car. She is too cold, and I claim to be too hot. I do not know why, but my first reaction was to disagree with her. I am not sure if I really am too hot or if I just want to fight—maybe I am searching for an excuse to call off the wedding to remove this stressor from my life. I could care less about the temperature, really, but the bickering breaks the silence, and there is nothing I loathe more than an awkward silence. Silence in the woods is golden. Silence in this car is torture.

“Ed?” she asks.

“It is about the wedding.” I say. Daisy’s eyes fall.

The rain is coming down faster now, pitter- pattering softly and lightly. I turn the wipers onto the lowest setting. They squeak—the noise makes me cringe. I turn on the radio to cover the squeaking sounds of the wipers, and Daisy abruptly orders me to turn it off.

“I do not want to get married in the church,” I admit after an excruciating moment of silence.

The rain is falling much faster, and the wipers have stopped squeaking. They create a steady beat. *Swish- swosh. Swish- swosh.*

“If the wedding is not in the church my parents will not go. You know that,” Daisy replies.

The rain is falling so fast that I can barely see the road.

Daisy finally tells me, “I do not know what else to say.” Neither do I. So I do not say anything. I just drive. But I am unable to concentrate on the road. I quickly change lanes. Too quickly.

“Slow down!” Daisy exclaims as a look of horror forms on her face.

I jerk the car back, avoiding a collision. The car swerves. We hydroplane. I hear a loud crash as the car hits the guardrail, but I see nothing. Everything is hazy. I spin. The world spins. As everything I ever tasted or smelled or saw or heard or touched or thought or wondered becomes a blur in front of my eyes, I know that I will never have to endure the pain of an awkward silence or hear a child scream or taste a piece of Wonderbread or see the wings of a bird or smell the bitter fluoride ever again.

I see images flashing in front of me. I see Daisy donning an elegant wedding gown, standing gracefully in front of a church altar. I see her warm smile lighting up the entire room. I see doves flying up above, circling the high ceiling. I see colorful flowers decorating the shimmering pews and golden walls. Everything is gold until everything becomes nothing at all as a feeling of regret sweeps over me, suffocating me up to point in which I do not feel anything anymore.”

I think I felt that if I could write about tragedy, my own live would seem less tragic, maybe. I think the writing helped me escape, my stories started to get longer as my perspective widened and I learned more. Looking back at all these stories, I am beginning to sense some themes—themes that I would not have otherwise noticed has I not read all these stories together, all at the same time. And the theme happens to be, as much as it pains me to say, is the common thread of the daddy issue. Yep, I have daddy issues, according to these stories as a collective. I never thought I was really that much affected by my dad leaving; I guess I thought I was stronger than that or something. But, as it turns out, these problems I had with my dad clearly began to surface subconsciously in my mind, manifesting themselves through the short stories and poems I have been writing throughout my entire life. I guess my writing is a place where I can truly vent and I always have been able to use it to express my true feelings and release my emotions in a constructive, creative manner. There are several obvious representations of my daddy issues as a theme in all my stories, such as the stable, normal father- daughter relationship in the clown story as well as the pseudo- father- daughter relationship between Leslie and the dentist in "Bitter Fluoride." I even wrote part of an alternate copy of “Bitter Fluoride” which was told from the point of view of Ed’s fiancé, Daisy—this piece highlights the father- daughter themes in an even more prominent way:

I can’t find Ed.

He is not in his office, staring into his coffee mug as he usually is. He has been very distracted lately. I think I know why.

It is the wedding.

But I can’t bring it up. Who knows what that will lead to—a bitter argument, salty tears, maybe worse.

The binoculars are missing from his desk.

Is he in the woods, looking at silly birds again? I suppose so. I wonder if he is not alone, like last time. I wonder if that little ballerina is there, with her sparkly, disheveled tutu and white leotard stained with mud. She was beautiful, that ballerina. Ed seemed to take her under his wing; he appeared to be happy with her. Maybe he will change his mind about having children, but I can only hope.

Taking the back exit out of Ed’s office, I make my way to the woods. Daunting and scary, the shadows of the woods engulf whatever enters. You never know what creatures or people may lurk there. You must try to be on the lookout, although some parts are all shadow. You cant see anything; the sun barely shines through the layers of leaves and branches.

Ed loves it here, but I cant imagine why. I can hear his voice.

“Look, over there, a red cardinal. Can you see it, between the branches?”

I do not understand what is so fascinating about the birds. I probably never will.

How did I end up here, in the woods, with dirt crusting the bottoms of my shoes and grass stains on my jeans?

A voice responds to Ed.

“Yes. I see it. It is so awesome!”

The tiny ballerina.

These mud- stained jeans do not belong to me. That sparkly tutu does. The white leotard. Those slightly worn ballet slippers. Those are mine. At least they should have been.

Years of dance school wasted, and for what? To become a dentist’s wife? To have caked mud on my jeans? How could I have given up all of that for what I thought was love? How could this be my life now?

Leslie squeals in delight at the sight of a robin’s nest.

It is a squeal I would have made when I was young and happy, when my entire life was in front of me. I could have been anything I wanted to be, and here I am, in the woods wearing dirty jeans.

I peer through the trees and see Ed and Leslie laughing together in a clearing. As I watch him interact with Leslie, he truly looks like a father, like a man who is ready to have kids. Why will not he admit that?

As the two bird- watchers laugh, I realize that it had been so long since Ed and I laughed together, since we were truly happy together. I never laugh anymore—nothing is funny enough. Nothing is wonderful enough to make me giggle or even smile a little.

They laugh, and I cry.

But my tears are not enough to wash these dirt- stained jeans.

From Daisy’s perspective, the line “As I watch him interact with Leslie, he truly looks like a father, like a man who is ready to have kids. Why will not he admit that?” really illuminates my own issues with my long- lost father. Another piece of evidence for my daddy issues theme is the title "Father's Daughter," although I am still not one- hundred percent sure what that means, but I am working on decoding it the best way that I can. In "The Getaway," I allude to a typical relationship between the main character, Annabelle, and her dad (“She remembered the creaky, wooden porch swing where her father read her stories.”). A less- obvious signal about my relationship with my own dad is the re- occurring symbol of the beer gut. Now, this is only really obvious to me (well I am pretty sure I mentioned it in passing to you, but I doubt that you remember it because it probably seems like such a small, insignificant detail; in fact, I thought it was, too, until recently when I read all my old writings and a light bulb popped up in my head like a sort of aha! moment), because my dad's nasty beer gut is pretty much only think I still remember about him at all. I am not sure why that is the one feature about him that sticks out, but maybe that is why—because it sticks out; his beer gut stuck out so far it was hard to forget, I suppose. Anyway, the clown and the dentist in my stories are both described as having beer guts (“Mayonnaise. 100 calories per tablespoon. Perfect. Just what my beer gut needs” in “Bitter Fluoride,” and, in the clown story, “White gloves covered his big hands and a colorful collared shirt and rainbow suspenders covered his big beer belly”), which is an obvious and prominent feature. Another thing I noticed about the story "The Getaway" (which is, coincidentally, my favorite story that I wrote) was the reference to a guardian angel (“Her mother always told her, “That is your guardian angel, Annie,” and she believed it”). Now, I am not sure if this has anything to do with my own dad, but I am making a wild guess here. I think about the notion of a guardian angel quite often, and how guardian angels are usually (well, probably always) just regular people like you and me. Maybe I idealize my boyfriend, and view him as my guardian angel because I could never depend on my dad and could not see a guardian angel in my own father, who is supposed to be the male role model I should be idealizing when I look for a mate. But I am not sure—maybe the guardian angel bit is a stretch, but since I discovered all those father themes and symbols (and symbols are something I am constantly on the lookout for, in literary works as well as in my own life) in my writing, I feel as if I am on a literary roll, figuratively speaking (ha-ha, now I think I am such a hot- shot that I am making literary puns. I love puns, though, because they are so punny!). Later on in my high school career, I started experimenting with the genre of creative non- fiction, which is highly debated about in the writing world in that it is non- fiction, but it still has a creative, over- the- top, exaggerated aspect to its style. One example of this type of writing that I was working on was entitled “Haste Makes Waste,” which, coincidentally, helped me re- affirm my vegetarian lifestyle, because the thought of innocent animals dying for no important reason was just too much for me:

“A vertebrate is run over every 11.5 seconds in the Unites States.

