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May 2020

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Prince

Before I was old enough to have any real memories, I lived on Prince Street. The house was haunted. I used to sleep on my back in between my parents and see tornadoes in the ceiling. The chairs moved in the dining room and one time I'd seen a friend of my mom's drown in a pile of trash at the bottom of a staircase. His name is Dave. He's still alive and well and he came to our house for Thanksgiving.

There were apparently no stairs at Prince Street. It was a one-floor house, according to Dad, a fact that I relearn every time I ask him about it, which isn't often. We haven't lived there in twenty or so years. My parents rented the apartment when they moved to New York City in the mid-nineties, and now it's filled with furniture and people who don't know us. Sometimes I want to go back there. But I'm not sure if that's allowed, or if the people who live there now would let me inside, even if I told them that I lived there first. I don't know what kind of people they are. I imagine a middle-aged couple spooning each other in the same spot on the bed that I used to hallucinate on, oblivious to the tornadoes happening above their heads. I wonder if they have children, and if their children can see things.

When Dad tells me about the architecture of Prince Street, it's hard for me to believe in it, because in my mind, Prince Street had no shape and was only visions.

I don't have visions anymore. I don't see anything unusual over the course of a normal day, or even an abnormal day. A toothbrush is a toothbrush. The only things in my closet are clothes and extension cords. There are no tornadoes. There's no imaginary golden man running around in my room. Also, I want to say that I've never done shrooms

or tripped on acid. I'm scared that something will snap in my brain and I'll never come back. I can barely come back from things that have happened to me when I'm sober. Like heart breaks and people who have wronged me.

Mom gave me a talk about drugs before I went to college. She told me that the first time she'd ever tried acid was when she was a teenager, and that the trees had screamed at her, and she never wanted to do it again.

Here are some things about me. My name is Willa. I grew up in New York. I'm adopted. I have a Chinese name, *Qimeng* (洪浩齐萌), which I don't use, and which is derived from the mung bean. Mung beans grow in mud and people put them on pad thai. I don't like the way they taste and mom is allergic. My birthday is January 10th, 1998. I don't know the exact hour or location I was born, but I know that I was found somewhere at a food market in Nanchang, a city in the Jiangxi Province of China. I was speaking already. I was saying the words "baba" and "didi," which means "dad" and "little brother." I don't remember any Mandarin now. And until recently, I've never had any desire to learn it. The last time I tried learning Mandarin was when I was four, and not by conscious choice; Mom had signed me up for it, and I spent many Saturdays in the classroom getting yelled at for incompetence.

I have two sisters. One younger sister, adopted separately from the Hunan Province, and one older sister, who is my biological sister, and who I've only just discovered this April through 23andMe. But I don't really consider myself a middle child. I don't have the temperament, which I'm told is a "well-balanced" temperament.

I attended a Quaker school near Union Square in Manhattan. I didn't like school. I couldn't talk to teachers without crying, and I didn't listen or pay attention, and I didn't do my homework. I didn't care about growing lima beans, and I certainly didn't care about the concept of queuing in line.

But I liked a few things. I liked drawing. I liked the Trix yogurt in the cafeteria, before one of the mothers started an initiative to ban high levels of sugar and salt from the cafeteria. And I liked French, too, which I began studying in middle school, and continued to study until high school graduation. In class, we watched French cartoons, which mainly revolved around three things: *sorcières*, *la guerre*, and *les bicyclettes*, which mean "sorcerers," "war," and "bicycles." We rote memorized verbs from paperback textbooks, which was easy for me, and I'd had two teachers, one of them named Shirin, who was having an affair with the Spanish teacher Señor Quinonez, and the other named Tom, who brought tiny tea cups to class for his espresso and had a French wife, who I'd never learned the name of. I liked French. I also liked the twenty-minute silences during Meeting for Worship on Friday mornings. Beyond Meetings for Worship, though, we as a school were not particularly Quaker. During those meetings, I felt loud and restless. There was a time I felt grave and reverent, but that was only once, and that came much later, like the week before I graduated.

