

Finding Out

I needed to focus on something, anything, but it wasn't working. Not the bouncing of my knee, the shakiness of my hands, the absolute tightening of my chest that feels like it'll break my frame, the bile building up in my throat, or the sweat slicking down my body. All I could focus on were the two lines. Pink and present. The absolute collapse of my heart, so heavy it brings me to the floor and to a new point of hysteria. I can't be. Not yet. Not now. Not even soon. Maybe not ever. But definitely *not now*. I take another test and another. But the cruel truth remains the same, and the test says the words of reality before I even can. *Pregnant*. Once a word that felt so distant it didn't even resemble anything close to a possibility or even a thought that ran through my brain. I thought of college, how to stretch out my curfew, what prom dress I was gonna buy. I never thought of this. I'm not *supposed* to be thinking of this. How the hell does anyone expect me to do this?

I drive past the hills. My hills, my favorite hills and one of my favorite spots. The hills where my friends and I set up blankets with food and pour juice into wine glasses and pretend it's wine cause we love the look but can't stand the taste, where he and I would look up at the stars and try to find constellations, and where I was going to have Senior Sunrise. I realize I may never get that moment again. Never have those moments ever. Just like that I'm pulling over to vomit on the side of the road. It's poison. That's what this is. Poison.

Telling Him

It's been a couple months since I have been over there. The whole house has changed. They'd furnished the place. There was a collage of photos on his wall, showing him and his family and his friends from cross country doing things like going to the beach, at Splash Mountain at Disneyland, their team photo, and some at his family's lake house. I wasn't in them. I wasn't friends with these people. There were three photos of me, one from last summer when we went to camp. The girl in the photo was bright and smiley, indistinguishable from the rest of the glossy teens on the wall. I sat there on his bed and he walked in and plopped beside me. He talked at me, not with me, telling me things about his stupid game and stupid parties and stupid people. I tried to interrupt a few times, saying I was having a hard time even thinking of school and the other stupid people, just trying to tell him, but he barely looked at me before returning to his original train of thought. These were the kind of things we were supposed to be talking about; he was instructing me. Every time I failed, his voice flickered in annoyance as what he clearly saw as my choice to be abnormal. I watched his body, the tenseness of his arms as they crossed against his chest, as his chin tilted away from me, as his legs edged together until we turned into strangers, and as he finally asked me what the hell was going on. "I'm pregnant" I say finally, speaking the truth into the universe for the first time, and I hear my voice break with the rest of me.

School

We were reading *The Odyssey* in English class. The goal was to categorize everything: when Homer mentioned a color, the role of Odysseus as hero, the way women were treated. When I finally went to class, I saw everyone's notes, little colored Post-it's like flags, long trails of highlighted texts, invented codes of letters and symbols, definitively marking each item, as

clearly as roads on a map. My book was unblemished, the spine barely cracked, pages still crisp and new. Even though I hadn't been in class, I'd tried to keep up the work. But I hadn't seen any of the right things. Instead I'd only noticed the violence. It was hard to miss: blood, stabbed, wounded, beheaded, dead. The words had stood out like they were only the ones in the book, this feeling that it had been written thousands of years ago simply to attack me, now here, in the future. I leaned over my desk, shielding my book with my body and shielding my body with my book as if they can already tell, hoping no one would notice my obvious absence of work and to me my obvious situation. I went straight home after school. I would catch up. I would notice the things everyone else had. I read all of Book 1 and most of Book 2 before realizing I hadn't highlighted anything at all. I thought about all the time I'd just wasted doing nothing. I still had all the math homework and the science and it crumbled down on me until my lungs felt void of air. I closed my eyes and tried to think. I just needed to slow down, break it apart, page by page, paragraph by paragraph. If I could understand what each sentence said, then I could piece it together and everything would become clear. I read a paragraph. It seemed like gibberish. I read it again. I read it again. The letters looked like random objects, fluttery and weightless as confetti. I decided to switch to my science textbook, biology, the orderliness of chromosomes and Punnett squares. But that book made me want to tear myself apart. I ripped page after page tore every letter away every word it formed. *Genotype, inherited characteristics, parents, offspring*. Maybe I was wrong, maybe this is the book that exists simply to attack me. I hope that they too will eventually become meaningless, written in scribbles rather than letters. I tried to make sense of the pictures but they were too diced up, the white pages surrounding them were too luminous, as though I was viewing it all from a kaleidoscope. There was something wrong with my head, with my vision. I looked at my hands and I could see the individual molecules that made up my flesh, the air between them, neon pulsating veins. I was dissolving, slipping from the human world into an angel, a demon. I ran to the bathroom and threw up straight bile, the same neon yellow as my unused highlighter. The act shocked me back into my body. I rinsed out my mouth and lay down on the bed and cried. The dreams I had of going away and being smart and cool in Berkeley or New York felt like discarded photographs, something I was watching get wadded into a ball, inevitable garbage. My future. It was trashed.