I braked as quickly as I could.

In this country alone, nearly 3 million vertebrates are run over each year.

I tried to save it.

As Americans, we live in a society where we take pride in doing things quickly, whether it be racing to get to the moon first or sculpting great abs for ourselves in less than 5 minutes every morning. We can cook a three- course meal in less than 30 minutes and get hair off our legs without so much as getting out a razor and soap. We send and receive messages instantly and speed date and eat fast food one out of every five meals. Nutritionists agree that eating too quickly will cause weight gain, yet we do not have time in our busy schedules to allot more than 15 minutes to eat a five- dollar foot long sub. A nation of workaholics, we are constantly distracted, already worried about the next task before we finish the present one. Laws exist that prevent cell phone usage while driving; however, driving while dialing is not the only type of distracted driving. With all of the concerns and stressors swimming around in our minds, we are always anxious to pass the car in front of us even if they are going the speed limit and red lights anger us more than our enemies do. If you drive 10 miles per hour above the speed limit for 5 miles, you save less than a minute of time, yet speeding causes 30% of car accident fatalities. To make matters worse, this statistic only includes human fatalities—it does not take into account the innumerable amount of animal deaths on the road. If we could just slow down a little bit, we could spare thousands of raccoons from the tragedy of getting their skulls bashed in. If we contemplate this disturbing detail during our 15- minute long lunch breaks, then we will eat slower, or maybe not at all, saving ourselves the need for 8- minute abs each afternoon.

My driving instructor, Ed, would not take me on certain roads. At the time, when I was first learning to drive, I was not aware of how awful vehicle- wildlife collisions could be. However, it was not until after I got my license that I had a first- hand experience with such an accident.

I thought I saved the squirrel.

He wanted to avoid “deer strikes.” In fact, it was not until a recent event shed light onto the tragedy of road kill that I took notice of how horrible roadside deaths could be. We passed by a dead possum in the middle of the road, sitting atop the solid, parallel yellow lines, but I ignored it, failed to give it the courtesy of a second, more sympathetic, glance.

I stopped.

Ed’s fear of “deer strikes” left me to wonder: was it because he was practical, or was he just an animal lover?

It got away from my wheels. It was practically in the clear.

I doubted it; his voice had the hint of a Kentucky accent, and I, quick to judge, did not trust him. As I gazed at the dark road ahead of me, cutting through the deep blue night with the AAA car’s bright yellow lasers, I noticed Ed’s eyes shift; I could tell he was on the lookout for antlers.

Maybe it was a suicidal squirrel.

He looked uncomfortable in the passenger seat as I weaved through thin streets and sped over bumps. He sat nervously, twiddling his fingers while sweat appeared on his wrinkled forehead—he obviously expected the worst. He muttered something about “deer strikes,” warning me once again. His slurring drawl brought horrific images to my mind, images of rifles and innocent animals shot dead, ready to be cooked for supper.

Maybe it was just stupid.

Or maybe I am wrong.

It happened in a split second. It scampered in front of my car without a care in the world, not knowing it was face to face with death. I braked, missing it by just a few millimeters. At first it just stood there, dumbfounded, unable to realize the magnitude of what could have happened if I had not stopped. I did not think to stop—it was pure reflex. The second I saw the squirrel out of the corner of my eye, my foot hit the brake, and I hoped for a miracle.

Squirrels are drawn to my car. They run in front of my wheels at any opportunity, yet I am lucky enough never to have hit one. Why do they run out at the least opportune moment? They are probably terrified of my giant land cruiser, which strikes fear into the hearts of many (not just squirrels). Squirrels see it. They fear it. They are unable to move, as much as they want to get away. They might even be mesmerized, not by my gargantuan vehicle but by its massive headlights. A squirrel seems to bask in the glow of a headlight much like a moth is drawn to the flickering flame of a medieval candle. Or maybe their innocence, their precious naivety causes them to stop in the middle of a busy road, amidst their daydream of gathering nuts and scaling trees and burrowing, without knowing they are a split second away from death.

We try to protect all the world’s creatures, yet 6 bears are killed each year by park vehicles in the “safe” animal haven of Yellowstone. Maybe all we can do now is accept the fact that they are suicidal, that they chose to end their life. Or maybe we are just selfish and can try harder to save them.

However, if saving animals is not enough, why not at least have the decency save ourselves? Every year, 200 human lives are lost as a result of vehicle- wildlife collisions. If we cannot stop rushing in order to save a deer, if the sight of a bloodied up fawn ling by the side of the road is not enough to tug on our heartstrings, maybe the pain of someone we love getting hurt is enough for us to slow down; that way, the lives of two creatures will be spared.

While PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals) obviously does not support road kill, they suggest putting these battered carcasses to use in the form of a barbecue dinner. Some would argue that road kill is positive, creating “dirty jobs” for road kill collectors as well as producing decomposed quantities of compost and mulch for farmers. The average twelve- year- old boy, who revels in the gross wonders of everyday life, would merely exclaim, “Whoah…cool!” at a bloody deer corpse without exploring the morals and ethics behind it. However, most drivers either rubberneck or ignore, whether nourishing the twelve- year- old boy within them or protecting their queasy stomachs from regurgitating that 99 cent hamburger from their infamously short lunch break.

“Hey, do not cry. Stop it. You are driving. Seriously, just stop. It is just a squirrel,” my sister, the oldest one, tells me from the passenger seat. I nod in feigned agreement as my eyes water up and I blink away the tears.

Just a squirrel.

Maybe she is right. So many die a year, and it was just one.

Just a squirrel?

No, it was not “just a squirrel.” It was a living being that did not deserve to suffer like it did.

“It was not your fault,” my youngest sister declares from the back seat. I nod in response, but a pang of guilt still stabs at my insides as I try to keep the tears from falling.

I braked as quickly as I could. I thought I saved it. It just missed my wheels, making a death- defying escape. The other side of the road was empty; I thought the little creature was home free—until the gold SUV came whizzing by so quickly I could not even see the driver. He probably did not even know he was a murderer, fleeing from the scene so swiftly. I saw a flash of a tail in the air. Then I saw a head, flying a foot away from the rest of its body. I saw a flash of red, and then nothing but blood- stained pavement. I was off, threatened by the beeps and yells emerging from the car behind me. He passed me, waving cruel hand gestures and snapping obscenities through the glass of his window.

