

It was a pretty hot day today! We went out to the fair at the botanical garden, little Jamie almost didn't come because he ate something bad in the morning but he ended up being ok. It was hot as heck, super duper muggy, the kind where you feel gross just wearing clothes on your body, so we spent most of the morning bee-lining it to the tree planters to get out of the sun, especially when waiting for rides. There were so many people and like ten million little kids, way younger than Jamie and I, just running around and screaming and peeing everywhere and dropping ice cream and hugging those giant stuffed knock-em-down game prizes. There were all of these banners hanging from the street lamps and so many colorful balloons everywhere just tied to things, like the fence posts and the police barriers and the people and the surrounding wildlife, and I just knew that if it hadn't been so noisy from all of the people that Mom would have hated it there because of all of the dreadful squeaking noises that balloons make when they hit things and get squeezed between things. We woke up really early before the fair even opened so we could go get breakfast/lunch at this old fashioned shiny chrome diner place near the fair that had these baby blue painted walls and cream colored yellow tables and we got to watch the sun come up and the whole street was so quiet and empty and perfect because all of the roads were fenced off. It was so weird and pretty, when the sun rose it made everything look so orange and it was that perfect temperature like when you get out of the pool at the sports center and are wet and freezing because you're too scared to fully towel yourself off in the locker room but when you walk out from under the awning of the sports center the sun hits you and for a moment your skin feels all warm and you can literally feel yourself drying and you linger a little bit out there on the turf, walking a winding path so you can dry off fully before you have to step inside the air conditioned building again. Anyway I remember just sitting there in the booth and Mom and Momma were kind of just half awake- Mom was drinking her coffee looking out the window and Momma was still sleeping a little bit, and Jamie was definitely asleep and he looked so cozy there sitting between Mom and the window, all slumped over and cozy in his hoodie on the soft puffy yellow booth seat and I remember thinking that I could die right then and I wouldn't even be that mad. It's not like I was sad or anything, but sometimes there are just moments like that where everything feels perfect and you're happy and totally relaxed and you kind of forget that you have goals or things to worry about in the future and you realize that you feel kind of indifferent about being alive or dead. I mentioned it to Luke yesterday during recess and he looked really confused and kind of concerned, and I know that Mom and Momma would totally freak out if I said anything about it, but it's not like these are particularly formative moments for me or something that I feel like an intense obligation to share about myself, I just wonder if anyone else ever feels like that sometimes or if I'm just completely mistaking this feeling for something else that is actually normal. Like I don't think I want to actually die, that would be kind of sad not getting to finish school and hang out with Luke and Ewa and eat soup and maybe find love or something like it and finally build that treehouse Jamie and I've been dreaming about for the last two years. Anyways the only reason I'm writing about this at all is because I'm actually in the hospital right now- it all started with this one booth that was getting crazy attention near the far right side of the lawn. There was a crazy line for it and a whole bunch of

people circled around the opening and it turns out it was for some sort of “smell every smell in the world” booth which sounded pretty cool. There was this fancy wooden chair that people sat in and behind it there were three giant gas cylinders(I think they were kind of like the primary smells that they used to make all of the other smells from, like in painting class) and a whole bunch of smaller tubes and pumps and valves coming out of them and they would blindfold you so your sense of smell was heightened and you weren’t distracted by other stuff and then they would lower this shiny brass horn that looked like a trumpet, except the mouth of the horn looked like it had a sort of pincushion-fabric-like ball sticking out of it and that’s where the smells would get puffed out. And there were all of these people going in and coming out looking like they’d just had the time of their lives, and so obviously Jamie was like we HAVE to go see what’s going on at the smell-o-booth and so Mom and Momma were like fine ok and then we went and waited for what felt like four hours in line until we were finally there. Jamie finally got to the front after they charged us like 20 bucks and gave him a little booster seat to sit on so his face could reach the horn thing and since we were his family they let us just hang out in the room while he did his thing, there were these little waiting chairs on the side, and I remember looking at those chairs while they were setting Jamie up and being like what family has like sixteen kids, and then I was like well maybe they aren’t all for one family and the extra seats are just for other spectators, and then I was like but then what is the point of spectating if you’re just watching someone else smell stuff and react to it and you can’t even see anything anyways but I wasn’t able to think about it much longer because they dimmed the lights and started playing some dramatic voiceover audio stuff about the power of smell and yada yada and I remember at some point they were talking about like the incredibly technology behind this experience and how it had taken like two decade’s worth of research to create and then map out human “smell space”, aka all of the possible smells that we could ever experience, and how smell space has like a million dimensions because smells are really just chemicals and those can have so many different shapes and variations, as opposed to stuff like color which only has hue saturation and value and how they’d worked with mathematicians to figure out how to take this crazy giant multidimensional smell space and then chart out a route that somehow passes through virtually all of it as efficiently as possible and by then I was like wait if we’re smelling *all* of the smells, does that mean we’re gonna have to smell rotting fish and hot garbage and all of that too? And since the experience was supposed to only last like 5 minutes and there’s infinitely many smells out there, how fast are the smells coming out? Wouldn’t they all just blend into one? And by now both Mom and Momma were looking kind of nervous unbeknownst to Jamie who was just having a grand old time kicking his feet around in his high chair with his cool blindfold and we couldn’t exactly tell them to stop because the tech guy who set Jamie up had just left and closed the door and sealed us all in, probably so that all of the smells wouldn’t come out. So they counted us down and Mom grabbed Momma’s hand the way they only do if they’re either getting mushy with each other(ew) or bracing for impact, and I remembered that Jamie is like a super picky eater, and Momma must have remembered that if Jamie is a picky eater then he’s definitely a picky smeller too and so right as the countdown was almost over she shouted to Jamie “Jay

