

Awake

I wake up. My right arm is asleep. It is tingling. I roll onto my back. I shake my arm and open and close my right hand. I grab my phone: 12:11 A.M. *I just went to bed.* I've had too many nights like this the past few months. Sleep has dwindled from hours to minutes at a time. For once, I'm happy to have awakened or else my arm would be completely dead all day tomorrow from sleeping on it. I have bad blood circulation. The first time that happened it was on my left side and my left arm had no feeling except for the pins and needles. I thought I was having a heart attack. I even scheduled an appointment with my doctor for the following day but the feeling returned and I never went. I had seen him the week before about my sleeping issues and didn't feel like paying to be told to sleep on my back or stomach. I put the phone on the night table and take a sip of water.

I wake up. My contacts are dry and sticky; my heavy eyelids make a soft scratching noise each time they open. I notice I'm grinding my teeth. I try to stop, but I can't. It's worse than that, though. The bottom teeth are pushing against the top teeth in my overbite, hard, and I can feel my top two teeth getting loose. Sweat falls down my temple as I realize I can't stop it: I'm about to push my teeth out. I sit up, but my tongue already feels metallic and warm and the two teeth are on my lap, wet and orange from the blood and saliva.

I wake up. I'm on my back. I reach up with my right arm and feel inside my mouth. My teeth are there. I look over at the nightstand and the orange bottle is there with the cap off. I thought I had put the cap back on. I knock the phone off the nightstand reaching for it and roll back over. *Did I put the cap back on?* I can't remember now. I put the lid on it now and put it next to the alarm

clock, which is dark because I can't sleep with it on, it's too bright. I don't understand why they make it so bright. It lights up the whole room. I just don't get it. I want to see what time it is so I reach down and my hand searches the carpet for the phone. I feel it and pick it up. It is 2:41 A.M.

I wake up. My girlfriend broke up with me today. Or yesterday, technically. We had a dog, but we didn't live together and the dog stayed at her place. So she kept it, afterwards. I bought the dog for her when he was a puppy. Charly. The spelling was her idea. She didn't like it when dogs had people names. He was a mutt with big paws and a brown coat with black and white scruff. I got it for her on Valentine's Day. I went to her place right before she got home from work and put it in an open box right by the door. He was too small to get out of box and started whimpering immediately when he saw me walk away. I hid in her bedroom. When she came in she shrieked and picked him up as I watched. Soon to be Charly licked her face and her smile was wet and wide when I walked out and hugged her. She told me she loved him and she told me she loved me. Charly was ours, another thing we were both invested in. *How do you split a dog? Can she take his body and I take his soul? Can I take the delighted hops when I open the door? She can take his shit and his piss and clean it up and wipe it down.* I got him for her two years ago, two years after we started dating. But that was before I had unplugged – her word. I roll onto my side and I see the cap is off the medicine bottle.

I wake up. My face is wet. *Charly is licking my face?* No, the drool is mine. I wipe my face with one hand and grab my phone with the other. 4:11 A.M. I'm a Fact Checker. I've worked for various publications across all sorts of genres. I've done a lot with scientific periodicals focusing

mainly on flora and fauna, but also some random articles on sociology and physiology. I wonder how the pheromone indicators of attraction can come and go? I never had to fact check an article quite like that. I don't care why they come and go anymore. It's not that I didn't see it coming because it was impossible not to see it coming when we talked about it constantly. At the end.

What about the dog, I asked her. The dog is mine. You got him for me. This was over a year ago.

