

New Hyperstates  
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The girls in the elevator are talking loudly about My Hero Academia. The one in my class, with her hair dyed bright blue, is wearing what seems to be a racoon tail strapped to a beltloop at the back of her shorts. I think one of them is staring at the bow in my hair, which is damp from the rain and sticks coldly to my neck. I turn up the music in my white Apple headphones that are bunched at my collar like a mangled crucifix. As I step onto the fourth floor, a wave of latte sloshes up over the rim of my venti Starbucks cup. It splashes onto the toe of my boot and I reach down to wipe it off with the sleeve of my sweater. The girl—she steps out behind me and makes a noise somewhere between a cough and a forced exhale—rushes by with her stack of manga clung tightly in one arm and her tote hung over the other. We are going to room 402a and class started three minutes ago.

As usual, I sit at the right end of the horseshoe-shaped configuration of desks. The spot to my left remains empty every class. Normally, Nick sits one spot away from me or he sits directly across from me at the other end of the horseshoe. Today, he isn't in class yet. He's always one of the first three people to view my stories on Instagram and he always likes my posts. In the last few weeks, he's been sitting in the spot closer to me. We talk about electronic music or the new releases on Criterion. A lot of the time, he also complains about the readings. He wants to hear about what I'm reading. He says that he wishes I taught the class instead of Vick.

"The bike rack was nearly empty today. No one is willing to sacrifice comfort for the planet. Especially not on a day like today!" Vick starts, "But me, I ride my bike to work every day. Even when my lower back is screaming out in pain. The wet humor causes muscle spasms, you know. And that awful, steep staircase leading up to our building. An institution of power. I didn't recognize the security guard today, did you?" Vick asks and some of the kids shake their head *no*. Vick looks at my coffee cup and grabs her own, reusable, one from her podium.

"I couldn't bear to get coffee from Starbucks," Vick says, "I always go to Divyesh's cart outside of school. I don't even go to the cafeteria downstairs. I want to support Divyesh because he's an immigrant. I tip him 25% each time, it's the least I can do. Oh, this country with its interminable, brutal hierarchy of suffering!"

Nick cracks open the door a few minutes after I do. It's November and his straight hair is dripping rain into his face like a leaking shower head. He takes off his neon orange sweatshirt, the kind that construction workers wear, and uses it to dry his hair and face. Vick mumbles, "I guess we should wait for this puddle to dry too before we start class." The class is silent except for the girl with blue hair, who snickers. From the other end of the room, I can see that she is scribbling something down

in her kid-sized notebook. Actually, it must be a diary with a small metal lock shaped like a heart, the key to which is linked to her charm bracelet. I used to have a diary like that in high school.

A few months ago, my mom gave me Camille Paglia's *Sexual Personae*. It's sitting on my desk and Nick is leaning over the empty chair between us to catch the title. My mom's therapist recommended it to her after her breakup with John to help her, as she phrased it, 'reinvigorate her desire.' Mom had been dating John for over a year when he cut things off. He got a new job at HBO and told her that he didn't want us to move down to LA with him. She was destroyed and took it extra-hard, probably because of her PTSD from my dad's death. I've been carrying around the Paglia since she gave it to me. I decided last week that I would finally try to read it. After all, I am twenty now.

"Missy? Missy!" Vick says, looking at me intently. Everyone is looking at me.

"Yes?" I ask.

"Missy, will you start us off today by presenting your work in response to this week's prompt?"

All of a sudden, my entire body feels cold and wet as if I'd just stepped back outside. I reach into my bag and pull out a piece of paper, which I had torn out of a journal I'd found in my dad's dusty study a few weeks back. A dried daisy, the petals of which I hand painted pale blue, is stapled to the base of the sheet and above the flower is a poem. I read it aloud:

*bubbles*

*the color of klonopin mixed with rosé  
a pale sunrise at the beginning of spring  
the way light touched you, i thought you were glowing  
you said my hands were cold, the first time ever  
when you hold them now, it's quiet like the house  
and each went underwater, perfect and intact  
in a row a warm hearth and glowing flames  
your energy of spirit, i'm jogging backwards  
back down the sidewalk and the bubbles above me  
i ask needless questions, left before i caught them  
they did not reach you and i'm thankful for it  
backed up to the couch, backwards i enter  
i know the handle and wreath and the empty windows  
i know the people in your bed, their quilting and curtains  
i find my room and my chair, I am solid underwater  
you misremember me now as a toy that is broken.*

Still looking down at the paper when I finish reading, I lay it atop my laptop. I look over to Nick because he's the only one whose reaction I can bear to see. His beaming smile brightens my heart. The microwave

from the break room next door constantly emits a low electric hum. You can only notice it when the classroom is dead-silent. “Does anyone have comments for Missy?” Vick exclaims. The girl with blue hair says, “Isn’t this a sculpture class *not* a poetry class?” When she says this, I swear her eyes roll back so hard that she loses everything but pure white.