Shaken up by the incident, I looked over at all three of my sisters to see if they were as traumatized as I was. The oldest sat wordlessly at first, shaking her head, embarrassed by how shook up I was. They other sat wordlessly as well, in fact, but since they were both so young, the realities of death were not yet an issue for then quite yet. Although they all were avid animal lovers, they sat nervously in their seats, more afraid of the angry man than scarred by the death of the squirrel. I tried to calm them down, but I, myself, was shaking all over. I was not able to stop trembling—my body was no longer under my control. I tried to focus on gripping the wheel and staring at the road, but flashbacks of the massacred squirrel flying through the air kept popping up in my mind.

I became scarred by the death of the squirrel. I was terrified of what road rage prompted by tardiness could do to a person. No meeting or interview could possibly be more precious than a life. We would not run over our neighbor’s cat Fluffy, so why run over any innocent creature?

On my way home, I took notice of the various animals that had lost their lives on the road. Most were fairly clean, lying by the side of the road as if they were sleeping. One raccoon, however, sat in the middle of the road, forming a bright red marker, a warning to other unsuspecting night prowlers. Its organs spilled nearly halfway to the other side of the road, its intestines leaving a trailing puddle of blood in their wake. The gruesome slight left my stomach churning violently and I felt suddenly nauseous. It looked like a murder scene, but no yellow police tape boxed it in. It was too common of a sight for anyone to care about, as cars steered around the blood and drivers averted their eyes. Nobody called 911, nobody got out of their car to give it a proper burial. They all just hurried off the wherever they were going, and then I realized that I was doing the same. A wave of guilt swept over me as I drove on, and I was nervous to come upon the same spot that I was that very morning, only now I would be on the other side.

When I got there I saw the infamous squirrel, one piece on each side of the road, marking a pathway of some kind. A pathway to wherever it is that car was hurrying off to so quickly, without giving the squirrel so much as a second glance. I thought the horror was over as I passed it, but, sure enough, one of his little friends was lying not too far up the road, his brain run over, his tiny face no longer visible beneath the blood. Later still, almost home now, I saw a sight worse than any of the spilled blood and guts and severed heads that I had seen earlier. It looked like nothing more than a grey bump in the road from far away, but up close it was obvious to anyone that it was an animal, a flattened squirrel. Neglected, waiting to rot away into nothingness, all because nobody had bothered to maneuver around it, or move it, or save it, or, better yet—stop hurrying for a split second so it would not have died so horribly.

If we could just slow down every 11.5 seconds—stop worrying, stop rushing, stop all the anxiety—another animal would be saved, and our country would be a less blood- spattered place.”

The non- fiction sector of my writing career really helped me widen my horizons on the world of writing, and, by that time in my life, I felt like I had tried every single style you can think of in terms of writing. Clearly, writing has always been a comfort to me, for my entire life, as you can see. In one of my psychology classes, we studied positive psychology for about a week of the course, and we discussed the topic of flow. Because I always add a touch of flair and pizzazz to everything I write, I jazzed up my assignment about flow to express my love for writing as a release:

“I find that when I think of flow, I instinctively think of being “in the zone.” Many times when one hears that phrase, sports first come to mind—a strong safety envisioning an interception, a runner sprinting towards the finish line, a swimmer measuring stroke after stroke. Sure, I exercise, but I find myself just waiting for it to be over—hardly a “flow” experience. However, even though sports are not my thing, I experience flow almost every single day, particularly in activities when I am channeling my creative energy. Obviously, the weekends are a time to relax and partake in activities I enjoy the most, contributing to a significant increase in flow experiences. Over this weekend, the most obvious flow activity that comes to my mind is writing. When I write or even brainstorm, I find myself consumed with my thoughts and ideas as I practically shut out the world around me. My parents might call for me, a rainstorm might ensue, but I am immune to all of it when I put a pen to paper. In fact, as I am writing this assignment right now, even though it was not entirely my choice to complete it, I find myself picking and choosing my words carefully, cautiously crafting my sentence structure, and alternating alliterations. Whether it be in a crowded coffee shop or in the sanctity of my own bed, when that first drop of ink hits the paper, I am as good as gone. I underline, chicken scratch, doodle, cross out anything and everything, interrupt myself, type my brains out. For me, the environment does not matter, just the tools I have on hand and the ideas casually swimming through my normally crowded and jittery mind. As a writer experiencing flow, the requirement of a page passes by in an instant, but the constraint of that very page leads to a quiet artistic rebellion, as I go about one line over, and then some, just for the flow of it.”