The dog talk of last resort. I started keeping a journal after our first date. But I was never completely comfortable with it because the intent was always to share it with her. Doubts could never be truly explained and times of happiness were usually indulged. I've read it many times over the past year and I think that I have forgotten to look through it with the necessary lens. Now I want those times back; the desires of a night spent watching three movies and barely moving an inch to simply readjust the curves of her back against me. Or to lean forward and kiss her hair and inhale the peach fragrance from it. Was that really a great night? Maybe we just watched movies because we had nothing to talk about. I should have written that down. *Megan and I watched three movies tonight. It was ok. We decided to after conversation ran dry at dinner. I wanted to care about how her day went and I felt bad faking it. So I listened. Her boss had been short with her when she was expecting a compliment and the rest of her day had been off because of it. I really had no good responses for her. My day had been the same, slightly unsatisfying but overall passable. An article on the symbiotic relationship between a rare tree found in South America and some sort of fungus. No real reason to tell her that; I mean, I barely understood it and I spent most of the time spell checking different type of fungi that existed around the world in similar symbiotic relationships. We decided to watch a movie, but since neither of us was all that tired, we watched three. She got up to change them. It was adequate.*

Awake

An adequacy of passable time made shorter by no real interaction. I miss it. My mind wanders at the sight of the blinds as my eyes have adjusted to the room. It's a dull gray with hard outlines. I need sleep. I take two more pills. I don't need to wake up early tomorrow, doesn't matter that it's Friday. I've been able to sleep in for the past two months. *Did I put the cap back on?*

I wake up. My back is wet and my shirt sticks to it and I feel grimy. My right calf is taut and painful. I reach down and massage it hard with both hands. My throat feels dry so I grab my water glass and find it's empty. I put it back and cough; I'm too lazy to get up and refill so maybe some phlegm will do the job. The cough hacks at my throat like a rusty saw and when I pull my hand away there is blood in it. I wipe it on my comforter, which is black and never shows any stains. There is a man in the corner where the television used to be. He's shade on a cold and snowy day and his eyes are hidden. I can't focus my eyes on him, they slide off and I have to convince myself that he's there. I cough again and there's more blood in my hand that is trembling now. I grab the glass and throw it at the man. I hear it shatter in an echo chamber; I hear it twice. My head is heavy with the pills and I'm exhausted from throwing the glass. The man hasn't moved. I think I see him smile. I could throw my phone. *How would I know what time it is?* The cap is off the pills.

I wake up. I press the buttons on my phone so it lights up and I can see in the corner. The man is gone. The television has cracks in it and imbedded glass spots that glitter from the light. *Fuck*, I mouth. I look at the phone before I put it back down. 4:59 A.M. The room is black again, even though it's the fall. I think it should be lighter by now, but I like it like this. I need the dark to

sleep. I need the fan also, whistling above me in consistent strokes that remind me of the trains that passed my girlfriend's parents' house, about two hours outside the city. It was there that I had asked her father for his daughter's hand in marriage. I hadn't bought the ring yet, but I knew what I wanted. I knew what she would like. It was smaller than most, but then a Fact Checker doesn't make that much money. I guess it was a good thing I didn't become a teacher because then I would have made even less.

I wake up. But I know I am dreaming. Megan is lying next to me and we are both on our backs. My right hand lays palm up on the bed with her hand on top and our fingers intertwined. I can feel the desire to kiss her and that desire is in the dream and outside of the dream. I'm above the dream holding the looking glass, but none of the strings. *I'm leaving you*, she says calmly and I see my hand being squeezed. *Why?* My hand grips hers even tighter and my thumb moves over the back of her hand with a forced passivity. *Because you have given up and I am not ready to give up with you.* My brow furrows and I pull my hand out of hers and try to smooth it out; my hand stays there as I think. *I haven't given up. I realize I haven't shown much initiative lately, but I'm still just trying to figure things out.* A job? Both sets of me are confused. *But how long do you need? You know I love you, but it has been three months since you got laid off. You have to move on. Other people are getting fired also. So you might have to do something you don't like for a little while, but...* her sigh is loud and she looks over at me. *I can't stay with you while you wait for life to happen anymore. I can't do it.* In the past, this talk ended with her trying to make me feel better and with a promise by me to do more in the morning. The morning always presented the most promise. *I'm so close. Give me one more day, one more week and you'll see.*

I've gotten better. You know that. She sits up and smoothes out her brown hair. Both my hands are white knuckled fists on either side of me and I'm pinned down on the bed. I've given you that day and that week. If you do ever get something going, let me know. But, I can't stop my life for you.