“This is my sculpture,” I say calmly in response.

“I get it,” Nick pipes in. “The paper with the poem on it and the colored flower are pretty much ready-mades, right? The triangulation between the paper, poem, and flower create a texture of memory. And texture implies a surface and that’s where the sculpture really is. And what is this sculpture saying? Well we have the childhood imagery in the poem’s content, which works with the torn page and pressed flower, which is like straight from a diary or something, to make this almost, like, time-capsule from Missy’s past. Obviously, there is some gloomy stuff like the Klonopin and all the objects that are from her house, which suggests like a haunting, right? But there’s the title of the poem, ‘bubbles,’ and the light blue paint on the flower petals that implies a sort of lightness, and I think that’s what memory is like. Haunting but light. It reminds me of Petra Collins’ early work, which utilizes this very specific, glossy aesthetic of girlhood in the context of realer, darker narratives that concern body image, drugs, and mental health, don’t you think?”

Nick is leaning back in his chair with a pen in his mouth. Once he finishes speaking, he sits up straight again and looks at Vick and then at me. I smile at him, but only with my eyes because I am afraid of disclosing to the others how truly validated he’s made me feel. No one has ever understood my art this way before. I want to place my hand on the seat between us. I want him to grab it and to hold it tight in a warm grip. But instead, I look forward and say nothing. Again, I am stuck focusing on the low buzzing of the microwave in the room next door. Every ten seconds it changes pitch. From listening for a while, I can almost discern a song.

Dad was diagnosed with colon cancer the summer after my senior year of high school. What was so spooky about it was that I knew it was going to happen. My mom’s ‘fit,’ as my dad had called them, that happened a few weeks prior to his diagnosis was like an omen. I found her passed out on the cold tiled bathroom floor with candy-orange Klonopin pills surrounding her head like a halo. The bottle of rosé that dad and I had picked out for her on Mother’s Day was empty on the marble countertop. Bless her heart, that one, she’s a tortured soul.

Don’t get me wrong, it wasn’t the first time mom had passed out from mixing substances. But this particular time, neither dad nor I could get her to come to. At the hospital I guess they pumped her stomach. They gave her an IV drip overnight. The next morning, mom seemed fine, just a little weak, but I was hardly relieved. The image of dad holding onto her forearm and guiding her to the couch in the living room that morning burned into my memory. A sense of death was lodged in

me: a feeling in my stomach like a black empty void. Then a few weeks later, dad was diagnosed with colon cancer. Eight months later he was dead. I didn't celebrate my birthday that year because it was only two weeks after the day he died. However, on that birthday I found a purple ribbon in my mom's lingerie drawer and I've worn it in my hair nearly every day since.

I realize that I've been picking and biting at the nails on my left hand so that they're bloody at the stubs. The person at the opposite end of the horseshoe is presenting their sculpture. It's multiple balls of laundry lint held together to resemble a body, which is dangling from a structure made from painted cardboard.

During the critique, the girl with blue hair calls out the piece as racist, saying that it's invoking a lynching. This activates a torrent of comments and eventually, Vick has to interrupt: "Well the truth of the matter is that the assignment was to construct a piece that concerned an event from your past. And what Michael has, in fact, accomplished is a piece that concerns *our* past. While I see what you're saying, because Michael is not black, I do think it's important for all citizens of his country to reflect on our fraught past of slavery and racism."

Vick takes a seat beside her podium and opens up her laptop, signaling that class is over.

"What are you doing with your piece?" Nick asks as people begin to pack away their things.

"Oh, I'm not sure. Might give it to my mom," I say, "What are you doing with yours?"

"I'm gonna burn mine. I would just leave it here, but my department doesn't have space for students' work," Nick responds, shoving his sculpture into his backpack. He holds the door and lets me go ahead of him, 'like a true gentleman,' my dad would have said. I put in my headphones and say bye to Nick as he says something about hitting me up on Instagram. The fluorescent lights in the hallway make my hands look a solid bluish-white. I reach up to tighten my bow, which has finally dried.