I generally haven't figured out my relationship to religion or spirituality. I used to have a babysitter named Lourdes who one time had left her rosary on the nightstand of my bed. I put the beads in my mouth while she was in the bathroom. The beads were tiny, red and translucent. They looked like berries, the kinds that forest fairies might eat or put in each other's hair. I was raised Buddhist. Partly. I'm not sure that I identify as Buddhist.

If I am, I'm not a very good one, because I'm scared of change, and I'm scared of dying. I have a sense that if I let go of these two fears, something in my life will improve. I'm not sure what. But I don't think I'm ready right now to let go of things that I've always been comfortably afraid of.

I'm also not good at being present. I'm nostalgic. I think about memories too much. They feel like the bulk of what I am. I think that they are the bulk of what most things are. And when I think about it, there is no actual way to be present, because the present isn't real; it slips into the past and into the future faster than we can perceive. I'm not saying this to sound smart, it's just true.

I haven't quite figured out my relationship to being Chinese, either. Being adopted is complicated. The word "adoptee" sounds stupid to me, and it also looks silly written down on a page. It's too much like the word "employee" or "yankee." It's not graceful. I overall don't feel Chinese enough to qualify as Chinese, and although that's not a wholly original thing to say as an Asian American, it's how I feel. Sometimes I don't feel anything enough to qualify as anything. Sometimes it helps for me to think about myself in terms of likes and dislikes.

For example, I like paintings of mangos. I also like looking at haikus when they aren't translated into English. I don't know what they mean, because I can't read Japanese, but I like the way the characters look on the page. The English alphabet on paper looks so clumsy. I like reading and writing letters and drawing faces, especially of angry girls. I like animals and doing impressions of other people and watching documentaries about outer space and the solar system. I like music and the sound of

water running. As long as it's coming from a natural source, and not a bathtub or a sink, because then I get anxious about the environment.

I don't like milk, or the smell of broccoli or Brussels sprouts. I don't like having conversations with people who talk about TV shows that I've never seen. I don't like mean humor. I can't currently think of other things that I don't like, but I'll remember later.

After Prince Street, we moved into a small apartment complex that was across the street from a bakery and next door to a painter named Rob Mango. Mom told me that Rob Mango was the most poetic name she'd ever heard. Or maybe I thought that or said it, and Mom thought his name was just okay.

Rob was the superintendent of the building. Sometimes when we had a pipe leak or something wrong with the ceilings or with the burglar alarm, which was often, he'd come over to the apartment. He didn't speak that much to me, and I can't remember if this was because he was shy or because I was young. He liked my drawings.

The June I graduated from high school, I got fully drunk for the first time at the prom after-party, and also broke up with all of my friends, because at that point in the year they had gone too far in chipping away at my self-esteem and something told me that I needed to preserve it, that whatever was left of it would be valuable to me later in life.

I talked to none of them after graduation. I started reading Dostoevsky over the summer, instead. Dostoevsky used to be a name like Proust to me, a name stamped with

sophistication and that authored none of the books that I'd ever read. Books that held the secrets of the universe and were reserved for a select intelligent few. But Dostoevsky's novels are easy to read. They're very long, but he describes emotional states and desires in very simple terms, even when they aren't simple. So I took Russian my first year of college.

In language classes, I learned the verbs to eat, to rise, to read, to love, to move, to fall, to take away, to give, to throw, to remember, to have a social life, to fall up the stairs, to ignore your mother's phone calls, to feel indebted, to have bad sex, to be with someone you aren't in love with, to be filled with hate, to feel forgotten.

I'm good at grammar, but my weakness is tenses. I don't have a natural intuition for when to use "I ate" versus "I had eaten." There are actual terms for these tenses. Past tense is one of them, and I forget the other.

One morning when it was raining very hard, I walked down to the park by myself to watch the cars. I like the sound of the cars on wet pavement. The sound reminds me of rollers in paint.