Jay! Hold your breath!” which isn’t very helpful advice to give since the whole thing was supposed to last five whole minutes and Jamie isn’t exactly an olympic diver and I know I definitely can’t hold my breath for the entire duration of Me and Julio Down by the Schoolyard and forget about even trying to do it for all of Bizarre Love Triangle, but I took a deep breath anyway and pinched my nose and braced for impact. As the countdown reached zero, the room began to hum, then shake, and all of this dust started flying around. I think I had my eyes closed for the first thirty seconds because I remember they were all watery when I opened them up again, and I saw poor Jamie just getting absolutely blasted with smells- they were coming so fast out of the nozzle that it literally pushed his hair back up off of his forehead and his shirt was flapping all over the place like those inflatable balloon men at car dealerships. He was squinting his eyes shut and covering his nose and mouth with his hands and tears were streaming from his face and he was kicking his legs and squirming around in the chair the way you squirm when you’re getting those terrible mouth molds with the gross pink putty at the orthodontist’s office. He couldn’t even go anywhere because they’d strapped him into the booster seat so he wouldn’t fall off, and I think they also strapped him down because he was definitely light enough that the smell blast would have knocked him clean off of the chair. I then looked over at Mom and Momma and they were huddled together and Mom had wrapped her cardigan around their heads to try and block some of it but it was made out of pretty thick yarn and the holes in it were so big that it didn’t end up helping very much at all. It had been like thirty seconds by now and the air was sort of mustard yellow, and I’d already done my first mini exhale which I kept trapped in my mouth so my cheeks puffed out. Across the room, Jamie’s face was turning a concerning shade of purple. As he tried in desperation to clamp his mouth shut with his fingers, he locked eyes with me and I saw exactly what I’d been dreading. A look of terrified resignation. It had been too long, and Jamie’s kicking had only made matters worse.

He had to take a breath.

Mom, Momma and I watched in horror as Jamie twisted, arched in his chair, spluttered, then took a pained gasp of the thick swirling stench. Momma usually has a pretty good spidey sense about these things and immediately scooted herself out of the way but Mom was still hiding under her cardigan and couldn’t see anything. I watched in slow motion horror as Jamie coughed twice, gagged, then assumed the classic hands-cupped-shoulders-hunched-eyes-watering-about-to-share-my-breakfast-with-everyone position. He turned away from the terrible smell spouting horn towards Mom. At the very same time, Mom (likely needing air) gingerly poked her pale face out from underneath the cardigan like a bear coming out of its cave and locked eyes with Jamie- every muscle in her face contracted from weariness to horrified realization. I watched in amazement at the scene unfolding before me- two mouths opening- one out of revulsion, the other out of pure fear. Sitting as far on the end of the bench as possible, Momma covered her eyes.

