

Primordial Ooze

There is a place where reality and dreams overlap, barely coherent, when you get that awkward sensation of falling and trying to catch yourself; drifting aimlessly. Suddenly you are interrupted by a full body jerk. Its medical name is hypnagogic myoclonic twitch; confusion, the victim's brain struggles to make sense, misinterpretation, and overcompensation - a lot like turning forty.

I've groped around in this primordial ooze trying to understand what I find incomprehensible for quite a while now. How can an eternity go on forever, when everything else has a beginning and an end? I am so exhausted with the finite life I am currently the star of I cannot imagine it never ending.

I was texting. I admit it. I was texting and driving. I was texting about stupid work frustrations. As I am prodded and poked in the ER I drift to my first memory - the first genuine memory I have of myself.

The sun shone gentle and warm from behind me as I sat on a lush carpet of tender spring grass. My porcelain cherub legs stretched out in front of me, as I delicately glided my tiny hand over the blades of grass being very careful to touch only the tips, allowing them to tickle my palm. My eyes caught one

thick blade in particular then another, and another. Suddenly the serene bond between me and the grass turned into mania as my eyes darted from one blade to the next. My innocent eyes focused on each individual piece as to give it its rightful acknowledgement before rapidly moving on to the next. Single blades turned into rows of blades turned into rows and rows and rows infinite. My chest began to ache, a quiver up my spine turned to pins and needles at the base of my neck. The gentle sun turned on me and began burning my skin as sweat beads dripped down my temples and onto my neck. I bolted up to my feet, thighs itching from the grass and quivering from the panic. I ran unsteadily into the house screaming,

"Mommy! Mommy!"

She was standing at the kitchen sink peeling vegetables and gazing out the window into our backyard. She stopped humming a familiar song, and turned just as I plowed into her buried my face into her thighs.

When I was growing up my mother spent a lot of time in the kitchen. She would add pinches of this and dashes of that; never followed a recipe. Her food was ambrosia from the gods. While she cooked she always sang the same song:

*When I was just a little girl,
I asked my mother what will I be?*

*Will I be pretty?
Will I be rich?
Here's what she said to me:
Que sera, sera
Whatever will be will be;
The future's not ours to see
Que sera, sera.*

"What on earth happened?" She questioned as she gently tilted me back, and knelt down, so she could do a visual inspection for injuries.

"The grass, mommy, is supposed to go on forever."

"No, it ends at the curb," her face relaxed as she sighed with relief. She stood up, placed the vegetable peeler on the counter, and straightened the front of her apron. Her apron was covered with tiny roosters to match the wallpaper in our kitchen.

"It's not supposed to," I insisted. Things just get in its way. It should go on forever."

I grabbed her finger in my miniature hand and tugged her urgently to our front door.

"Look," I pointed across the street - "grass there, and there and there -" I pointed to each side of our yard. "There is just stuff in its way."

I looked up at her stunned face. Her eyes were searching anywhere for an answer; trying desperately to understand why her child was in such agony over blades of grass. It wasn't the grass. It was the frustration, the pain, the sweat, the pins

and needles - the first time I tried to understand something seemingly not understandable - the end of something. My first memory - too many obstacles getting in the way was also my first panic attack. Age four.

Turning forty sucks. Turning forty in a hospital with broken bones from a failed attempt to commit suicide by throwing yourself in front of a moving car sucks even more.

"Miss Sadie, Miss Sadie?" A distant ethereal Southern voice was calling me.

"Can you hear me? I need you to wake up." As I was regaining awareness, the enormity of reality and my failure crashes over me like storm waves - I am still alive. The nurse is talking in a calm, precise voice - weather banter:

"Let's welcome some sunshine into your room. Such a lovely day today, supposed to be in the low 90s by this afternoon; in May. Can you believe it? Sign of a hot summer."

She tears open the vertical blinds, and they are left methodically swaying back and forth from her enthusiasm, taunting me.

"Oh my God. Shut up," I plead. She acts as if she didn't hear a word I said.

"I'm going to raise you up a bit," she says with a question mark politely dangling, although she's already begun making the top portion of the hospital bed lift me up several degrees.

"You are blessed," she continues as she drops the bed control, then straightens and tucks the sheets and blankets with military precision. I'm not sure how nurses are trained to make order out of chaos. I'm not sure they don't just ignore the chaos.

"Only one broken leg, a couple of broken ribs, and some lacerations and bruising," she cheerfully reports. She takes my vitals, attempts some additional pleasant conversation then leaves with a promise to return and check on me. I'm sure she has to say that.