When Mom and Dad Found Out

I wasn't too upset when Vera's phone rang and it was my mother. The thing that upset me was what she said, and how she sounded. She told me to come home right away. Her voice was clipped, like she was mad. I figured maybe the school had called. I was trying to think of excuses as to why I had been absent. I felt sick. Vera's mom drove me home, saying she had to go to the grocery store anyway. Vera came with us, and surprisingly even got out of the car to hug me before I went in, her arms light around my shoulders in a way that felt condescending. Inside, my mom had some of my things out on the kitchen table—clothes, my backpack, and the three tests. My face went hot as soon as she'd called, and it got hotter when I saw she'd gone through my stuff. When I saw she'd found the tests. She started screaming right away, about my grades, my truancies, my sullen demeanor, and most of all the tests or rather what the tests meant: "I don't even know who you are anymore. You're not my daughter. My daughter, the daughter I know, would never have done something so outrageously stupid. She would've been

smart and she would've been careful. Do you know how disappointing this is? How disappointing you are?" she got right up in my face, and I couldn't stand the noise for another second. I couldn't really see anymore; everything had gotten fuzzy and dark on the edges. I took the candlesticks on the table and threw them against the wall. I went into the bathroom and locked the door. I started crying, the gasping ugly kind impossible to stop. My hands were shaking and I wanted to puke. She opened the door somehow. I was sitting on the bathroom mat when she came in, sobbing. She grabbed me by the arms. She was yelling. I didn't even know what she was saying. Her mouth was blanked out. I didn't mean to but it felt like I was choking and I hit her, not knowing if it was her face or body, just that my hand had connected with something softer than the wall. She left me alone after that. The air in the room settled, and I was breathing hard but my vision and hearing slid back into place. My face is blotchy in the mirror, eyes glassy and hysterical. A little beast. My dad came home shortly thereafter. A floor tile had cracked when I threw the candlesticks, so he was angry because they'd just had it put down. But he was furious when my mom told him. He told me I'd have to pay for it, take responsibility. I didn't know how I was supposed to do that because nobody would hire a sixteen year old fuckup to do anything, and my savings from my past allowances will not be nearly enough. My dad wasn't like my mom and me when he got angry. He didn't yell. But that day, the anger sprung out of him in pointed black daggers I could see stabbing the air, and his words settled as he asked what was wrong with me, why was I acting this way, a look of disgust on his face before he sent me to my room. But he didn't have to tell me. I already knew. When I came back out he told me I had to leave.

