

sunglasses

The autumn air is incensed with the thin fragrance of dying trees, drifted with a multitude of brittle yellow leaves, bursting apart and separating in a violent, swirling gust. Crystalline, the pond gently rocks its blue reflection back and forth, rocking a floating duck in a careless lullaby. Death seems to fall beautifully into its natural role this season, its flagrant yet gorgeous colours blooming, falling in warmth, naked twisted trees silhouetted into beauty by reckless sunsets, as if death has been benign to begin with, as if it's a companion, instead of an antithesis, to life. My socks are visible, proudly pressing into my Nike slippers as I walk, shielding my eyes with one hand from the cutting sun.

Upper middle class yards are bared, promiscuously, through their thin little iron fences, along the path. I hear little dogs yapping at me predatorily, through the rows of bars. I grin, calling them cute in baby voices, as they throw their full fanatic force into anxious spasms, screams of terror and alarm ripping through their throats, spittle dripping like blood, their minute teeth glinting, sharp. Thankfully, my ears are deafened by headphones. I come across a strange patch of clover, jarred by its brief cessation of the homogeneity of fall, its lurid green and pink displayed like an abnormal growth, some pernicious illness, breaking the seamless illusion of the scene; I overcome a strong sudden urge to stamp on it, my toes digging into plastic.

As I walk, my mind twisted, wrung in a wet sort of abstract thought, blinded by the soon to set sun, I feel a presence transgress beside me, then past, then gone, another human violating my wilderness. Entranced in my music, a throaty, jazzy number, this one, I freeze, like the world soon will, when I smell the air. It's a strange, cruel link, the acute proximity of the memory and smell

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centres of ones brain, the disgruntling implantation, or perhaps a better word is discovery, of past, vivid emotions, when sniffing. Olfactory torture.

Looking back, I see him.

Back at my cul de sac, I avoid exchanging greetings with my suburban neighbours, their silicone, happy faces stretched wide in a forced civility. It's too bright to look at. I shield my face from them, glancing at the neat row of identical houses, lawns dying a grey death, save for one house with uniform, plastic grass. I shiver when I look at it. As I approach my house, the sun is covered into near oblivion. The tall structure casts a deep shadow, like a rot, like a crack in this neighbourhood's picturesque fantasy.

I leave my slippers on the mat. The air is stale, as if lived in only by an absence.

Approaching the stove, I discover a thick beef stew gurgling decadently in the iron pot. Chinese television resounds throughout the air. I feel unrooted, as if I'm not standing on the ground, but not in a floating way, but as if my heart is suspended in the air, susceptible, and with no blood flow. It feels choked.

Walking past my parents, immersed in their show, they send me a cursory smile and sink back, deep, singing along, or gazing, transfixed, into the overwhelming allure of words, action scenes. It's as if they're existing on a different, righter plane of existence, and I have faded into oblivion. My heart tightens, and I swallow. In a window, I watch the sun set. My music is plugged into me as if I need it to breathe, as if the chords wrap around me, clinging, constricting, to try to keep all of my limbs attached, to keep my sac of flesh from tumbling off, just as my parents are enraptured comfily in their vapid activities. Now, it's a sultry RnB tune in my ears, nothing holy about it. She sings of sex in a strangely philosophical way, but perhaps there's nothing strange about

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it. Like death, sex is just another facet of being human, being a mammal, being an organism. Fluffs of cloud seem inextricable from the myriad of colour, and a lone goose flies overhead, gliding melancholically, maybe separated from its safe V formation. It'll probably die soon.

From above, I probably look like a singular bean, curled up, separated from the can, curled on my bed. I've always been alone. Even in my mother's womb, I must have been slathered in a thick, sterile alcohol, separated from the warmth of life. I have friends. Not many, but I have friends. There's a deep alcove, or maybe an abyss, within me, however, stretching wide, profoundly silent, and never once has even a glimmer of a whisper resounded within. Not even my constant music has broken through, filled this abyss with splendour. Does everyone feel this startlingly alone, even amongst a family?

Whispers. I lie on my twin bed, I'm too big for it now, I've long outgrown it, long outgrown my modest room, obviously well lived in but sharply impersonal, as if the clothes scattered across the carpet, melding with empty wrappers and pens, could have belonged to anyone. The sun dies out and a stubborn shadow spills out across my room. I'm bathed in darkness. I stare.

First love. Could it even be classified at so? Outside, the wind has grown, and our tree careens back and forth, struggling to grasp onto its escaping leaves. It'll be bald soon, and cold. Poor thing.