I lay there uncomfortably disoriented. I had forgotten the simplest things, like my mother's maiden name, what I'd had for dinner last night, where I kept the twenty dollars I hide from myself in case of emergencies. I needed to call work, and get a substitute, I'd hit a road block with this thought. I didn't know what to tell my principal when I called. I was becoming agitated and panicky. I immediately wanted to call my doctor. My conversation would go something like this,

Dr. Williams, I'm sorry to wake you. It's me, Sadie Anderson. I was just in a horrible accident, or I dreamed I was in a horrible accident. There was a Hummer and a soccer mom with blond hair; she waved politely after I rammed my car into her. There are glass shards everywhere; my face is bleeding pretty badly - I can taste the blood. The other drivers keep

passing me by. Anyway, do you think I have Alzheimer's? Should I go to the emergency room, or call 911?

Then, I imagine him hanging up without saying anything while I am muttering, "never mind." He would never hang up. It would never end that simply.

I always think I am in the early stages of Alzheimer's. There is an epic battle roaring in my brain. On one side I can speak eloquently, remember vast vocabulary, and play the piano perfectly like I did when I was 15. Then, there's the other side, screaming,

"No way! You, my friend, are an idiot. You are incapable of having a conversation without losing your place. You also cannot go to the store without a list you must check at least twelve times before you consider heading to the check-out, and when you get home you will realize as you pull in the driveway you forgot something anyway. Stop already with the over achieving, you imbecile. Settle, just settle, for average. You will never make sense of it all!" On any given day I can be seen fighting on either side.

My successful brain commands me to take action; and I just sit there awkwardly grasping for words; rolling my knuckles over the ebony keys of the piano; reading and rereading my tattered lists. Sadly, I don't think there's a solution for being forty

or for having a lost soul and I am both forty and lost. I am overwhelmed. I am constantly in a fog. I exist passionless.

There are "perks" to being forty I hear. The clichés typically spouted by over forty women convincing themselves forty isn't so bad,

"Forty is when you learn to say NO, and stop feeling guilty you're letting someone down." Frankly, I never had to learn to say NO to something I didn't want to do and I never felt guilty about it in the first place. My favorite is,

"Forty is the new thirty." All of this is nauseating to me. Thirty wasn't that great and I certainly don't want a rerun of it. These women who've gone to college, worked, gotten married, had children, LIVED. Why would they be in a rush? They probably declared actual majors when they entered college. They probably always knew exactly what they wanted to be when they grew up. No wonder they are so relaxed about being forty. They've done what they were supposed to do. They probably wanted to be mothers and wives, probably had their weddings planned before they were twelve. They knew what they wanted and went after it. They had passion, or they were too vapid to realize there was more. I, on the other hand, waited. I let stuff get in my way; cloud my vision; involuntarily jerk me from my intended destination.

I waited until I was 24 to pick a career, and that was only because being a full time student was no longer a financial option. I was being urged on every front to start earning some money, and I allowed myself to be nudged into it. I should have gone to graduate school, but I didn't. I got a job teaching. I'm playing catch up and the clock is running out. I am just getting started and everyone else is already half way through the race.

Most of my late twenties I was up to my eyeballs in Grey Goose martinis, being the center of my own universe, spending all disposable income on shoes, clothes, and going wherever I wanted, whenever I wanted. Most of my dates began with my well rehearsed diatribe about how marriage was an antiquated institution and eventually one or the other partner was going to end up resentful for what he or she had given up for the other, so it just wasn't for me. Probably one of the reasons I always ended up in abysmal relationships with guys who weren't invested. When your date night outfit practically has "Commitment is for Pussies" printed on it, you aren't going to attract quality men, and things are most certainly going to end poorly.

To be quite honest, I remember very little about my late twenties - and most of what I remember about my early thirties involves depression, mental facilities, mania, psychology

appointments, surgeries, enemies, paying for the debt of my twenties, and being in a prescription drug stupor. Most of what I did was inconsequential. Humph. Forty is NOTHING like thirty, and I can already tell that on day one of forty. Thirty sucked too, but there was time left when I was thirty. Being lost doesn't seem like a death sentence and inconsequential seems fixable. Even the word FORTY sounds nasty - like FUCK or FART or FOOL. Besides, it all seems like a small reward for the overwhelming feeling of reality sideswiping you with "Is this all there is?"

I don't look like me in the mirror any more. In my mind I still look twenty-five, but in that mirror I look like a bloated, tired, blob with a dull mud colored hair, wiry uncontrollable grays sprouting out all over my head, and purplish-black contusions under my eyes. What makes it even worse is when people I've known for years say,

"You were hot in high school." Then I watch as they rapidly back peddle, "Oh not that you aren't a beautiful woman now."