I used to be an art teacher's assistant when I was fifteen. I was in charge of cleaning paintbrushes, and helping third graders printmake on linoleum. The teacher wore a smock that never had any paint on it, and her name was Andrea. She used to teach me when I was in third grade. I don't think she remembered scolding me back then, but I do. I always remember these things. Her top and bottom lip were the same size, and I'd never seen her hair down. I don't usually think about her. But sometimes I imagine her life, and for some reason, I picture her living in Brooklyn with a boyfriend who is

constantly on the couch and who never wears shoes. I picture the whole of post-graduate life in New York City to look like this, even though I know it doesn't.

When it started getting colder, I walked back up the hill to Broadway. On my way back to my dorm, I passed a Halal cart and a girl trying to light a cigarette under her umbrella. I recognized her from a seminar we took together last year, but I decided not to say hello because I didn't want to start a conversation. Not because I'm unfriendly, but because I just sometimes don't want to.

I took the elevator upstairs to the seventh floor and changed into dry clothes. I spent the rest of the afternoon reading *Exit West*, a novel that I'd never heard of until the week it was assigned. *Exit West* is about two lovers in unnamed war-torn country, who have illicit meetings in the middle of the night and discover magic doors that teleport them across the border into other nations. During one of their night meetings, the woman sneaks the man up to her apartment. They listen to jazz and take psychedelic mushrooms together while sitting cross-legged on the floor, and as they gaze at her lemon tree outside on the balcony, their hearts get so full of love that they start crying.

I read the book lying on my back in bed. Declan sat by my feet propped against the wall. He was reading a hardcover novel by Haruki Murakami. Sometimes he reached over and rubbed my ankle without taking his eyes away from the page. I remember liking that he didn't look at me.

When he was reading, he didn't close his mouth all the way and his eyes moved from side to side in little bits, like Okazaki fragments, and I liked that, too.

I was in Woodstock last weekend. I was there crewing on the film set of a graduate student named Jungyoon, who studied at the Columbia MFA program, and who I'd never met before. I was there for five days, sleeping in the basement of a two-story bed and breakfast with twelve other people. I didn't know anybody, which was why I went. Many of them were older than me and everybody smoked. Including me. Someone told me that they were impressed by the fact that so small a girl could have such great lungpower.

We were awake at five A.M. every morning. We slapped hand warmers, rolled tobacco, ate egg and cheese croissants mass-ordered from Dunkin Donuts, strained neck muscles hauling equipment from the truck to the woods. I carried a roll of tape on my belt. I wore a baseball cap and said things like "standby" and "copy that" into a walkie radio all day long. I said "shot four Charlie, take four" and clapped slates. During lunch breaks, we ate tomato soup out of paper cups, lit each other's cigarettes, complained about the cold. The air was fresh up there. When the day wrapped around seven o'clock we'd pile into a van and drive home and roll joints on the living room coffee table, and because smoking weed makes me anxious, I'd go to the basement and think about how I didn't want to go back to the city.

The Tuesday we got back, I spent the day in Hungarian Pastry shop reading *The Mill on the Floss* for my Victorian Literature class. I wrote words in the margins of my book, words like "industrialization" and "dramatic irony," terms that always seem important in the context of analyzing literature, but that I never feel any connection to.

The Mill on the Floss is about a woman with strong passions and an emotional temperament who eventually drowns when saving her brother's life. The protagonist's name is Maggie. I had a best friend in pre-school whose name is Maggie, but they're not anything like each other. While reading this book, I was sitting next to two old women who were talking to each other about their nicotine addictions. One of them said that when she wakes up in the middle of the night, she tastes cigarettes in her mouth. The other woman asked her if her husband knew, and I don't remember the conversation beyond that. After an hour of half-focusing, I finished my cup of coffee and left my change in the tip jar. Then I left and walked home.

It felt like something was rotting in my mouth. Tooth pain. My head felt like a bunch of tangled cords and wires getting pulled tighter and tighter, and all I could think about was that I hated Sundays, and about the director's monitor at Woodstock, how I spent all day sometimes coiling and uncoiling the cables that connected the monitor to the camera, and then carrying them on my back to somewhere else.