As you can see, writing has *always* helped me deal with what I am going through, but I have been having trouble lately producing anything but a ramble—I can’t seem to write anything with any real emotional significance or symbolic undertones, and it is probably because my life is such a mess. God, I could use a soak in the tub right about now! Maybe I will write about a bathtub. I could write a poem, or some prose, or a prose poem! I *love* prose poems because they combine two genres in a breathtaking, unobtrusive way, in my opinion. Anyway, I wish I could find some sort of connecting thoughts in my writing. A lot of it is bleak and depressing, and a lot of my characters have deep, dark secrets and sketchy pasts, but I am not sure what that means about me and what that say about my life. I mean stuff is going badly now, but I had a decent, in fact a pretty good childhood, so what is with all these dark thoughts in my mind? I never realized how depressing my writing was until is saw it all together and it clicked in my mind in a way. It is probably fairly obvious to an objective reader, but since it is my own personal writing I did not necessarily realize the moody undertones until now, or at least I did not really think about it because why would I? Plus, the clear themes in my writing that deal witch obvious daddy- issue problems are too much for me to stomach right now. I was going to say that reading my old stories and poems took my mind off babies and pregnancy at least for a little while, but there is goes again, hopping back on the my- life- is- a- total- fucking- mess- train again for the thousandth time. This is getting ridiculous—I am not in an emotionally healthy state right now by any means. I wish a simple bubble bath could fix everything, but life is never that easy and problems do not just go and fix themselves all willy- nilly. I want my mom to see a shrink with me. Maybe *I* should go see a therapist to help me sort through all of this anxiety I am having. I am sure my mom would pay for me to go since she thinks I am the one who is crazy—maybe then I can get her in the office with me and we can sort through her problems and the shrink can tell her how crazy she is! But she would probably just say the shrink is dumb and wrong and would send me to another one who has her outlook on life (But what are the chances? Nobody in their right mind sees the world the way my mother does) so that one can tell me I am crazy and lock me up forever! Okay, I realize that is an erroneous situation on all counts, but I can’t help but come up with these crazy scenarios to ruminate upon because I seem to have *way* too much time to think; it is ridiculous. Sometimes I feel as if I *am* totally, inexplicablyinsane- crazy what with all these thoughts running through my head and my whole family being against me. Whenever I start to think they are on my case for a reason, I call my boyfriend and he tells me how amazing I am and that I should not listen to those idiots and they are the ones who are crazy. And he is right, but when I hear everyone saying mean and nasty things about me all the time it is really hard not to let it creep in a little at an unsuspecting moment when my mind seems to think that everything is peachy keen when it is really terrible and disturbing. If it was not for him I would probably, if I am really honest and truthful with myself, be in a deep depression and I know it and I think he knows it, too. Sometimes I feel as if I am being to dependent with him, too needy, but this is the only way I can be in light of my current circumstances and the way my life is going. I should probably tell him about the pregnancy soon so he does not think I am keeping a secret from him. Because I am not; I do not keep secrets from the people I love because when I love I love hard, and let us not forget the golden rule, do unto others. I mean I am at the moment but I just found out and I want to sort through my thoughts before I tell him and can help sort through his, too—is that selfish? I guess not because I do not want him to have to deal with this problem until I really need him or he really needs to know; I do not want to stress him out what with everything else that he has to deal with concerning my life but I have to deal with it, too and he is really the only person I can talk to. It is times like this when I wish even more that Lewis was still here because I could pour my heart out to him and he would not tell a soul or get upset because let us be honest and real, he does not really understand what I am saying—he is just a dog, after all. What is funny is that everything I have been through in my life, I have never really waited for my own father to come back into my life, but I am still hoping, waiting, wishing that Lewis will run through the front door as if he never left, as if nothing happened and that my life was not a mess anymore and everything could be okay. Oh how I wish that could happen, but when I am really honest and real with myself and think realistically (which is incredibly hard for me to do considering how insane I actually am, but reality can sometimes slip in a little when my mind expands and allows it to enter, as much as it pains me at times, like in the case of my adorable, amazing, dearly missed puppy Lewis) I know it will never happen. Lewis will never come back just as my dad never will come back, but I refuse to believe that Lewis abandoned us like my father did—I like to think Lewis just lost his way a litte bit for a minute and got confused, kind of like I am losing my way right now, only for much longer than a minute, and confusion does not even begin to describe the way that I have been feeling recently. I feel as if I do not know what I want to do in my life any more or how to handle all these new problems that are arising. I could really, really, just a bubble bath right now. I can just smell the incense and the sweet scent of those bubbles and I can feel the smoothness of my lavender bath gel. The smell is delicious and intoxicating at the same time. I want to take the hottest bath of my life, so how that my skin will burn, hopefully burning away all of the bad feelings and thoughts and problems that are going on in my head and in my life right now. Burn, baby, burn. I want to feel the inferno. I wonder if I believed in god and heaven and hell if I would be one to go to hell. I guess it depends on what you believe is a hell- worthy action, but being a pregnant teenager considering abortion could not possibly be helping me get to heaven, if I believed in such a thing. I am not sure what made me realize that god did not exist, in fact I do not think I ever *had* an actual moment of realization; I do not think I ever actually believed in him. My view on god happens to be a firm antitheism. Unlike atheism, which is the belief that there is no god, antitheism is the belief that there is no god, and that the belief in a god actually *hurts* people. To me, the belief in god just makes the world a worse place. Between different religions thinking their beliefs are better than others, and people killing each other for their god and religions, the world could really use a break. The world would probably be much more free and sane and safe without the belief in god. For example, the *Harry Potter* book series were banned from some schools because some Christians said it promoted witchcraft, which is a “sin” towards god. If there was no belief in a god, *Harry Potter* and other banned books would be open for many more people to read. Another way the world would be more free without god is if people took religious text as a story, a myth, not as reality. In the bible, it says that if you commit a crime, you are to be stoned to death. People do not believe it now, but if someone thinks the bible is correct then do not they technically believe in stoning without actually realizing it? Also, the bible teaches that men are superior beings to women. Eve was made from Adams rib, which shows that women are not as “important” as men. The bible is completely sexist and no one complains, and that pisses me off insanely. Another reason beliefs in god are hurtful manifests itself in cults. There are crazy people walking around saying they are god or Jesus or the messiah or Buddah or some other god and saying “Follow me and you will be saved. You will go to a better place when you die. Follow me, join my cult.” Cults are known for doing all kinds of psycho things that god “told” them to do. If god existed, would he really tell you to rape women, have sex with minors, murder innocent people? I doubt it. If there was no notion of a God many people would be spared the brainwashing, murdering, raping, etc. Also, there are people who risked their lives and other people’s lives for their beliefs and for god. Suicide bombers are an example (is it too risky to touch upon the topic of September 11th? Maybe. It is one of those things, like Kennedy’s assassination or something more positive like when the first man landed on the moon, which, as it turns out is not made of cheese. It is one of those things where everyone remembers exactly where they were the moment it happened, the moment the shot hit the late President Kennedy or Neil Armstrong’s spacesuit- enclosed foot touched the surface of the moon or the moment those planes hit those Twin Towers of the World Trades Center. When September 11th happened, I think I was in fourth grade; all the teacher brought us all, all the 4th and 5th graders, into a single classroom for an impromptu, spontaneous, class meeting. I remember they told us that the planes hit the towers, and I remember having no idea what they were talking about. For god’s sake, I was only 9 years old! I had no idea about the connection with terrorism because they did not say anything of the sort, all the teachers were sort of quiet, and I was led to believe, probably because I did not know any better, that those planes crashing were just an accident). When you see stories about terrorists on the news you think, “Oh, how horrible,” but you probably do not give it a second thought. Honestly, if those people did not believe in gods or a god would it have happened? No, it definitely would not. So what is so great about god? Another reason why the belief in god hurts people is directed at “my: religion, Judaism, regarding the Holocaust. If the Nazis did not believe that their beliefs and their god were better then the Jewish people’s beliefs and god, then millions and millions of lives would have been saved. Many people might argue that there are not a lot of people who have suffered from their god or gods, and that god does more good than harm. But they were still people, they each had a family and people who cared for them, no matter what the number of people is, whether it was three or three million, they still suffered and that is what matters. I believe that the notion of god does much more harm than good. Sure, god gives people hope, but it also makes them think their notion of god is better than everyone else’s which defeats one of the original purposes of believing in a god, which was to unite people under a supreme “ruler.” But, honestly, with all of the scientific and technological advances in the world, there is no need to believe in a god to explain things. Because that is originally why deities were invented (yes, invented, by people—they are not real!!!), to explain things that happen in the world—like why does it rain, and why is their a drought now, maybe someone is punishing us for so on and so forth. But now we can explain simple things such as the weather, so the need for a god to explain such things is simply null and void. Have not you ever heard of science, people! I know god brings people comfort, but wake up and smell the coffee. He does not exist and never has because we invented him in the first place. Sorry, but it is the goddamn (ha, so to speak) truth. Maybe I just need to start writing more. In creative writing we used to do these exercises for if we were suffering from a case of severe if not mind- numbing writer’s block, to get our literary blood flowing again and get us out of whatever literary rut we happened to be stuck in at the moment. We would pick from different prompts such as “write about two characters that meet on a delayed flight” or “write about two characters waiting in line at a grocery store.” These prompts were mainly used to have us strike up a conversation in our writing, which, to me, is the easiest thing to do—for me it is pretty simple to write a back- and- forth conversation, whether it is coherent and flows or not, as long as I understand it (not the way a writer should generally think in terms of her audience, I realize…but we are talking a serious case of writer’s block here! This is not something to joke about or take lightly too and it especially does not involve the reader just yet until it is stepped on and smushed, killing it until the seed sprouts a plant again. And then you smush it again. And again. And again). Once, my assignment was to “write about two characters stuck in an enclosed space together,” but I can’t seem to find it anywhere, so I think I will try to write using that particular exercise prompt again right now:

“My fingers are cold,” Shelly finally said, breaking the silence. She looked over at Rob who was sitting in the corner opposite from hers, his arms crossed and his knees pulled up to his chin. His face was down and all she could see was an angry shadow where his eyes were. She envied his hunter green North Face. Shelly tugged down at the hem of her pink t- shirt, covering the sliver of a midriff she was exposing.