I can feel the bile rising. My chest is burning as I try to swallow it down. I turned forty. I'm in a hospital dwelling over my most recent failure . . . is this really it? If I died tomorrow, aside from my family and a few friends, who would care? What would my obituary be, a list of mental illness

diagnoses and failures? I've never been able to isolate my purpose; never captured that dream and gone after it with everything. I've coasted along on "some days" for too long, and my "some days" are running out.

I hear myself hissing like a feral cat at the nurse rummaging through my belongings, but I cannot help myself,

"In what fucking universe does it make sense to you that I can stay in this room with these glass framed pictures of geese, but I cannot have my damn moisturizer, because it is in a glass container? I'm starting to think the inmates should run this asylum."

I sit paralyzed in a wheelchair with my broken left leg protruding ahead of me. I secretly like that. It keeps people out of my bubble. I have a very well defined personal space. I have since I was a child, and I become not only uncomfortable but crazed when people step into my bubble uninvited. I foam at the mouth when faced with "conversational-feelers." Those people who have to touch your forearm or shoulder to make sure you are truly engaged in the conversation.

I was wheeled over to this wing once my condition warranted being released from the hospital. The time when most people would be wheeled to the parking lot with their families and "Get Well" loot in tow - flower arrangements, helium balloons, giant

cards and stuffed bears. I was wheeled to the psychiatric wing with my bag, my cast and my broken soul.

As she takes each item out one at a time and inspects each thoroughly; she makes neat piles; one item for me, one item for her. Fixating on her prevents the rage inside of me from spilling over like a molten lava flow. She's wearing scrubs, red bottoms, and a top with chili peppers on a black background. Her name badge has a picture of Anthony Kiedis taped over the place where her picture should be. She looks like she's twelve.

I know her pile: I won't see it again until I earn the appropriate amount of dots to gain supervised visitation rights with it. I don't know why this always enrages me. It isn't like I don't know the drill. First, check in. Second, get a room. Third, expressionless nurse goes through all your shit. No glass, no tampons, and no belts or strings. The strings from my yoga pants and shoes are yanked out and stuffed swiftly into the chili pepper covered pocket of "Anthony Kiedis'" scrubs.

When I asked during my first stint in the hospital why the tampons had to be doled out on an "as needed" basis at the nurse's station, I was told it's was so I couldn't tie the strings together and choke or hang myself. Seriously, and I'm the crazy one. Joke is on them, no tampons this time.

Finally, the nurse helps me remove my clothes. She gives me a hospital gown and steps out briefly returning with a backup

nurse who is also wearing scrubs, but hers are blue. Her ponytail is too high and she intentionally walks so it swings too much. The two proceed to fill out a form containing an outline of a gingerbread man that represents and mocks me. He's bloated too. They are documenting any scars, marks, or tattoos I have. This is much more complicated than previous times, because I am speckled with stitches, scabs, and bruises from the Hummer encounter.

They help me change into my droopy yoga pants and a tattered burgundy Virginia Tech hoodie, and then they leave. I hobble on one foot and lie down on the hospital bed. A maintenance man, who is proceeded into the room by the odor of stale cigarettes and body odor, comes in to unbolt the framed pictures from my walls and take them away. I'm so tired and Johnny Maintenance Man has an electric drill.

"Fantastic!" I mumble as I melodramatically cover my head with a pillow to drown out the noise and demonstrate my disapproval. There isn't much I like about a psych hospital, psychiatric rehab, mental hospital, psychiatric wing, loony bin, nut shack, crazy bed and breakfast, place of rest; whatever. I don't like the dehumanizing intake process. I also don't like having every second of my day planned, so I don't have time to figure out where it all went wrong. I am a dweller. I spend the majority of my time in the shadows of the past batting

cobwebs from my face trying to make sense of it all. Playing and replaying the events in my mind, tweaking a specific reaction or non-reaction and wondering how I could have changed the course of my life. I am going to dwell in the past despite anyone's best efforts to prevent it. One doctor calls it over-analyzing; another obsessive-compulsive disorder. I call it stuck, trying to understand the incomprehensible; honing in with laser light precision on another event, failure, mistake, or decision gone wrong and pinning each to a dissecting board, cutting and poking it beyond recognition.

Turning forty sucks; turning forty in a hospital after a failed suicide attempt really sucks. Turning forty, sitting in a wheel chair guarded by a nurse in the psychiatric wing of the hospital where you know you will be spending the next three weeks, is degrading. I am forty, broken, and degraded.