I went to the dentist yesterday at 10 A.M. He poked around in my mouth with some metal tools that I don't know the names of, took an X-Ray, squinted at it, told me that he couldn't see anything wrong, and then referred me to the oral surgeon next door.

"Are you in pain?" he asked.

"Yes," I said.

"Alright," he said. He wrote something down on a card. He gave it to me, made a self-deprecating comment about his handwriting, and told me that the oral surgeon was a

left turn out the building, and then down a block and a half. He gave me a copy of the X-rays that he took of my teeth. I looked at them and thought of Yorick.

When I got to the oral surgeon, he just looked at my teeth and told me to go to a root canal specialist, and I walked down a few more blocks, holding my jaw, thinking about all of the different professions in the world.

The receptionist at the root canal specialist's office said that I looked young. She called me "sweetheart." This happened to me once, at the DMV, when I was obtaining my drivers' permit this summer. Someone had told me that I looked like I was ten years old and asked me if I had a guardian or a parent accompanying me.

The root canal specialist that saw me was Russian. I told him that I could say some things.

"Say something," he said. I told him "zdravstvuyte, ya studentka," which means: "hello, I am a student." He said that I had a good accent. Then he asked me to open wide, and after blowing cold air onto my tooth, said that the nerve in my tooth had died, and that he needed to extract it immediately. This is the second time I'd ever gotten a root canal. The first one I got in high school. I don't have strong teeth.

There was not much to do in the dentist's chair besides lie still, and keep my mouth open, and try not to think about how dry my tongue is, and about all the things that could go wrong if a tool slipped, or if my tongue made a sudden movement. So I passed the time thinking about other things. I thought about what would happen if the dentist numbed my mouth, took out all of my teeth with pliers, scooped out all the nerves, replaced them with porcelain posts, and then put all the teeth back in. My teeth would always be white and beautiful and hard, and would never hurt again.

I thought about something I learned from my American Literature class, which is that the body is a public object, open to public scrutiny at all times, and that existing is a public act, open to people's judgments and projections and anxieties. When I'd learned that, it made me want to wrap myself in a blanket and lock myself in a tower.

I thought about being sixteen and waiting for the subway in the winter. I wore glasses back then, which always felt heavy on my face. I dressed in unisex clothes that were always too big for me. I never felt sexy. I developed around that time a hyperactive sixth sense for mean girls, for backhanded comments and passive aggression, a paranoia that I've carried with me up until now and that's probably ruined some potential friendships. In high school, while listening to music, my mind would get full of all of these words and phrases that I wanted to write down and put into a book, and sometimes I'd stand in front of the mirror and say: I'm going to do something so great and incredible, and I will be famous, and all of you bitches will be sorry!

I thought about how I didn't start sleeping in my own bed until relatively late, when I was around nine years old. I liked sleeping next to Mom. And sometimes she told me stories, many of which she made up on the spot, and only one of which I remember with some clarity.

The story was about a man who was a talented storyteller, but he was born with an ugly nose. He was made fun of for his nose by everyone who lived near him, and only one woman was kind to him, so he fell in love with her. But another guy was into her, too, and he stole all the storyteller's lines to try and court her into marrying him. When she finds out it wasn't him that was writing the stories, I don't clearly remember what

happens, but she races across some grassy hills to meet the original storyteller in the middle of the night, and they kiss.

I've always liked love stories, which was something I didn't have in common with many of the cousins and friends I used to play with as a child. They liked cars and destroying things. Some liked ripping the heads off of dolls and screaming and seeing people in cartoons get hit in the face with food. I didn't. I liked when heads were intact. I liked when people followed the rules, and most of all, I liked love stories.

I thought about my first boyfriend. I met him in my Russian class, and his name was Adam. We deflowered each other at five A.M. on my nineteenth birthday on his sweaty twin-sized dorm bed, and when we were finished, we ate dry Cheerios out of one of the plastic cups from the dining hall. He liked The Beatles, so we listened to The Beatles. I remember that he had dark blue sheets and that he had pleated window shades, the kind that have drawstrings, and the kind that never shut evenly.