I wake up. The last time I really played with Charly was a Saturday. We went on a run around the park. He only used a leash for the first few months; it had been well over a year since he had last had one around his neck. His stride was smooth and his mouth was open with his tongue hanging out. Charly looked like he was smiling. After a mile we stopped in the center of the park and played with the Frisbee I had brought. I could throw it far and he wanted it thrown far and high. He was good at catching it and I always wanted to stop before he did. He caught one that I had thrown a couple of hundred feet and ran the other way with it as I yelled after him. Megan was there and she laughed as he came up to her and licked her face. She brought a picnic and we all sat and ate there and spent the rest of the day walking around the park and playing with Charly. We talked all day.

I wake up. I grab my phone and push a button to see the time, but it won't light up. I must have drained the battery from using it to read before I fell asleep earlier. I push it again and it lights up for a second, the battery is red. 5:50 A.M. Not dead yet, but it will be soon. I hope I marked my place in the book. Sometimes I fall asleep while reading and the book falls to the floor and I can't remember where I was because the pills quickly make me hazy. I rub my face, my arms moving slowly and deliberately. It seems a little lighter in the room and my eyes don't need as

much time to adjust. After Megan and I broke up, I didn't talk to her for two months. But then I did call her and asked her to meet me for coffee. I had been going to the gym for about a month and I wore a sports coat, a crisp white shirt and fitted jeans. We met after we each got off of work. She smiled widely when she saw me and we hugged and she let go a beat before I did. She was happy to see I was doing better and we caught up. *I'm ready to be with you again.* I blurted it out to her and it hung in the space between us. I don't need a journal entry to remind me of her face. Her eyes tightened immediately and I knew. The conversation died shortly after she told me and we both left. I push the memory away as I rub my temples and sigh in the bed. I should charge my phone but I decide to wait until I wake up for good. I don't want to wake up for awhile so I swallow two more pills, pushing them down my throat with my tongue because all the water is gone.

I wake up. I keep my eyes closed because I know it will be light in the room and I don't want it to wake me up. The cramp in my calf is gone and I feel relaxed. I reach down and massage it lightly anyway, stretching it back and forth as my hands work it over. My throat is dry. I open my eyes but freeze before I can move towards the glass on my nightstand. The man is standing at the foot of my bed, his head tilted down towards me. The room *is* lighter, but I still cannot see him well, a frozen vacuum in the center of the room. We're both still and staring at each other but I can't find his eyes in the shade. I sit up coughing violently and bile fills my throat. I cough again and I can feel the vomit coming up my esophagus and my saliva is on fire. I swallow the filth from my stomach back down into my body and cough again, this time empty and painless. The man reaches out for me, but my eyes are fading as my back hits the bed.

Awake

I wake up. I'm on one of the trains outside of Megan's parents' house, feeling comfortable as the engine chugs on rhythmically, making my eyes feel heavy. Megan stayed back at the house and I'm the only rider on the downbound train. Thinking I see a figure in the car in front of me, I get up and run towards the door, but I see nothing as I peer down the empty aisle between the empty seats. I realize I'm dreaming.

I wake up. I can hear my phone ringing in the distance, but for some reason I cannot open my eyes. I try to move my arms around to grab my phone but they stay at my side. The phone continues to ring and I know that it's Megan calling me by the ring tone. My head hurts with my desire to answer the phone and I start to get angry that I can't move. I just want to hear her voice one last time. That's why I called her yesterday, but she didn't return my call. Finally, I feel my fingers flex back and forth a little and I feel control coming back to me. I am holding something. The medicine bottle and it is empty like the scream I attempt as it all fades away.