“Mine, too,” Rob replied after a long pause. His hands were buried deep in the pockets of his jacket. Shelly was across from him shivering like mad, but why should he care? If he gave her his jacket, then he would be even colder.

Shelly played with the frayed perimeter of a hole in the knee of her Gap jeans, weaving the strands between her frozen fingers. “How long do you think we’ve been in here?” she asked Rob.

He shifted his weight and turned to her, meeting his eyes with hers. “No more than half an hour, probably.”

“Oh,” Shelly said, and the ongoing silence returned. They could not have been in there for only half an hour. To Shelly, their time spent in that freezer felt like an eternity. She began to think about her family—they were probably wondering where she was. She thought about her mom, her dad, her little brother, and prayed that she would get out alive. The school was already locked for the night; nobody was likely find them until morning. She hoped they could make it until then.

Rob was more concerned about the basketball game he had the next day. It was the most important game of the season, and the star forward had to be alive for it. But there was nothing he could do at this point but sit and wait for someone to rescue him. He scanned the shelves, disgusted at what he was being fed—frozen French fries, slabs of “meatloaf,” and something called “pasteurized processed cheese product” that filled boxes upon cardboard boxes. He heard a muffled hiccup, and immediately turned towards Shelly. Her face was in her hands and she was shaking all over. “Are you crying?” he asked her.

“N-no. I am fine,” Shelly lied, her hands covering her red, tear- stained cheeks. Rob suddenly felt a pang of sadness inside of him; as much as he did not like Shelly, there was nothing he hated more than seeing a girl cry. He felt really bad for her, and tried to comfort her as best as he could.

“You know, everything will probably turn out okay. We can survive in here until morning, I bet.”

Shelly looked up at Rob, revealing her tear- streaked face and scowled at him. “I do not need your fake sympathy,” she told him, wiping away the tears, now more angry than upset.

At that instant, all the feeling of pity Rob felt for Shelly disappeared, and he just laughed. “God, you were always so hard- headed.”

“What is that supposed to mean?!” Shelly snapped, fuming.

“Nothing, it’ s just that… you have not changed, that is all,” Rob said, smiling. She looked very pretty, wearing a t- shirt and baggy jeans without looking frumpy. Shelly always managed to look nice, even if she just got out of bed, Rob noted.

“Well neither have you. Still going with that Bethany chick I presume? Or maybe Miranda? Kelly? Are there any more? I am sure it is a long list.”

Rob looked down at his feet, ashamed. He stood after a few minutes and began to stretch. “Maybe we should walk around a bit, or jump up and down. You know, to get our blood flowing,” Rob suggested, breaking into the awkwardness of the moment, cutting into the thickness of the air.

“Would not that just use up the oxygen?” Shelly inquired.

“I do not know, probably. But there is no use just sitting around here. We’ve got to try something.” Rob noticed that Shelly’s jet- black hair, which was usually in a ponytail, cascaded freely past her narrow shoulders. It framed her face nicely, her bright green cat- eyes standing out even more than usual. They caught his gaze, eyeing him suspiciously as he stretched his tired legs. They followed his arms flailing back and forth as he completed a series of jumping jacks. They watched him purse his lips as he always did when he exercised. “C’mon,” Rob said, “it will do you good. Get you warm.” He took her hand and pulled her upright.

“I feel silly,” Shelly admitted as they did more and more jumping jacks. Rob broke into a smile as he watched her clumsiness. Suddenly, Shelly’s foot slipped on a small patch of ice at the bottom of the freezer, and she toppled down after it.

“Are you okay?” Rob chuckled, looking down at her defeated expression.

“It is not funny!” Shelly yelled, laughing, as she playfully punched Rob’s leg, causing him to lose balance as he fell down next to her.

“You are such a klutz!” Rob exclaimed, a wide grin plastered on his face.

“Me? You fell too!” she replied, giggling uncontrollably.

“Only cuz you punched me!”

“Yeah, tell it to the judge, you buffoon!” They were both caught up in a fit of giggles, struggling to gasp for air.

“You are going to use up all the oxygen!” Rob mocked her as they continued to laugh.

They calmed down after a few minutes, each letting out a big, prominent sigh that was key after any major laugh. Shelly looked over at him and said, “I have not laughed that hard in a while.”

“Yeah, me either,” Rob said. He had always loved Shelly’s laugh. It was not soft or delicate my any means—it was loud, powerful, a real belly laugh. He looked over at her and their eyes met; Shelly quickly averted her gaze.

She thought back to how they got there, sneaking around school after dark, working on an article for their journalism class about the truth behind cafeteria food. When partners got assigned, they each rolled their eyes, angry at their fate for the project. She blamed Rob for getting them stuck in the freezer—he should have been holding the door. Oh, well—if she was going to die locked in a freezer, she may as well die having fun. She just could not believe that it was with *Rob*.

“You are shaking,” he noted, pulling her out of her cloud of thought. She looked down, and he was right. Her arms and legs and hands were shaking uncontrollably. “Here, take my jacket.” He wrapped her up in his North Face, revealing a Harvard t- shirt.

“Thanks, I did not even realize I was shaking. Weird,” Shelly replied. She pointed at his t- shirt. “Have you applied yet?”

“To Harvard? Oh, no. That was just a dream that now, looking at my transcript and SAT scores, I know can’t be conquered by me. But it is whatever, I guess,” Rob admitted.

“Oh, I am sorry.”

“It is okay, I was offered a full scholarship to Pitt, you know, for basketball,” Rob said, his eyes shifting.

“Pitt? You know I applied Early Decision, right? You know it was my first choice, do not you?”

“Yeah, I guess I remember now. I never thought about it,” Rob lied, although he knew that his subconscious remembered.

“God, that is *so* typical of you. You only think about yourself. You *know* Iwill not be able to handle going to the same college as you. You are such a pig!” Shelly yelled, standing up and walking across the freezer, her hands crossed tightly over her chest.

“Baby…” Rob said instinctively.

“Baby? BABY?! Do not you baby me! I am not you are *baby* anymore. I have not been your *baby* for a while. So stop kidding yourself.” She pulled his jacket off her shoulders and threw it at him; he caught it against his chest, like a basketball.

“I am sorry, I know. I do not—” Rob hesitated, “I do not know why I said that.” Shelly tried to hold the tears back as best as she could. She blinked fiercely, trying to get them to go back where they came from, but they would not budge. “Shelly…” Rob continued.

“What?!” Shelly spat.

“I miss you,” Rob admitted. Shelly’s eyes fell.

