

How Sad, How Lovely

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I used to be so good. I was ten and read books during recess, wearing walmart pants and hair that straightened easily. I knew nothing of the knife, only dreamt of heat and Santa Claus. I was listening to the radio in my mom's blue 2004 Toyota. My brothers still had teeth gaps.

Then my horns came in. I almost didn't see them at first and when I did, I thought everybody had them. I began meeting with depression when I was thirteen. I grew up with it like a mean best-friend. It came and went every few months like the darkness in Alaska. I was kamikaze, sometimes. I tried to make the devil take me. I wrote bad poetry and dreamt of fights. I wanted to be gone so bad. There is a white scar on my left wrist from one particular time.

A momento.

X

It is obviously, glaringly, wonderfully October. Every house I pass has either an inflatable ghost or a plastic witch parked on the square meal lawn. It is Tuesday evening, I'm walking home. I have every ache in the sidewalk memorized. The sky is a melted, apocalyptic blue. Lovebugs trill dead melodies in my ears.

For the last week, my neurons have been tripling and bruising. I have to grind my teeth to slow them down. I've never felt like this before. This is a becoming, a reckoning of who I am meant to be. A car slowly turns the corner ahead of me, like a shark. My shadow is perfect. I am sixteen. My hair hangs from my head like slaughtered royalty. I am like those gladiator spectators, loosely beautiful in freshly washed rags, giddy for weeks after watching one man tear the heart from another. My head fills and leaks like a pool drain. I'm almost home now. My neighbor is out on her lawn with her yip yap dogs. I pucker up.

X

I remember walking into the gas-station like a God. Yellow Andy Warhol shirt nearly to my ankles, tights old and unwashed, I flirted with the boy behind the counter without filter. Asked him how much cigarettes were but didn't buy any. Told him he was weird for liking cherry-gum. Told him I'd like a kiss. That summer, I kissed boys for the sake of kissing, to keep the act of kissing alive, to keep me alive, to keep me awake. My mouth tasted like a photo album.

X

I am lying on a gurney in the back of an ambulance on the way to an upstate psychiatric hospital. It stinks like the middle school nurse's office I walked into once. Think gauze and thermometers. My body has been strapped down because I'm a danger to myself, at least according to the doctors in the emergency room we just left. Through the back door windows, I can see the sky. Blue as ash. The cars lining the FDR are orange and red and beautiful. The East River screams. We weave in and out of traffic. The paramedic has black curly hair and white clothing. She could be anybody. She refuses to play Beyonce. Lana Del Rey comes on instead, her sultry voice guiding us to Westchester. A woman throws her drink out of her car window at high speed. The buildings along the river look like knives. Clouds pucker like a chorus of crying children. I watch it all with my eyes.

X

It is raining today, the rain comes down like buckets are being poured. Like somebody is being careless. I hear my name being called and jump. Camille, the nurse on a one-to-one with me, meets my eyes.

"What?" she asks, touching one hand with the other.

“I heard somebody say my name” I mumble, getting up to use the bathroom.

She follows me. My hair was washed last night when another nurse watched me shower for twenty minutes. At least I have that. I stay in the mirror for a few moments.

“What are you feeling, Jas?” Camille asks, meeting my eyes in the glass. I feel like I don’t exist. Like somebody has filled my body with fizz. Like the ghost of a teenager who never came home. Somebody who knows too much. I shrug.

“Bad” I say it like the truth is a bullet. “Agitated, maybe. My thoughts are racing” She nods.

“Wanna get breakfast?” she asks, her earrings dancing. I think about pulling them out. “What else am I supposed to do?”

It is dark as a secret in the hallway which bothers me. I make up a poem in my head as I sort through the plastic scrambled eggs and randomly placed pound cake. Above me is a painting of a dog laying outside of a battered house, boards across the windows and door. Dead grass and a bucket thrown about. I don’t know what is therapeutic about that.

X

My mom has come to visit me. She flips through my journal of scrawled and punched out racing thoughts.

“I thought you had schizophrenia, at first.” she says.

I don’t remember asking her to touch anything but I digress and drink the coffee she has brought me, which technically shouldn’t be allowed considering caffeine can worsen mania or, if nothing else, decrease my Lithium levels. But it’s not like she’d know any of that. And I’m not

saying anything.