I thought about Patrick. He was Irish Catholic. We stayed up until dawn during the snow day and read each other's writing. For a month, we'd get drunk on Redstripes and fuck. Sometimes he smoked cigarettes. When I found out on May 18th, 2018, that he left me for Sophia, I went out that night with my cousin's friend Brent, drank until I couldn't see anymore, and threw up on his pants. Brent had empty gages in his ears and a small tattoo of a dinosaur on the inside of his lip, and he had to take me home in a taxi. He rubbed my back while I sobbed "why why why" into my knees. I got up early the next morning, poured myself a tall glass of orange juice, watched the royal wedding with Dad, and didn't think about anything except the sound of horses' hoofs on the TV and the

color of Queen Elizabeth's key-lime pie outfit, which Dad hated, and which I had no ability that morning to have any opinion on. Sometimes I can still feel something hurt.

I thought about novels from the Victorian era, how characters get red in the face and cry and hysterically throw themselves onto couches. I wonder why we don't do this anymore.

I probably thought about many other things in the dentist's chair, but I can't remember them now. I do know that I fell asleep at one point. When everything was done, he told me that it was okay to sit up. He told me to spit and wash out my mouth. He said I was free to go.

When I got back from the dentist, I took two Motrins and a Tylenol. I listened to jazz, and rearranged the furniture in my dorm. I rolled up the carpet, almost died lifting the bookshelf off of the dresser, vacuumed, and Swiffered. During that time, I didn't think about anything except for the way it felt for my arms to move things around.

I used to have a best friend named Olivia. We were friends from second grade to sixth grade, and I used to call her house phone from my house phone, which was located in the kitchen, and ask to copy her math homework. I liked the way the number keys gave way when I pressed them. While Olivia and I would talk, I'd coil the phone wire around my fingers and try to stretch it out and make it straight.

Olivia and I liked pretending to be cats. We would call each other Snowpaw or Leopardfur, and spend hours on my parent's bed wrestling and biting each other's hands and pulling each other's hair and sometimes actually hitting each other. She was good at

math. I wasn't. At least not any math besides Sudoku and Proof-Based Geometry, which I always found soothing.

Olivia was aware of this, and she let me copy her homework. But we weren't always good to each other. She told me that I had big pores and a hairy round face, which made me look like a gorilla, "Gorilla Willa." I made fun of her for having acne and for getting her period early. Sometimes we ignored each other for days.

When we were both ten years old, we sat in the Young Adults section of Barnes & Nobles and read "Forever" by Judy Blume. "Forever" is about two teenagers having sex for the first time. Sometimes we'd pause while reading and ask each other what things meant, things that we've never heard before, like "rubbers" and "going steady" and "coming" (who was coming? who was going? I never understood). Olivia and I agreed never to have sex. But I was always curious. Sometimes when I was alone, I'd go back and read the book and wonder about things.

The first time I had Froot Loops was on one of my birthdays. Maybe my seventh. I don't remember exactly when, but my mom finally consented to let me try. My parents didn't keep sugar cereal or soda in the house, nor did they let me play with Bratz dolls or watch Spongebob, which was why I liked going to Olivia's house. Olivia had a Nintendo DS and her parents let her watch TV. We liked watching Animal Planet and the TV-movie called "Mother, Will You Let Me Sleep With Danger?" which is about a teenager who dates a serial killer, and I remember that he dies at least three times before he is actually dead, like most villains.

Sometimes we looked up weird things on the Internet, like snails having sex or lions mating. And Olivia had the best snacks. She kept bags of *konpeito*, which are colorful Japanese sugar crystals, the kinds that the sootballs eat in *Spirited Away*, and sometimes we'd sneak them when her parents went to bed.

Olivia and I would take bubble baths together. They were always in the morning. I was enamored with her shampoo bottle. It was very pink and very tall.

Most of the emails I receive are about something% off deals at bookstores that I don't ever go to, and sale specials at online stores that I no longer look at, and student organizations that send three emails in a row correcting what they'd said in previous emails.