I don't remember much of the ensuing panic, but I do remember taking a breath at one point and getting absolutely assaulted with a wave of scents and... emotions? I was expecting it to smell all around awful, but instead it was just a bunch of really distinct not-individually-terrible smells that were all incredibly specific, all at once. When blended together all at once, the room smelled kind of like a hot blend of birthday cake, dried squid, and burning trash. Anyway, Jamie threw up on Mom and then Mom threw up on Momma and then the people running the ride threw us out of the booth but Jamie was still coughing and throwing up and we got really worried so Momma called the ambulance and they showed up and threw Jamie on a stretcher and then threw the stretcher in the ambulance and we got to ride in the back and there was so much stuff strapped on the walls and Jamie's face was all pale and his head shook around whenever the ambulance went over a bump. The paleness didn't bother me too much, but I didn't like the way his head shook around- it looked like he was dead even though his eyes were open and he was still breathing. Mom wasn't looking too hot either because she was still covered in vomit and sweating and shaking a little and Momma was asking the ambulance people a bunch of questions but then realized she should just let them do their job so she stopped asking them questions and just sat with us on the ambulance trunk bench and held Jamie's hand. When we got to the hospital they took Jamie away to a room but there wasn't enough room for all of us to fit in there so Mom and Momma went into the room with Jamie and the doctors and left me with some magazines in the waiting room. I actually didn't mind that so much because Mom and Momma were so stressed out already and I didn't really want to be stuck in the middle of that for a potentially long time so I just hung out by myself on one of the chairs and looked through some of the magazines, but the text was really small and all of the photos in there were just ads for boring stuff like golf clubs and door mats and industrial sized people shredders (like the ones next to the dumpsters in the parking lot behind the baseball fields) in all of these gross colors like mustard green and neon pink. So I flipped through the pages for like twenty minutes and Mom and Momma still weren't back so I started crawling around under the waiting room chairs pretending I was a navy seal crawling through a big sewer tunnel system looking for a way into some secret base, but there were a couple of other people in the waiting room and while I was crawling under one of the seats I accidentally bumped this old guy's leg and he jumped out of his seat which made me sit up fast and bump my head and he was like what the fuck and took the chair I was hiding under and lifted it like it was nothing and it scared the heck out of me and I started crying and he was like what the hell do you think you're doing and all I could do was apologize but he only got angrier so I ran away down one of the hallways after a doctor who was pushing a cart. I ran down a few corridors and kept taking turns until I was sure he wasn't chasing me and then I found a bathroom to lock myself in and splash water on my face and pee because I had to pee real bad by then anyways, and then I towed my face off with some paper towels until it was dry and I wasn't embarrassed about myself anymore. I looked in the mirror for a little bit after that and I did that thing where if you get really close to the mirror until your nose is almost touching it you kind of forget that you're looking at your reflection and suddenly it feels like a complete stranger is standing face to face with you and by then I usually get

freaked out and jump back. But it's kind of cool that you can forget yourself like that, kind of like how in dreams I forget who I am or what my name is or that I have a family or that I have to do things like go to school and eat and that long falls will break my legs because I've never broken my legs before in real life so I know if I fall in a dream that can't happen to me because I don't know what it would feel like. So I stayed in there a little bit longer and then I left and started just wandering around the halls for a bit. When I stepped on the floor tiles the soles of my sneakers made this nice echoey sound just like the hallways when afterschool is over and it's empty everywhere and dark outside and I'm just waiting around to get picked up. Anyway I remember taking a left turn at some point and ending up in this really wide/tall hallway that didn't look like it was part of the hospital at all- it had all of these pretty glass windows going all the way down, the actual real glass that's kind of bumpy and not perfect, and I walked down that hallway and outside to my left through the windows there was this beautiful tree with pink flowers all over it, and it was swaying and rustling a little bit in the sun, and I could just barely hear the sound of it rustling through the windows because one of them was cracked a little bit, and the wavy glass distorted the tree and stuff so it looked like it was shimmering around under the surface of a clear swimming pool. The floor in the hallway was all wood too and it looked really old, it was all creaky and worn and stuff and I could feel the hallway itself creaking a bit every time the wind blew. I stayed there for a while and just looked outside and I started thinking about Jamie and about how scared Mom and Momma looked, and then I started wondering if this was going to be some sort of pivotal landmark moment that informs the entire rest of my life and if I would somehow change into a completely different person if something really bad happened. I remember when I was younger I'd read so many comics with the trope where parents have kids who are really wonderful and kind and creative and then they go into high school and become really gross and depressed and moody and start doing drugs and being mean to everyone and it scared the hell out of me because it seemed like a completely involuntary thing, like maybe you're genuinely a really kind person and you love your parents, but then all of the sudden you hit puberty and then hormones take over your life and turn you into a terrible person and you do all sorts of irreversible damage and ruin your relationship with your parents and then they don't love you anymore and wish they never had a kid. The comics make it seem like it all happens in high school, but I'm pretty sure everyone's actually going through it right now because I see everyone else in my grade making friend groups and going on movie dates and using terrible pickup lines on each other and getting into fights and making up drama for the sake of drama. It's terrible and I hate it. But I do it too every now and then. I've actually gotten pretty good at it, the situational punchline jokes and the sick jabs. I remember Tanya from math class who is so sweet and always finishes her worksheets first so she can help other people out and always says good morning even to people she's not friends with. She didn't come to class one day because her little brother ran across the intersection after his dog and the two of them got run over and crushed together by a minivan. No longer boy, no longer dog, just one big smear of hairy paste. It was near the Target on Emery street. And even though it was a terrible situation I remember snorting for a moment and thinking about a stack of pancakes. I hate it so much and it makes me