I wonder if she'd rather it be schizophrenia. You can explain that without having to. Everybody thinks they know what it means. You go crazy, you can't be touched. But what is bipolar? You steal from a pharmacy because you're god and then you're okay for October. You can say hello, sometimes. I'm sorry I couldn't be sick in an easier way. You deserve better. This must be so hard on you.

When she leaves, I don't tell the nurses about the man calling my name.

X

My second night home, I get off at 42nd street to throw my confetti all across Times Square. Let's celebrate freedom. I watch the lights drizzle on and off, red-green-purple.

Animated bruises. They look as if they have been crushed in my palm. Like a child drew them with crayon. The smell of everything you could ever want. The un-wanting of it all. I finally finish my pack of cigarettes and focus on the warmth inside me. All that blood swimming and swimming. I'm a pool of gross and I want to touch it.

Down the avenue, the sun starts to blush again.

X

Midtown looks like a ripped postcard. You meant to write back but never did. Slick gutters are well hidden and heels sound like aged coins against the stained sidewalk. All of the monolithic buildings are either grey or white. They make for the best concrete Gods. The air smells of ravishing piss at any given moment.

I've been out of the hospital for three weeks.

I feel like a freak but not like an alien. My arrival would not cause any sort of curious stir. Here is my third arm and fourth eye. Nobody has held me in long.

I'm lonely as vomit. Walking from the dirty mouth of the train station to a seaside park nestled between fifty five and fifty fourth street, I hide from the afternoon, walking on the edge of the sidewalk covered shallowly in shade. It's funny to think of all those times I once felt like a biblical flood walking these concrete inches, extravagant even if my hair was spooled into grease soaked curls and my head hurt most of the time from the color factory inside it, my brain knocking to get out.

X

I'm on the subway again. Except this time, the lights are brighter than they have been lately. They almost burn. My body feels light as dust. I cut myself last night after screaming at my therapist who told me to drink tea. I look around at those around me: half heartedly sleeping, reading fat books, clicking their heels together to go home. I hum into my reflection. I have a bottle of pills in my go lucky pocket. The air is silk. I have a secret, buried in the pink mush-land of my brain: I am going to kill myself.

X

In the hospital, time passes by like hair through blood. It bubbles and sludges. I spent most of my watched time divided between my assigned bed and the dayroom, equally as tired as when I arrived. I sat at the table nearest to the door, sometimes doodling drooling faces on the backs of coloring pages, sometimes watching reality tv with as little energy as I had. I was deeply fascinated with a show documenting plastic surgeons fixing botched surgeries. A nose that looked like a mouth. Hips like cottage cheese. Most of the other patients seemed annoyed at this choice, rolling their eyes and walking to the nurses station to ask for the remote control.

The thing is it takes almost nothing to watch shows like that. I can sit absolutely still and revel in glorious garbage, allowing even the commercials going over my head.

A typical game within a psych ward is listing what you want. I'd sit with whoever would listen and we'd count off names of desire with the lust of animals. Triangles of dark chocolate that melt in your mouth. Hair dryer set on full blast. Underwear that read baby. Beer I can gurgle. My fucking mom.

X

It always turns out to be alright even if it hurts. And it really does

X

Beyonce's angry love plays in my ear as I make my way to the corner of 70th street.

Walking through mid afternoon subway smoke that rises from the gross mouth of a storm drain. I am mooses if mooses was a twenty one year old manic depressive on the brink of a genius wish.

My hair, still clean from birth, whips across my face like a blindfold but I see it all. The ground might be sizzling. A new hair salon has opened next to the restaurant reserved for thin white wives. To celebrate, they have put out a lone pretty doll head outside. I want to eat her.

X

I have this recurring daydream. In forty years I will still be in New York like an old, dying lover. Baby, I knew you once. Baby, don't you still love me? The city will take me in, wordless. My skin will hang off my face like a bloody nose and as I walk through the night streets, I will come

across an orange-lit bar, smelling of helium. I will go inside like a moth. Everything will feel simple and complete. There will be cobwebbed people in the corners, singing along to the music, low as a fire. Nobody will see anybody. Just the light. Just the glass. I will slide into a seat and order a drink. It won't take long until the story swims out of me.

"I used to be so good"

X

When I get out and stay out, I'm going to sew all of my hospital gowns together with flamboyant thread and have a beautiful picnic in the middle of the street. Me, my million bowls of raspberries and all of Manhattan's perfect sadness. Then, I will take the quilt to the field I've been searching for my entire life and burn it.