Well, that is all I got, but it felt *amazing* to write. I think I will entitle it “Stuck,” as lame and cliché as that may be. I have not had a chance to write any good, thoughtful titles in a long- ass while, so sue me. It is whatever. I just needed a chance to get my feet wet with writing again, and I would like to think that I plunged right in and flew out soaking in a rainbow, having pulled through with flying colors (I am assuming that is what “succeeded with flying colors” would be like in a literal sense--- being soaked head- to- toe in a pure, majestic, beautiful rainbow. You are even luckier if you find the gold. Sometimes I like to be super literal. It is fun, everyone should try it at least once, as long as you do not let the power of the words overwhelm and consume you—this has happened to me one or twice…or maybe even thrice. I love the word “thrice” by the way). I just hope that short story in with the freezer and what not did not sound too much like a flashback episode of a bad sitcom (or a good one, because let us be honest here every good sitcom has it is bad flashback moments when the writers run out of ideas… uh oh is that what I was doing?! Whatever, I am most definitely not a professional sitcom writer by any means, and let us be honest here I am not a professional *anything* by any means, so I am allowed to have my flashback freezer moments since hardly anyone would notice but me, anyways). You would tell me if my writing sounded like a bad sitcom flashback episode, right? Can I trust you? Who am I even talking to? Myself? Am I going insane, officially?! I was just thinking about how a good writer is not truly a writer until she had an audience. And that is something I have always lacked—an audience. I have never had a true audience to read any of my works, except maybe in one creative writing class that I took in high school, and essays in English but I do not really count those, anyways (although I am a huge nerd and I love writing essays). But what worries me is, if I have never really had an audience, how am I supposed to know if I am a good writer, if my works mean anything? Which is why I have concluded that I cannot really consider myself to be a writer if nobody has ever really read my work and criticized it or even told me exactly what they like about it and how I can improve. A lone writer is not a writer at all, by any means—she is static, a thin film of electric force (I told you I can be literal at times) engulfing her, pushing away anybody that tries to take a peek at her literary journeys. And that is me, alone, trembling in this capsule of static electricity that surrounds me, and all I need is a good, big shock from somebody who is not afraid to come in and see what I am all about. And maybe *he* is that person. He would be totally open and honest with me about my writing, and yet I am terrified to let him see any of it because letting someone read my writing is like putting all of my trust in them, but I feel that I need to take that next step if I want my turn at a real career or at least a satisfying hobby in the sport of writing. I am almost ready for that, but other crazy things that are going on ibn my life are inevitably hindering that to the point of insanity. But all good writers are insane in some extent, right? And all good writing, in my opinion, has some sort of dark tones to it, whether hidden in an undertone or right out in the open, because you cannot write unless you have lived a real life. And maybe I am lucky enough to say that my tortured existence or at least what I believe it to be is leading me towards becoming one of the greats. But maybe, just maybe, and probably so, I am just kidding myself. Does a lack of belief in myself cause me to be even more tortured, more likely to jump- start a possible writing career, or is it hindering my abilities to expand, stopping me from breaking free of my shell and just letting somebody in for a change? But maybe, like most things in my life, I am reading way, way, way too much into this. Am I crazier than everybody else, or am I just a different kind of crazy? Is everybody as crazy as me or are they even crazier because they are trying to hide it, to shroud their insanity? Nah, that seems too deep—I bet everyone else is normal and I am just…let us say I am just quirky. I am quirky and special. That sounds better than crazy, I suppose. I know at least one person in the world thinks I am special, and I guess that is all I need to find happiness. That is all I want, really, in life—to be happy. I want to be ebullient, jumping- up- and down, smiley, happy- go- lucky but that is not in the cards for me, at least not right now, and I do not even know how I would try to get there right now. But someday I will, I promise you, you being my future readers. Somebody will recognize me someday, I will shine. But why am I thinking like that? Somebody already does, so who cares about everybody else? But even with him in my life, I still feel a lack of something, a creepy void, not in my heart, but in my mind. I think that is where it is because sometimes I get the instinct like my head is honest to god pulsating and I need something to fill it up with to make it stop. But I do not know what and because of that time hole in my brain I cannot really think about how to fill it right now—ironic, am I right? Wow I really am losing it. It is kind of like humans have to use the human mind to study the human mind—mind blow, right? (Hell yeah that was a two-fer. I am hilarious I do say so myself.) Anyways, in “Stuck” I tried super hard not to involve any daddy themes for the sake of what is left of my sanity. I need to do that more—just *write*. Just go for it without any inhibitions or worrying about the story line being perfect because I get hung up on the details a lot of the time. It was nice to have the situation picked out for me and just supplying the dialogue between the two characters—pure dialogue is a great way to provide suspense without having too many fancy plot twists, in my opinion. Wow, that was the first time I really wrote anything substantial and minus any unnecessary scatter in a while, and I am actually proud of what I wrote. I tried to avoid anything about babies and fathers and anything like that, which probably made it a bit easier to narrow down a topic. Here I am, constantly searching for symbolism in my life, and then strategically avoiding it in my writing for fear of what it might mean for me. That just proves that I seriously am a mess right now. I am a crazy, scatter- brained, wreck of a chick. I have literally been having mirages of Lewis running into my room and plopping down on my bed to wake me up from a nap or to jump on my lap to cuddle with me. Maybe I should just get another dog, but that would mean that Lewis is officially gone. I could get a girl puppy and name her Alice, keeping Lewis’s memory intact in another life, like a form of some weird literary reincarnation, or I could get another boy dog and name him Poe after the great Edgar Allan Poe, switching up the author but keeping the literary theme going strong. But the thought of getting a new dog just makes my eyes well up with tears when I realize that Lewis is never coming back, he will never run through the door of my room to sit on my bed with me and he will never chase squirrels in my lawn again and he will never run through the front door and get the welcome mat even muddier and grosser than it already is, and tracking the mud further into the kitchen and the living room. I can accept that he is not coming back, I suppose, but I simply cannot accept the fact that he may not be alive. That just is not possible. He is still just a puppy to me, barely even a dog, and I cannot bear the thought of his life ending so quickly. But I cannot help but see him starving in an alley or squashed by the tires of a pickup truck. But if he is out there in the world, on the streets or in the woods starving or sad or alone or cold and freezing to death why does not he just come back to be with me and live with me and stay with me and be happy? He is smart enough to know where I live and return, to run back through the front door and into my open arms, which, coincidentally, will always be open and loving towards him no matter what even if he left me for another family. The thought that he does not want to come back, for some reason, and maybe this thinking of mine is sick and twisted but I can’t help it, pains me more than if he was really dead. This is the worst tragedy I have ever faced; worse than my mother’s hate and this unplanned pregnancy. I wish I just *knew* where he was. I just wish I knew why or how he left because one day I came home from campus and he was just gone. I cried for hours and hours that day and night and I could not sleep and I was choking and it turns out there were some tears left in me and they were choking me, engulfing me, strangling me and drowning me in their salty bitterness. If he is hurting, I will save him. If he is happy with someone else, I will respect his boundaries. But I just want to *know*. I even, as crazy as this sounds, considered hiring a gypsy fortune teller wearing big hoop earrings, wrapped up in colorful scarves and filled with voodoo magic to look into her magic crystal ball and tell me where my baby boy is, where Lewis has gone and who he has left me for if he is even alive to jump and prance and bark and pant any more. And maybe when she looks into her crystal ball she will tell me what decision I made about this baby so the future me can tell the future me what to do but then would not that be a paradox