sick, but I can't stop thinking that way sometimes. I told Mom about it and she said that everyone has those kinds of thoughts, like how sometimes she gets so angry at her coworkers who never invite her to things and make terrible jokes about her and are so passive aggressive all the time, and how she thinks terrible things about them that she shouldn't think. And that was nice of her to say but I feel like that's way more normal. Like Tanya didn't do anything wrong, and it's not like I had terrible beef with her brother- I didn't even know him that well. I remember he came in to class one day for family day and it was just the two of us hanging out on the green and purple round carpet near the corner and we played a pretty one sided game of connect four but he just kept laughing and giggling because he was having way more fun just dropping the pieces into the chutes and watching them show up through the holes in the grid, and I don't think he even knew the rules at all, but I do remember having a lot of fun just watching him get a kick out of stuff like that. I remember we kept waiting for Tanya to come back the next day but she didn't show up and so we thought it would be the day after that but she still didn't come and by the time she came back to school next month it was so weird and kind of sad because we weren't really sure what to say to her- she seemed like a completely different person. She wouldn't look people in the eyes and she mostly worked off to the side by herself or with her friend Maddie, who is the one redhead in our entire grade. She was like that for almost the entire rest of the year. I think she got a little bit better towards the end of the year because she knew she wasn't going to see anyone again until September since her family was flying back to Greece for the summer, and it caught us a bit by surprise. But when she came back in 6th grade after summer break she seemed a lot more cheerful. Even a little bit more than usual- she baked peppermint cookies for the whole class on the last day before thanksgiving break even though it wasn't even christmas yet, and I remember everyone was so happy and running around in circles from the sugar rush and also because it was Friday, and I remember looking across the classroom at her just sitting there on the edge of the desk, and seeing how she was just sitting there and smiling and watching everyone running around and having fun. She looked really old then.

Anyway I was standing there for a while but then one of the nurses walked by and asked me if I was lost and I said no I'm just looking for the bathroom so she pointed me back the way I'd come so I pretended to walk that way and then when she left I ran back to where I was because before she came I spotted some stairs through the window that went down into the garden. Way at the far end of the hall on the left there was a door that led to a sort of fire escape looking thing outside, and the door was locked(or at least the knob was), but the fitting was so old and busted that most of that little triangular latch was exposed, so I waited until it got quiet enough in the hallway and then stuck my finger in the fitting and popped the latch. The rust was so sticky and I pushed a little bit too hard because I bent a fold right through the middle of my thumbnail and it peeled up and all of that gross stuff, but by then I'd moved the latch just enough that I was able to just yank the door open by the handle. It was so pretty outside, it was a little bit cooler than I thought it would be since it was so sunny. I walked down the fire escape and it made kind of a big klanging noise but the wind kind of drowned it out so I didn't have to walk that quietly. The courtyard itself was pretty small- two of the sides of the courtyard were up

