

Laying with my head on the hard surface, I could hear the crunch-crunching echo of footsteps in my ears. The sound was unsettling and reminded me of how I used to be terrified of the sound of my heart's beating when I rested my head on my pillow. My heart's nervous beats always sounded like relentless walking on a gravel path in my ears, haunting my nights with an always present shadow of a lurking stranger making their way towards me.

Sitting up, I felt woozy and tried to climb to my feet.

Around me, everyone told me not to look, to please not look towards the road where everyone was gathering in a whirlwind of excitement. They told me to keep my eyes closed and to not glance at what lay on the road.

I kept moving without much thought, my feet walking a straight line as I calmly focused on the way my feet followed each other, one after another. My eyes scanned the horizon, adjusting to the minute details of sidewalks and front yards as they slowly unrolled in front of me.

The voices that told me not to look towards the road, to not look at what had happened gradually faded away behind me, their frantic yelling and chaotic discussions slowly getting less and less audible, yet all I really cared about and could focus on were my footsteps, and how my feet always knew where to fall.

I counted the seconds. I timed my gaze. My eyes seemed so far ahead of my steps, always hovering in their locked searching, never looking down. I thought it amazing that each millisecond was a snapshot that mapped my journey. Every detail was processed without my thinking, without my concentration, and now that I was aware of how two and two made my footsteps fall accurately and without too much thought, I got confused in how complicated the whole thing was, in awe of how I was able to keep walking without really concentrating.

Woozy, I didn't care too much about what passed on either side of me, nor did I care about what was behind, and I even tried to ignore the gradually gaining voice behind me, the one that called me to stop walking, to please stop walking, to please stop.

The voice begged, pleaded with me, and I wondered if it was in relation to what I wasn't supposed to have looked at when everyone told me not to look on the road, which hadn't been a problem since my steps and walking seemed a million times more interesting.

A hand grabbed my shoulder, gently yet forcefully, stopping me mid stride.

I was suddenly concerned about the way my eyes burned, veiled with a thick sudden cloud that was salty and warm. The voice of the person who held me rebounded in my ears and yet I still looked forwards. I had to look forwards, and I tried hard to ignore the forced hug that I was getting, the clinging desperation of the person whose nails dug into my back and shoulder blades, their skin both sweetly perfumed yet slightly musty. I didn't want to see what was beside me on the road nor in the yards that bordered the sidewalk. I didn't want to see the stranger's face that talked to me in a calm voice that thinly veiled confusion and fear.

There were tears streaming down her face.

I didn't want to retrace my footsteps.

The hands that held me turned me around. My head tilted under the strain of the arm that weighed heavily around my neck. It was more of a headlock than a hug, and with a quivering lip she walked me in a straight line past where I'd just been, making me retrace my path. I could almost see my footsteps.

In her tightening grip, I focused on her sleeve that glowed with shades of red that seeped as she walked.

"You're bleeding," I said, focusing on the way the blood quickly lined across the fabric of her white blouse, crisscrossing in hatch marks that looked like aerial street maps.

Her hand reluctantly passed through my hair. Her fingers tangled like they were in a bird's nest. One by one the hair follicles on my head lit up, each one a little firecracker of warmth and match like burning that sent my head reeling from the sensations that burned inside.

"You're bleeding on me," I said to her, hoping that she would stop hugging and hurting me. I didn't want to go where we seemed to be heading. "Please stop bleeding on me." She cried as I talked. Her hand pressed hard on my scalp, and with her hand there I could feel my heart's frantic beats shooting through my head, leaping into her shaking grasp as she pressed harder and harder with every footstep.

I tried to watch the sidewalk, but everything was blurry. My legs listed and misstepped. Each footstep misfired and was uneven to the point where I could almost lie down and sleep from the wave of fatigue that blanketed the once colorful horizon.

Stumbling, my left leg became unstable as I felt the weird splintering sounds as they shuddered through my body. I fell from her grasp and to the ground, my body falling like an old tree, the slapping sound of my head bouncing off of the grass median sickening, a hollow popping sound that turned heads.

I sounded like the watermelon I'd dropped on the sidewalk in front of our house the summer before.

On the ground my head was sideways and my vision narrowed, almost fish eyed. I watched in slow motion. I saw their footsteps, calculated and purposeful in everything they did. There were many of them, feet running, step after step, their footsteps as calculated as the ones I'd done not too long ago. Sideways, I saw shoes that mirrored the rainbow as each one created an arc of color that looked like rocking chairs. To and fro, each movement larger than the last as they paraded in front of me.

I could hear their voices, and I could feel their scattered probing touches. The top of my head burned under the pressure of the fire ants that had taken over my head. They raged there. My leg had lost all purposeful movement and quivered like a puppet's limb.

On me I felt hands trying to brush off the ants, to make me ant free and pain free, but their swatting did nothing to alleviate the throbbing or biting that continued on.

I spotted daylight through the clearing of legs. Through them, I could see what lay beyond. I struggled with distance. There was much to see just past my head, just past the legs and the curb that they traversed. There was so much happening in the street, and I for the first time realized that maybe this was what the people had told me not to look at, to please not look at the road.