because then how would the future me have been able to make a decision without a future me to tell me what to do? That is why time travel and looking into the future would be way too confusing for me to handle in my already chaotic, hectic existence. Maybe getting a new dog will help me move on but I just do not know if I am ready for that now. Maybe if I got a different kind of dog, like a giant, furry Newfoundland or a yippy, yappy, talkative Chihuahua I would not be forced to be reminded of Lewis as much, I would be able to finally move on from Lewis. but I wonder if getting a new dog would help me move on or if I would just resent my new dog because he or she could never be as amazing as Lewis? But it is a chance I will have to take to even have the slightest hope of moving on, even though I have no idea how I will be able to afford a dog what with the decision I have to make about this lump of cells in my uterus. So I guess I will have to wait on the puppy decision for now. God, so many decisions! Why can’t any of them be easy ones? It is not fair. I know life is not fair, but why can’t it just be a little nice sometimes, have a little sympathy for those of us who are struggling. See? That is further proof that god does not exist. Because life sucks, and if there was a ruler with unlimited power would not he stop that from happening? Exactly. Reason: 1, God: 0. Logic wins every time. And cynicism is just realism, in my humble opinion. Ha, who am I kidding, I am not humble by any means, usually. That is probably a bad trait but, oh well, we already know I am totally fucked up in the head anyways so what is one more problem with me gonna do? Nadda. Zip. Zero. Zilch. That is what it will amount to. Sometimes I feel like when I talk I am just flying off the handle, speaking gibberish because I talk so much so fast and so damn often. But I can’t happen—I feel the need to fill every single silent moment as quickly as I possible can because silence may be golden but time is money, too, and you do not want to waste it sitting there being quiet all the time. What is the point in life if you do not make a little noise every once in a while? People do not realize that a lot of the time, probably because of my hypothetical adult switch that I made up; yep, that is most likely the reason. See, it is stuff like that, like the adult switch thing that I made up that makes me feel like nobody understands me and I feel as if I am constantly speaking gibberish. Maybe I just need a brain- to- mouth filter so I do not just go ahead and say every crazy thing I am thinking in whatever scattered, unorganized manner I feel like saying it in without even realizing it half the time. See, this is why I need to relax more and take more bubble baths, but I feel as if I never have the time because of the fact that I am always in my head. It is seriously a vicious, never- ending, maladaptive cycle, and I am still not entirely sure how to end it or if I even can, but I am working really hard on the solution. Okay, that is sort of a lie. I am not working hard enough to allow my brain to relax and chill. The only way I can is when he is around but he does not know about how I am pregnant and I am still really afraid to tell him not because of how he will react because of what it means that we have to go through this together. I am in a relationship but I am still a horribly terrified of commitment and I can’t help it and I do not know what to do to stop it, not matter how much he reassures me that we are perfect and that he loves me and really wants to be with me and will not hurt me. I am still scared. Not as much as I was when we first started going out, but I am, in fact, still slightly terrified but in reality more than slightly terrified. I am afraid of commitment not because, I, myself cannot commit or will cheat or whatever, I am just afraid of getting hurt by him even though I know he would never hurt me in a million years. I am pretty much having an internal battle with myself and I am afraid that one day I will unleash all my crazy and all my worries about him breaking up with me at him and then he will decide I am crazy and, coincidentally, break up with me, so it is a terrible cycle that I can’t step away from because I am afraid if I let him know what is going on in my head it will freak him out too much and drive him away. So its ironic because the only way I can be free of this insanity is to talk to him about it, but I am afraid to talk to him about it because I am worried my insanity will make him stop loving me, which does not even make sense. I know people say be yourself but you need to let out the crazy in teeny- tiny bits and pieces like the [janitor](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tKRSKoyUsGA) (who is coincidentally my favorite character because he is so crazy, maybe he reminds me of myself I am not sure) in the amazingly hilarious television show Scrubs. Actually the character of [Elliot](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=stI7AUGEnXs&feature=related) probably remind me much more of myself because she is a neurotic crazy mess, like she says she (and I am too, actually, in case you could not tell yet) happens to be “a great mountain of koo- koo waiting to erupt.” She exclaims, “I can't take it, Carla! I cannot hide the crazy a minute longer! And the worst part is, Paul is this sweet, perfect guy who actually wants to take things slow with me, and I am just this big mountain of cuckoo who's about to erupt and spew molten crazy all over him, and he is gonna die like this:” after which she proceeds to make a face of a guy dying in hot lava. Well, her rant makes me feel less alone and actually reminds me of myself and my boyfriend a whole awful lot because I feel like a big heaping bowl of crazy too, sometimes. But, later, when her boyfriend Paul tells her he thinks she is holding back she let us all of her crazy out, “Of course I am holding back! I am insane, you idiot! Remember the other day, when you told me that I had pit stains? Well, I have cried every fifteen minutes on the half-hour since you told me that. I am wracked with self-doubt. I have panic attacks. I am claustrophobic, germaphobic, phobiaphobic. I talk to myself. I talk to my cat. I talk to three separate shrinks about the fact that often my cats respond to me in my mother's voice. And yesterday, when that stupid pretty surgical nurse handed you a pair of latex gloves, I almost killed the guy whose leg I was stitching up because I could not stop thinking about the two of you having sex on a box of steaks! Why a box of steaks? 'Cause my dad had an affair with a female butcher! And, as I mentioned before, I am insane. There! I opened up! Are you happy?” And, as it turns out, he is happy; in fact he finds her crazy to be totally attractive and amazingly sexy. So that makes me think he will, too, but then I remember that *Scrubs* is just a television show and I happen to be living in the real world and I am in a real life relationship and in this reality that I live in my crazy is probably not so appealing. But maybe I am wrong—there goes the crazy again! That is why I had to get rid of my Facebook—because of my super crazy craziness that refuses to go away. It made me feel super self conscious because if I posted something and nobody liked or commented on it I would be a mopey mess for days and it was embarrassing but true. I would judge myself and compare myself to others based on how many “friends” we had on Facebook which makes no sense because most of them are not even your real- life friends in the first place so what is the point even? There really is no great point to it, I guess, but maybe I just think that because that damn social networking site caused me so much anguish for no real reason, so I guess it was dumb for me to have one in the first place but who was I to know it would make me freak out so much? I mean who am I kidding, *everything* makes me freak out a ton no matter what because I am just certifiably insane. I am sure if my boyfriend heard me talking like this he would tell me to shut up and that I am perfect and not to be so worried all the time. That is what he would really do, I know; he would not break up with me but he would try to make me feel better and he would succeed for a while until I get home and miss him and miss Lewis and go into another spin of depression and fear and sadness because that is what my life has become. I yearn to feel how I felt two Christmases ago with my family, and now I only feel that when I am around him or talking to him on the phone. Every other time I feel lonely and scared and upset and I want it to stop but I do not know how to stop it and even though all I want to do is take a bubble bath I know it will not help because the second my foot hits the towel on the floor of my bathroom I will feel horrible again and I know that for a fact. What can I do to make myself feel whole and right again? I can’t stand how I feel when I am at home and it is mostly because my parents (well, my mom and my stepdad, but he is more of a dad than my dad has ever been obviously not that I love either of them in the slightest) are sneaky, crazy hypocrites. They have always told me not to judge a book by it is cover but they are doing exactly that with him just because he is not med- school material in their eyes (Not everyone can be doctors; why can’t they see that? Plus my stepdad is not god’s greatest gift either, even though he thinks he is, and he sure as hell ain’t no doctor, either and he is definitely not “doctor material” or whatever that means; if every single person was