against the walls of the hospital, and if you stood in the middle and looked straight up you could see a perfect square of blue sky surrounded on all four sides. The other two sides of the courtyard weren't really sides, they just passed under these two skybridges that met at a right angle and opened out onto a larger part of the garden. When I got to the bottom I looked inside and realized that I was outside a different waiting room. It looked a lot fancier- there was a big white front desk and a lady sitting behind it and I could only see the top of her bun from behind the desk and the waiting room seats looked really comfy but there were only a few people actually waiting there- it was a lot less crowded than the one I'd come from just up the hill. I remember hanging on one of the lower branches of the tree and looking inside the waiting room and there was this one girl who looked a year or two older than me and she was sitting there arguing with her mom about something, not in a big way where you're yelling at each other but I think her mom was just nagging about something that she didn't want to talk about. There was this crazy metal strut thing connected to her leg with all of these pins, it almost looked like acupuncture but the pins were way too thick, and it honestly looked like it would hurt a lot but she didn't seem to pay attention to it much at all. Her mom got up at some point and went and talked to the front desk lady- it looked like they had been waiting there for a really long time. I sort of just hung and swung around on that branch for a while, kicking my legs around and pretending I was way up on a trapeze before realizing that the girl inside was staring straight at me. It gave me a start and I lost grip on the branch and fell backwards, and from inside the glass I saw her eyes widen. She was kind of plain looking. Straight black hair, kind of short, etc. One of her eyes was a slightly different shape than the other- she really did have an intense stare. I wonder if that was how I looked from the outside. But by then her mom came back from the desk and saw me outside the window and then there were suddenly two people staring at me at once, and by now my thumb had really started hurting because now there was dirt all up in the cut under my nail and I looked down and there was blood all over my arm that must have been dripping down when I was hanging on the tree. Her mom looked pretty concerned and turned back to try and get the front desk lady's attention, and I froze a bit and then ran back towards the fire escape because I wasn't really supposed to be there anyway, but before I went back through the glass door(made of real glass) I looked back down and the girl was still looking up through the window at me. She smiled and waved, and I waved back. And then I left, because it seemed like the right thing to do.

Anyway, I ended up going back home with Mom. Jamie had to stay at the hospital because whatever chemicals they were using to bind the smells together in that booth got all built up in his lungs for some reason and so his lungs are sticky now like those gross ads you see on TV when drug addicts smoke too much plastic. Mom apparently really wanted to stay with Jamie instead of Momma, but Momma sent her home with me because Mom looked more sick and tired and they didn't know how long it was gonna take to pump all of the goo out of his lungs. They have this big pipe cleaner thing that they're going to feed down his windpipe after clamping his mouth open so he doesn't choke, and they have to give him this drug that makes him continuously inhale so his lungs can stay still enough that they can try and loosen up some

of the goo with the pipe cleaner. It sounds disgusting and also pretty traumatizing, especially since he needs to be awake for the pipe cleaner part before they put him under anesthetic and do the full flushing process. I hate the idea of someone tickling your lungs from the inside. Anyway Mom and I drove all the way back home and it was like a two hour long drive because we hit rush hour traffic and Mom kept sneezing and she didn't say anything for most of the ride and I was kind of scared to say anything so I just sat there in the back seat and looked out the window at the cars stuck in the lane next to us. We had leftover spaghetti and made pesto for dinner and it tasted like the best thing ever. I think Mom felt bad about not talking to me on the car ride so she put on some light music and got out all of the ingredients and we piled all of the basil and walnuts and garlic and parmesan into the blender and she let me press the button which usually scares me because of the noise but it was fun watching the stuff fly around inside. I then helped her cut up a tomato with the orange plastic knife we got from cooking camp and she fried some bacon and ground it up and we piled it all onto the pasta, dolloped the chunky pesto on top, garnished it with the chinese chili oil we got from the H-mart downtown, and watched it melt onto the noodles. Neither of us had eaten pretty much since breakfast, and it tasted like the best thing ever. We ended up talking pretty late that night, she asked me about school and so I told her about all of the books I've been reading over free period and the weird hole in the ground I found in the yard behind the tetherball pole and how Luke has a new pet axolotl and Ewa is trying to teach herself how to sing so she's started singing all the time but she's really not that good and then Mom talked about how she used to get bullied a lot in elementary school and how she used to have dance parties with her little sister in their basement TV room and how one time she wrote and performed a short play for her middle school talent show about a family of crabs at a fish market who try and escape to the ocean and also about how she's worried about grandpa because he has no friends and how she feels bad because even though she works so hard as a teacher and supports us and all that she still feels like Momma ends up having to look out for her a lot when stuff like this comes up, and that she feels like she's never able to be that person for Momma. She called Momma by her real name Ivy, which she doesn't usually do- it was pretty late and she'd also had a glass of wine and she looked really sad and small when she said that. I kind of felt like I wasn't talking to my mom. But then we sat around a little bit longer and ate some chips and then went to bed. I stayed up kind of late just staring at the little glow in the dark stars on my ceiling, and I knew Mom was still awake in her room because when she's asleep she snores kind of softly, and I just lay there in bed. I thought about Jamie, and I wondered why I hadn't thrown up on that ride and if there was something wrong with my nose. I thought about Momma and how tired she must be staying up so late with Jamie at the hospital. I then thought about a bunch of other stuff, and I also kept on thinking about that girl I saw in the tree and how she smiled at me, and how that's the second time in my life that's ever happened- the first time was when we were on the train in the city three years ago. I kept thinking about her and how her eyes were kind of mismatched and how she kind of sat sideways in chairs the way my little cousin Asher does. I started really missing her even though she was kind of plain looking, and then I started getting bummed out because the hospital was in Oakville which is like an hour and a half drive