Sometimes I think about how I will just keep accruing more and more memories, and my whole life will be stretched out like a long pull of taffy.

A couple weeks ago, I went swimming in the pool at Dodge. I didn't bring a bathing suit to college, so I went swimming in my clothes. The two lifeguards were girls in red shirts, both blonde, and they kept their arms folded and wore sweatbands to keep the hair out of their faces. They told us that we weren't allowed to use the diving board, that it was meant only for the Columbia Swim Team. Neither I nor Katie nor Daileny were on the swim team, so we stayed at the far end of the pool, treading water and doing nothing impressive. There was a trampoline at the corner of the gymnasium that divers used for practice. We weren't allowed to use that, either.

Katie kicked water into my mouth while showing me how to breaststroke and I got sick a couple hours after that. Katie used to be on the swim team. I was never on any swim team, but when I was younger, after the school day ended, I'd take swim classes at the pool around the corner from my house with an elementary classmate who I no longer see or hear of anymore. Her name is Gio. Giovanna. I think that's an Italian name, even though she wasn't Italian. The swim teacher was named Lars. He had a tattoo on his right bicep. I remember one day when he told me to hang on tight to his back and hold my breath, and when he took me for a ride underwater, I thought that I was going to drown.

In the locker room, we passed an old naked Chinese woman who was leaving the sauna and toweling off her gray hair. When I saw her, I thought about what I might look like when I'm older.

Katie put my wet clothes into a plastic Morton Williams grocery bag. On the walk back, it was cold outside and our hair was still wet. We said goodbye. She took the clothes up to her room (I forgot to ask for them back) and I sat on my bed with a fever. That day was a nice day.

I spent the day after that in library blowing my nose with toilet paper. I thought about all the surfaces I've touched with my fingers. I visualized a pink bioluminescent trail of germs.

I'd sat down that day with the intention of writing. And while I was sitting down, I thought about the total amount of times, in contemporary literature, that the adjective "cheap" is used to describe beer. I don't think I'd ever heard beer in literature described as "expensive."

Declan had gotten back from Italy that day. He climbed into bed with me and gave me a notebook from Milan filled with his cartoons. Then he got a sore throat and had to take the train back to his home in Sunnyside, Queens. He takes the 7 train to 46 Bliss Street.

I like the 7 train because it's the kind of train that rides above ground, and when I'm on it, I like looking at the sun glinting off of the East River and off of the windows of the low-rise buildings.

My godmother Sharon took me this week to what was called Psychic Bootcamp, which she'd bought two tickets for over the summer. I want to be psychic, so I went. The event was held at Open Center, a small café from the front with a ten-item menu. Sharon tried to order food. The woman at the counter was wearing purple lipstick and Russian hat, and she made a facial expression that could be interpreted as either confused or judgmental. She told Sharon that they were out of everything except for bags of vegan Cheetos. And a few teas.

The psychic's name was Laura. She told me to think of someone close to me who had "crossed," which is another word for saying "died," and I thought of Grandpa Rick, my mom's dad. We didn't talk as much as I wanted to when he was alive, but he was the only one I could think of.

I closed my eyes. I tried to encounter him in my mind. I planned to ask him advice about my mother's health problems and what to do about them.

When it wasn't working, Laura said that I have to first establish a "sign." She said that the "sign" has to be something unique, like a pink dolphin or a green antelope, or a

unicorn, and that once this sign is established, we'd start seeing it everywhere, whether on a postcard, or in a textbook, or in snippets of overheard conversation, and that was supposed to be the crossed person communicating with us.

I asked Grandpa Rick, with my eyes still closed, to send me a blue mouse with a hat on it. And also to please send me the number 333.

Laura said that time isn't linear on the other side. She said that the future informs the present and the present informs the past, and vice versa, all around, and that it is all going to make sense in the end, and when we all die, there will be nothing left to misunderstand or to communicate to one another.

I haven't seen 333 yet, nor have I seen or heard anything about blue mice in top hats, but it's only been three days.