doctor material or wanted to be a doctor there would obviously only be doctors in the world and I bet that would not be so great). But who are those asswipes to judge *me*? Ugh, now I am starting to get myself really fucking angry. Maybe I am not med school material, either. They do not know if I am not not. If I change my career path will they start hating me too? I would like to think they would not but they, in all likelihood, probably would not. They do not judge a person by their character, they judge a person by what they dub as “intelligence.” They think that being smart is more important than being kind, though they would never admit that. But what my mom and her husband do not understand is that there are all different types of intelligence, and being kind does, in fact, take a certain type of intelligence. Would they rather me be with a doctor who beats me but racks in the big bucks or a kind, sweet, working- class gentleman who may not have the biggest wallet but has the biggest heart on earth? I do not know what they would chose. But being a doctor would probably win him so many points in their book that he could send me to the emergency room every week as long as he did not, and god forbid this, work in the social service or something like that because that would be worse than embarrassing for my mother and her silly husband who barely works and you can’t even consider him a trophy husband because he is not even remotely good- looking. But I can’t tell them how I am feeling; I can’t even say any of this stuff to them even in a nice way—hell, two Christmases ago, when we were actually seemingly *happy* for a little bit, I could not even suggest playing Uno to my mother because Uno is not a board game and it would send her to her wits end and ruin the one day that we even resembled some form of together- ness and family warmth and love without any screaming matches or fights or any voice- raising at all. I long for things to be that way *all* the time, or, at the very least, most of the time. Or even just some of the time. But not rarely; never rarely. Sometime, I guess, you do have to say never. Like when I am saying, right now, “I will NEVER give up. On anything. NEVER ever. I will make things get better. Things *will* get better. I will fix them. He will help me fix them when I need him to, if not do it himself like he already is without even realizing it. Everything will be okay, someday. Hopefully that will be someday soon. I know it and believe it because I have to or else there would be absolutely no hope left for me or my life or my relationship or this fetus inside me which may someday be no more. I will never give up. Ever. And he will never give up on me. Ever. Because I feel amazing about this relationship and I have to believe and I do believe that it will never end. Never ever.” But I do not know how to make things normal because they have never been normal so I do not even really know what normal is. Maybe normal is like a sitcom with little spats and theme music that somehow causes them to solve their problems or the solving of the problems causes the theme music I am not really sure. I think that maybe all my problems could be solved if I had theme music, like a soundtrack to my life (I feel as if I am channeling *Family Guy*’s [Peter Griffin](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fivTIT-i7YM&feature=related) from the episode when he wished to have theme music). Now I really am talking crazy—but would not it be funny? Like to have your own theme music every time you walked in a room that would change depending on your mood? That way, I feel as if every situation could be comical and it would make the world a lighter place. But maybe that is just me with my twisted way of thinking. But who does not have a twisted way of thinking, in the end, you know what I mean? Because if every person, is, in fact, really and truly a unique human being, do not we all, then, hold true a special way of thinking that probably seems twisted or weird to at least one other person in the world? Because if you consider how big the world is, and how many people live on this planet, that is a very likely scenario that at least one person finds another person’s way of thinking to be fucked up and strange if not ridiculous and twisted and totally messed up. Plus, nobody’s perfect. Take me, for instance—my imperfections are obvious. I am neurotic, self- loathing, self- doubting, and paranoid as fuck but I am a good person and I survive my day- to- day problems (which are so large and vast sometimes or at least seem that way that they maybe should not be reduced to simple day- to- day problems but they are mine so whatever) and I do that with those imperfections. I like to call them my quirks. They define me as a person and they help me live the way I do and they are beautiful, as corny as that my sound. And even though he is my knight in shining armour, he has imperfections, too—he is not perfect, either. But that fact makes him even more loveable and even more amazing. Take tgis past Halloween, for instance. It was the first time I had seen him sloppy- ass drunk, and instead of making me think back to my mom and all of the problems alcohol has caused her and my family, I saw it as the situation it was, not mine or my mom’s—a young man getting drunk on Halloween night, and somehow it made me love him that much more. He was throwing up all over, it should have seemed totally disgusting, but for some reason at that moment even though I was totally sober despite the beer I had and the shot I took, I was not grossed out. I took him home and sat with him on the bathroom floor by the toilet and I looked at him not with pity through his desperate “I am sorrys” and “go to sleep, I am okay” pleas but with looks of pure love. I looked at him totally lovingly because at that particular moment in time I saw him as what he was, totally uninhibited and vulnerable—a regular, imperfect, beautiful human being. Sure, he smelled like beer and vomit, but that was okay because I was finally able to take care of him the way he has been taking care of my emotionally. I saw that I did not always need to be that perfect princess for my knight in shining armour, that sometimes he could take his shining armour off, whether it be dirty and dented or not, and I could stop being the damsel in distress or the perfect, put- together princess and just be me, helping someone that I love unconditionally, him. There we were, two normal humans, perfectly perfect and beautiful with our imperfections and quirks and problems and downfalls, sitting on the shaggy rug on his bathroom floor, peering into the toilet. I wiped his mouth off when he asked me to do so and I put him to bed once he needed me to help him up, pushing his crawling behind into his room and helping him take his shoes off and get under the covers as he continuously whined endearingly, over and over and over again and again, “I am sorry; I am so, so sorry.” And I kept telling him that he really did not need to be sorry, that shit happens to everyone, that people get drunk sometimes and that is okay, and that I was happy to help him as he always has helped me. So there it is—nobody’s perfect (“This is the very perfection of a man, to find out his own imperfections” –Saint Augustine), and besides that, trying to be perfect is totally overrated, anyway (“The condition of perfection is idleness: the aim of perfection is youth;” “The true perfection of man lies not in what man has, but in what man is.” –Oscar Wilde). And everybody is imperfect in a different way, so you are lucky if you find someone that is imperfect in different ways that you are in just the perfect amount so you balance each other out splendidly. I guess it is all about finding that perfectly imperfect match for you, because, like Sam Keen stated, "Love isn't finding a perfect person. It's seeing an imperfect person perfectly." And if you find that perfectly imperfect match, you are damn lucky as hell, and that is all I can say about *that*. It is just like when you consider how big the universe is, which is extremely hard for me to do as it is, considering it is infinity, which means it is endless, you realize that in all probability, there must be some other form of life out there, somewhere. But I will not get into that any deeper because the vast expansion of the whole entire infinite universe scares and confuses the living fuck out of me. But, speaking of infinity, I know that because there are infinite possibilities every damn second, anything can happen at any moment. Anything can happen. Anything can happen at any moment whether it is probable or not. Anything can happen. Anything can happen at this exact moment, right now, except one thing. I am not going to make a decision about this baby at this particular moment. I will soon, but not right now. I just can’t seem to face it right now; I feel like I need a break…I deserve a break, actually. So I will not decide right now—I will not even think about it. Not at this exact moment in time I will not decide, but I may decide in a couple moments, depending on how exactly you measure a moment, which I am still not sure about. I think the way we measure moments can be a dynamic measurement because a moment is such a vague, uncontrollable concept. Anyway, I will not decide at this moment, whatever the word moment means or whatever this moment is defined to be—I honestly do not care at this point, at this moment. At this moment, I am going to go take a bubble bath. Right now, at this very moment, I am going to go take a bubble bath, and I am going to try to relax.