away from us and considering how many people live in the city there I probably wouldn't ever see her again. Then I thought for a while about Mom and Momma and how I still didn't know how they met, and then I just started thinking a lot about growing up and being an adult and what it must be like being a parent and stuff. Recently I've been thinking about how all grownups tell you to enjoy being a kid and have fun and do the stuff you want to do because these are the good years and they go away quickly and then you have to do job stuff and life gets hard and boring and repetitive, and how even though most people live to be like 50, 60, or even 80 years old, they really say that the best years of your life are the first 20 years of your life and how messed up that is- that you could live to be 80 but have to fit all of the fun and joy and happiness and exploration and learning and adventure into the first quarter of your life. It's kind of depressing and also feels really unfair. But then I also think about people like Ms. Yoshi who is 63 and teaches us sculpture and makes giant beautiful mechanical birds out of bones and wire and stuff in her backyard and is always talking about some cool new friend she met in the library last weekend, like some old artisan shoemaker or that one homeless guy she made friends with on the bus or that one college student she ended up recommending painting spots to or that one family of crows that she's trained to bring her bottle caps and trinkets and stuff for her art. And that's pretty cool and also makes me happy- I think cool old people are inspiring because they kind of fight against that pressure of having to do all of your important stuff early in life. But Ms. Yoshi also lives by herself, and I also wonder if that gets lonely sometimes. And I look at Mom and I hear about all of the fun stuff she used to do before she met Momma and I think about how different she is now, and how when you're married your life gets a lot smaller and more orderly and you have more stuff to worry about but also you don't have to worry about being lonely anymore unless you fight a lot or get divorced. And when you have kids it's the supposedly most amazing part of your life but Momma also says it's the scariest part of your life because you know that the next few decades of your life have suddenly been kind of decided for you, even if it's for a thing that you want to do, like starting a family. And even though I used to get kind of annoyed when Mom and Momma would fret about me doing stuff like scootering fast or going out to swim with my friends, I feel like I've started realizing more and more how terrifying it might be pouring all of your time and love and energy and care into one thing, except the thing is sentient and even though you try and teach it things and protect it from harm it also does whatever it wants to and you can never really know if it's truly safe. I think about how mad I was when Momma accidentally threw out one of the terrariums I was building, how there were so many little shrimp creatures and plants and weeds and stuff growing in there already and she washed it down the drain because she thought it was just a jar I'd filled up with river water and forgotten about. I dunno. Parenting seems hard. Working a job seems hard.

I don't think very much that I want to grow up.

It's been a while since I last wrote, but here are some things that happened recently:

-We got a pet frog and it kept jumping around the house and so we tied a little nametag to its leg that's light enough that it won't bother it

-Luke and I found a really cool hidden pond a few blocks north of the strip mall up the hill and we pulled a stick that was poking out of the water out of the water and the whole bottom part of the stick was covered in leeches so I started screaming and Luke started chasing me around with it but then both of us ended up getting bit up and I had maybe three or four and Luke had like 8 and his dad had to sit us both down in the bathtub and take them off one by one

-Mom had a big argument with Momma last week over something and was gone for most of the night but then she came back