When we're alone together, Sharon asks me about school. I tell her that I'm graduating this year. She asks me how I feel about that, about graduating. I tell her what I normally say to people when they ask me that, which is "scared." But sometimes I feel like that's not true, and sometimes when I say I'm scared to graduate, I feel like I'm reading off of a small-talk script. Usually I don't know what I'm feeling about anything that is not going to happen in the following immediate days, like papers due and when will my tooth pain end.

I used to spend a lot of time on the floor of my house watching movies on my DVD player. I'd watch cartoons like *Lady and the Tramp* and *Alice in Wonderland*, and I'd never want to do anything else for days.

"Alice," said a woman sitting under a tree. "Will you kindly pay attention to your history lesson?"

"I'm sorry, but how can one possibly pay attention to a book with no pictures in it?"

"My dear child, there are a great many good books in this world without pictures."

These weren't my favorite lines in the movie but they're the ones I remember the most. And I think Alice did something after that, like take the flower crown off of her head and stand up with Dinah under her arm and walk away into the bushes.

My dad and I used to play poker when I was younger. When I wasn't winning, I'd get angry and quit.

Declan has a small concert in Sunnyside Queens for Halloween. The adults roll joints in the bedroom while Declan and Jacob and I sit on the couch in the basement, playing Katamari on the game cube.

Katamari is a Japanese game from the early 2000s. You are a tiny green-colored character. You're supposed to push around a ball much bigger than yourself that looks like a giant *konpeito*, and the ball sticks to everything it touches. While you're rolling the ball, you are supposed to pick up as many objects as possible, set against a time limit, and

you start by picking up small things, like mouse traps and flowers, then bigger things, like crabs and flopping fish and black bears and people, and then coniferous trees and buildings and ferris wheels, and then cities and clouds and rainbows, until the ball has so many things stuck to it from the world that it gets really heavy and is almost impossible to move around anymore.

After the party is over, and the adults leave, I help Declan and his mom clean up the empty beer bottles in the living room. When we're alone, I put my hand on his face.

My computer clock is four minutes faster than my phone clock. The discrepancy makes me anxious. I've tried to fix the clock multiple times in Settings, but it doesn't work. I'm going to go to a repair store and get it fixed.

There was a point in my life when I thought that "healthy" meant "bad-tasting," which was why one time, I sprinkled Parmesan cheese all over watermelon.

I don't think that anymore, but sometimes I witness social interactions and wonder if "having many friendships" means "having normal social skills" which means "being weird."

I hope that one day I can wake up with social skills. Sometimes I think of the Sims video games, and how easily they can make friends with each other, and how liking one another is indicated through a plus sign above their heads, and how easy it is to keep friends in that game; all you have to do is repeat the same joke over and over until the relationship bar is full. Then you're all set.

There are a few things I like to do with my hands. I like to roll joints but I don't like to smoke them. I like the repetitive motions of knitting even if I don't wear the things that I knit. I like peeling the whites off of my fingernails.

I think about Andrea. I imagine her biking home after art class and stopping for a drink at the Mexican bar near school with one of the science teachers. I imagine her smoking a cigarette and putting it out against the side of a building. I imagine her going home to a small apartment in Brooklyn and frying carrots in a pan, and being asked how her day was, and replying to whoever is asking her that her day was fine but that kids are too loud.

I imagine her setting an alarm for the next day, when she has to unlock her bike again and ride to school and spend the day telling children "five more minutes" and "please don't put your linoleum in the sink" and "are you listening" and "Lily go to the principle's office now" and "Willa can you get the paintbrushes from the other room," and I think about how I've only seen this version of her.

I'm in the library at the university. I'm sitting at a wooden cubicle. I'm wearing black clogs and a light purple hat. I'm thirsty. I have a twenty-page paper due in a week. But I am tired of hearing people talk about their impending assignments here, and I am tired of sharing about my own, so I'm not going to talk about that. It's no longer interesting to me.

I would rather think about many other things. Like the snow outside. I hope that there will be a snow day tomorrow. I hope that my visions will come back. I wonder where they've gone, and how they got lost in the midst of everything.