

Write 300 words about an experience of failure that taught you a life lesson

English class is a cathartic break in my STEM packed life. I find that in the midst of everything, it allows a simultaneously far away and intimate interaction with myself.

Still, my twin brother Ted sat in his usual seat in morning English, next to our best friend Jacob, while I stayed home sick. This is by no means a rare occurrence.

We share a class, teacher, a car, a family, and a best friend.

What's mine and mine alone is the empty desk next to Ted's filled one.

I still haven't told anyone why I stay home so often; not the teacher, not my friends, barely even my brother.

I had Lyme disease for over a year. I have and will continue to have ulcerative colitis, chronic fatigue, psoriasis, a host of other conditions neatly catalogued in my MyChart app like rules to live by.

The psoriasis is hard to notice, the others impossible, granting gratifying privacy alongside an inquisitive relief.

Why are these parts of me hiding themselves? Should I be ashamed?

A misfired alopecia diagnosis or two, "arthritis" becomes the common cold, but after enough blood tests and procedures they figure out what you have, and what you have to do to fix it.

That's very important, that you fix it.

Rule one, no spelunking.

A life spent outside the mouth of the cave, not that I have any urge to spelunk.

To be brief, my immune system has about as much power in my life as my nervous system.

Sometimes, like today, Ted calls me during English, I go on speaker and everyone says hi.

And then I listen.

Through the phone's campfire speaker I hear Mr. Biondi speak on Prufrock:

He spoke about distance in narration, the gap between narrator and subject, and then about what happens when we narrate ourselves from too far away.

About the body in literature, how it's always both present and described, and then about what gets lost when we only describe.

I stopped listening.

It felt like I was given a teaspoon and everyone else a gallon jug, and I would sip with the spoon filled to the brim, and they would only let a little drip in for some incredulous, white-knuckling and teeth-grinding reason.

In shamed silence and resentment I learned that I chose to create this distance.

I distanced from others when I was sick, and distanced from my sickness when I was with others.

Listening to a lecture about intimacy through a speaker. Hearing my brother's life—since birth: our life—while lying in bed.

I keep choosing the gap.

The empty desk is often immutable, but on the days I was there I could've closed the gap, brought my two lives together. But I lived a life of presence or description, I could never allow myself both.

I'm still choosing it now, describing this from far enough away that it almost feels like it happened to someone else.