I Didn't Know What To Do Anymore

I no longer slept. It was loud all the time. Each day I was assaulted by ringings and whispers, my heart pounding out the center of the chaos like a metronome, the order of the days splintering, popping apart, the ropes that once tethered me to the rest of the world had snapped and I had floated too far to find my way back. Each morning I was sick to my stomach, a feeling that only increased as the day wore on. The world falling away like bombs, leaving only me, the darkest war in it. There was nothing I could do. I was scared. I was only able to go to school one day that week. I sat in class, completely silent-no one talking to me, the teacher's voice making noises but not words-unable to move because it felt like my bones might break from my body. I watched the normalcy around me, the students and their textbooks and their notes, the easy things I was supposed to do that had now become impossible. I was a freak. I ditched the second period to go to the library. I wandered around the shelves until I found the books on pregnancy. It took a while because I didn't want to get caught with books like that, so I kept on having to duck in different aisles where the librarian couldn't see me. I picked out a book that was blue and fairly thick. It looked very official. I flipped through awkwardly, my fingers feeling stiff and plastic. I read all that I could bear, which was all of three pages. All I could think was: *fuck. I am so fucked.* The anger gurgled up inside me hot and quick. I clapped the book together, put it back on the shelf, pretending I hadn't touched it. I walked out of the library. Then I just kept going. I wanted to go somewhere, I wanted to get away. But I couldn't think of anywhere to go. I couldn't think of anything to do, anything that would take this away or make it better. I didn't know how to fix it. I just walked home. Thoughts gathered in gray spiderwebs, tying together my limbs, caught in my hair. The problem had ruptured into something I could no

longer ignore or keep to myself. I didn't want to; I had to. I tried to plan out what I'd say to my parents but I didn't really get anywhere. When I got home, I found some paper. I told myself I was describing somebody else so I wouldn't cry. I was relaying the plot of a movie. I was merely transcribing the troubles of a friend. It wasn't me who was experiencing this. Nope, not me. Not me. Just a girl. And soon it became true. I floated out of my body, somewhere above my head. I watched this girl with honey brown hair and pale skin, as she sat at a desk covered in papers and books and trash, writing a letter. Her name was Kiara. She was sixteen years old. She was the daughter of Melinda and Scott. She was no genius. She was just crazy. She wrote it all down.

Church

The first five things I learned going to church was this; strong traditions, the power of God, giving generously, supposed unspeakable joy, and reaching the lost. However, I really just think the selfless people who call themselves Catholic are really just bullshitters with a savior complex. I've seen how they manipulated the words on a page and speak it to be God's intention, as if God intended to create these identities for people to hate, and even the ones who think so big of themselves with that whole "love the sinner, hate the sin" do not realize that they identified the person as their sin and if person is their sin they do in fact hate the sinner. The traditions of God come before the love of God. His power is what is spoken of before his love ever is, we hear it before we are to feel it. We are born out of sin, born out of hate. For a mistake that was made by a woman who was around when humanity began. How can you claim He is forgiving when he has made being a woman a sin? He has made my body a sin.

I Hate Men. I Hate Arizona. I Hate Men in Arizona.

"Take responsibility for your actions." That's what my dad had said. I wanted to absolutely scream. The fact of the matter is no man had to take responsibility for their actions. No man had to live with the proof of what he did under his shirt. He didn't have to feel it. With him no one has to know it. With me it stretches out my waist and clothes to make sure everyone can see and look with eyes that says all that "good people " wouldn't. No man gets called a slut, at least not seriously. No man has to push out a human. No man will be pregnant. So why is a man making a decision about pregnancies? Just so I'm clear on the rules here; I can't get pregnant, that's absolutely not allowed of me, but I'm also absolutely not allowed to stop being pregnant. Forced birth in a country with the highest maternal mortality rate, no paid maternal leave, no universal or subsidized child care, no continued birth parent care, and frequently inaccessible mental health care. I've looked at my options. I've looked at all my options. If I were to give up for adoption here's the truth about the foster care system; there are way too many children there and way too few social workers, there's no safety net for kids who age out of the system, children in the foster care system are more likely to be abused, sexually and physically, and neglected. According to AFCARS there was a national standard for child abuse in foster care of 99.68%. Up to 80% of children in the system suffer from a mental disorder. They are more likely to suffer with addiction, alcoholism, and homelessness. They are more likely to kill themselves. How is that a gracious option? I can't do it. I will not do it. I don't want to be a mom and I don't want to be pregnant. I can't be a mom and I can't be pregnant. But I live in Arizona where they would rather see a human, someone who has a purpose, die before they would ever let cells

that are only good for making and promoting vomit be removed. Where these cells have more rights than the person carrying them.

Why Do I Not Count?

I have a social security number. I have a credit card. I have a job. I'm an honor student. I'm on the swim team. I have a name. I have a birthday. I was someone's daughter once. Why do I not count? Why is my persons disregarded? I am a person right? Right?