-Jamie finally got back from the hospital after being away for two months. We went to visit him every day after school except for the days when I have soccer which are Tuesdays and

Thursdays, and on those days I save up the CapriSuns that we get after practice so I can give them to him, especially because he drank everything through a tube. Now he's back and walking around and talking and stuff but he has to wear this respirator mask thing that goes over his nose and mouth and mixes up a special chemical air soup that goes into his lungs and loosens up the glue in there a little, kind of like the ear drops Momma makes us use that make everything sound like you're underwater. Every now and then he starts coughing up a storm and then retches up a big blob of this tan looking sticky stuff, which apparently is a really good thing because that means that the glue is slowly coming out of his lungs. If he wears the mask for long enough and coughs enough stuff up and they do X rays and see that his lungs are clean enough they'll do one final cleaning and then he won't have to wear the mask anymore and he'll be good to go. Until then he has to avoid doing too much physical activity so he doesn't breathe too much. Also he has to leave the door open whenever he showers so the air he breathes doesn't get too humid because then it would condensate and he would drown. It's nice having him back home but every day he comes back from school crying or beat up and I realize how much his life sucks right now. Two of his friends don't hang out with him anymore because he looks like an alien with the big headgear and everyone talks about him behind his back now. When I hear him crying by himself late at night I can't sleep and so I dream about finding all of the bullies at his school and beating them up like Bruce Lee or Jackie Chan. But I can't fight too good so then I dream about inviting them over to a playdate and then trapping them in the garage. And then waiting until they're asleep and nailing them to the floor so they can't move. But I only think about that terrible stuff when I'm really mad and even when I do it just depresses me even more so I usually just go over and knock on his door and he opens it sometimes and we lie on his blue rocket ship carpet and stay awake until we get tired. Sometimes we take turns playing the little handheld football video game he has that I took the speaker out of so we don't get caught, and sometimes we read Garfield comics even though I don't really think they're that funny except for that one strip where Garfield misses a kick and his leg turns into a propellor and pulls him off the ground. But most of the time we just lie on our back and whisper about stuff but mostly stay quiet and just look at the glow in the dark stuff on his ceiling and he does that thing where when you lie on

your back you just put your arm up in the air for no reason and I do that sometimes too but then I get tired and just drop it on myself. He talks less around other people but talks more when it's just the two of us. Whenever we're in public or at some afterschool thing or hanging out he usually just stares at the people we're with unless we're with friends or family, and if I ever get bored I just stare at the air coming into and out of his mask and how his breath fogs it up whenever he exhales. There are these little circles under the front of the mask that turn red if he breathes too hard or too fast but he doesn't really get to run around too much anymore because he's not allowed to so it only really turns red if he's about to get really mad or start crying or if he's having a panic attack which I've only seen happen once in my life because I wasn't there the other time. Besides that he's pretty much the same, just quieter. We go on walks with Mom on the weekends when she isn't working and he tries to catch ducks sometimes if they swim too close to the edge of the pond. Whenever strangers drop their change or stuff on the ground he always walks over and picks it up and gives it back to them. He kicks the tetherball around by himself during recess even though you're supposed to punch it. He is still very much in love with the Indian waitress with the hummingbird tattoo at Etta's Breakfast Diner. He talks to himself whenever he's waiting to use the bathroom at home, probably because he doesn't care if I hear him. He's started keeping a scrapbook for strands of his hair but his idea is to keep doing it every day until it turns gray. Momma told him that he'd probably have to wait thirty or forty years for that to start happening but he didn't care so now he has like two college ruled lines' worth of hair in his notebook, and it all looks pretty much the same. I used to think about him all the time when he wasn't living with us, but now I don't think about him quite so much, even though we are closer now.

-I haven't been able to sleep very well at all, everything in my room looks like a face to me. The painting of the house on the wall behind my nightstand, the pile of pillows in the corner, the shadows made from the bumps on the wall. If I have to poop for a really long time I just sit and stare at all of the little dots in the floor tiles and I see faces there too, but then it's not so scary because the lights are on and I'm not trying to sleep. I talked to Jamie about it and he's never had that issue at all, he just has nightmares instead. I dunno what's better, to be afraid of being awake before you go to sleep, or being afraid of going to sleep and wanting to stay awake even if it's bad for you. I don't know how grownups sleep so well. Momma gets tired at like 10:30 every night and totally just conks out every time, no problem at all. It must be nice.