A childish infatuation, at best, of hand holding, awkward kissing. As if my ice body had melted at that meaningless touch. That smell, of a spring morning, slightly salty, from sweat, and yet a fresh smell, not at all unpleasant. The feeling, the look, of a boy, a strange evolutionary chain pulling us together, a tale as old as time, of reproduction, of genetic diversity. There was, on the surface, nothing truly sexual about our connection, and yet validation sprung up from these

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pragmatic wells of existence. I had clung onto him, catalyzed by this chain, trying to squeeze him to fit around my heart, like a glove. I wanted to mold his deepening voice to slip into the infinitesimal cracks, to touch the abyss, if even slightly. Boys aren't malleable like that, however.

I'm at my desk now, without realizing it. My feet are resting along the artifacts of a deep depression, random objects strewn incoherently upon the floor, from times when I couldn't bear order. My cat comes to rub up against my ankles, and I feel a violent seizure of fuzziness rising, a sensation of wanting to squeeze. I grab it under its slender arms, and it hangs sheepishly, staring at me with indifference, yellow eyes sardonically thin. I've always loved the wayward nature of cats, their dynamic with humans one of flippancy and servitude (on the human side) rather than the overblown loyalty of pups. Their purring more a vain celebration of their own eternal beauty, than of their owner. Perhaps this is another defect within me. I set the cat down, and ruffled, it pads away.

Perhaps I love cats so much because they symbolize to me an apathy I mistakenly believe I share, content to curl up into their own persons, like a snail's shell, and spend the day turned inward. If I was so beautifully independent, what "first love" would have me reeling in such strange musings? What friendships, what strained familial ties?

I think about sad things in my life, things far sadder than these petty connections. The streetlight, drowning out the faint, dutiful moon, casts a nice yellow glow into my room. A long strip of cloud curls restlessly like a cat's tail. Turning the lamp on my desk on, a sterile bluish white violates the ambience. Just as we have violated this suburb. The nerve! With our lack of hockey nets, our late night screaming, our immigrant trauma. Money does not mean you belong. My fingers run along the side of *The Great Gatsby*.

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I bring it to my nose and sniff, remembering. Winter is coming soon.

Soon, I will no longer live in this cul de sac, will no longer have my meticulously curated, fabricated wilderness to escape to, walking along the perfectly paved path, watching perfectly built, homogenous houses, pristine backyards. Perhaps I'll meet real wilderness. I'll be going on to bigger things. Alone, as usual. As I drive along the main road, watching my familiar Sobeys and Pizza Hut and Supercuts glide past, I wonder what it'll be like to escape, and yet be torn, like a baby's gory separation from the umbilical cord. A necessity bordering on cruelty, plunging one headfirst into the realities of existence. That is the essence of life.

Driving is not my strong suit. I've failed the drivers test four times, my worst try culminating at a mistaken red light transgression. My instructors have all commented on my Achille's heel being a proclivity for distraction. Caught deep, huddled in my philosophical lair, or suddenly turning foolishly to check if I remembered to bring something. Absent-mindedness, it's called. Who knows whether moving to another city, I'll survive the night. Something catches the corner of my eye.

Pulling over when I get a chance, I slam open the door and run out in a gust, probably a peculiar, laughable view, dressed as I am in Christmas pyjamas, the red reindeers on my pants tinkling. The wind around me is cold and robust, very adult. I pull my Santa robe closer around me.

A dead rabbit, mangled, its fur still caught in a suspension of colour not quite white, not quite brown, caught between seasons. Eternalized in an ephemeral state, it lies, bloodied, unseeing, propped against a piece of cardboard. Cut off right before the climax. This could be me, any day. I stare at it respectfully for a while. If I die, or live, either way a part of me will be dying, something fleeting, something one can never buy. A strange, bright quality that only children have, one that

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shields. I feel as if it's already died long ago, within me. When I reach the house, I snap the blinders back. I need to go buy sunglasses. I'm always forgetting, and I'm thus forced view the harsh brightness of life in its entirety.

Soon, winter will be coming. The first snow of the season, though beautiful, brings with in a strange twinge, when my mother points it out to me. I breathe in warm tea and honey and milk, deep into my damaged lungs. The fireplace flickers welcomingly in the corner. I dig my chopsticks into the long strands of noodles. As the warm broth sinks into my tongue, it's like I can taste the love it was made with. In times like these, my loneliness is bandaged.

Forced out, discombobulated, into the harsh cold, by the dictators, I resentfully arm myself with a large shovel and earbuds and begin hacking away at the mountain of snow. Plugged in, even during labour. When I reach the sidewalk, I carve out a respectable distance halfway between our houses, a curious suburban ritual.

The world looks drowned. The leaves, once lonely looking, having fallen from their roost, have now faded into a great white oblivion, muted, as if they have never existed or mattered. Looking up into the endless expanse of blue above, the light so bright I squint, I reach out my tongue to catch snowflakes, swirling in a never ending stream, dancing randomly, seemingly without purpose. Laughing with childish delight, I am not thinking of young love or death or philosophy.

I merely let the cold sink in.