Lying on my side, all I could do was look past their legs and shoes, and focus on the road where more people gathered, their faces and clothing dotted by flashing red and blue lights and the sirens that screeched through the warm afternoon's thick melancholy air. It was everywhere, the stuff that resembled the cloud in my eyes and the pools on the lady's blouse. The pavement was red splattered. It made my knees ache just looking at it. I began to feel claustrophobic and suddenly found it hard to breathe, with all the people crowding in around me.

Deep within the beeps I listened. They hovered above me. Like a marionette I lay still, and yet even with eyes closed, I knew I was attached to things that held me like a kite-string to earth. The beeping pulses soothed me, and as I slowly drew myself out of the fog that was slowly dissipating, I held my breath and listened as the beeps got louder and slower, their signals first confident and precise, then as the clock ticked more erratic and alarmed. I heard their running footsteps. I began to breathe again, willing my heart to keep going even though the pain from my breathing sent waves of nausea down my spine. Surrounding me, I could feel them, talking and murmuring like a band of birds that had stumbled upon something. I felt the icy hands of someone slowly tracing a stethoscope against my bruised chest, and I winced as the pokes and prods gradually worked their way around my stomach and chest, rounding my neck and then my temples. The cold hands worked slowly, yet I could feel the thoughts that even they had, the calculated moves of five digits that knew exactly what they were looking for and where to find it. The shuffling receded and I listened to the beeps as they chimed out into the silent stuffiness of the room. From the sound's echo, I could almost tell that the room was an off blue-green, with matching curtains and bedding, all making the room look dull and lifeless. I knew this from the way the room smelt, and from the way the sun reflected off of the walls and hit my throbbing face. The sunlight was too subdued to be reflected off of white walls, and too intense to be from dark walls, so calculating ray intensity combined with warmth and mustiness factors, I knew that I had indeed guessed right, that my room was the color of a stormy winter high tide that wallowed against the seawall that I stood on, and that's how the blue-green color of the room made me feel, chilled yet warm from the way it reflected the reluctant sun's light.

More aware than ever, I struggled with the sensation of looking down from above. Dizzy, I looked around. Everything was clean and calculated, disinfected and sterile. I saw myself riding the high tide, and watched as my body ebbed with the pull of machines and medicine that tugged and pushed against me. I felt too high, too removed from down below to feel anything other than the sickness that floated uncontrolled through my body. Sometime later, there was a cry in the bed below me, and I heard the dedicated shuffling of footsteps as they rounded the corner into my room. Their eyes were wide and they talked loud and firm. A little of this and a tweak of that, and the seawall that I stood on shrank and shrank until my feet were level with the ones in the bed, and exhausted I lay down and joined the shape as another smile crossed my lips from the realization that the room was more a greenish-blue than a bluish-green.

Her lips were warm yet they trembled, and I knew from the second they touched my cheek that my mom was sick with worry. I thought fuck it and opened my eyes and the light in the room shot through my barely open pupils and stabbed me with a million little

shards of glass that made my head throb. I wanted to see my mom, her eyes that looked at mine, but all I got was the halo of incandescent light that throbbed like a spaceship. I winced and cried out, and her hand clutched at mine and I could feel the cold sweat nurturing of her tremble in the way she crushed my fingers in hers, her rings splitting my skin and me not caring one bit. Crying, my eyes watered a fountain of tears and she cried and my dad could be heard coughing emotionally from somewhere past the floodlights that lit up my pores. Under them, I whispered for her to turn off the lights, and she fumbled with switches and bumped along the walls until she found what she was looking for.

“Is that better sweetie,” she asked, stroking my bald head.

“Where’s my hair...” I whimpered.

She cried and ran her fingers across my eyebrows, tentively tracing the scar that lit up my forehead like a third eye. Her touch made me wince. Her fingers bumped along the ridge of staples that held my head together.

I fought with wonder about the room and the beeps, colors and my mother’s sobs and my father’s cough cough coughing emotions just out of range. I saw again the woman’s blouse that raged in red and the other stuff on the road that I never quite saw, and I suddenly wanted more than anything to know what had happened, even through moments before I hadn’t cared at all.

“What happened to me,” I asked, my eyes closed tight, “what happened on the road, what happened with all those people and the lady with the blood? What happened?”

She said nothing, and with a squeeze she held me tight, and I knew that she wouldn’t tell me what had happened, no matter how hard I tried or how much I asked. Not just yet anyway.

I took stock. I wiggled my fingers, coaxing them to life, then followed my legs to my toes where one foot finally wiggled slowly, the other leg numbly straight, strange and deadened.

I realized that I was messed up, just how much though I wouldn’t know for probably a while.

In a lull between sleep and daydream haze, I listened to the sounds that whirred around me in that efficient hospital way, each hiss and barely audible beep a sign of life or death. I could never really tell what time it was, morning or night, because of the light’s constant intensity. It was always there, whether I wanted it or not.

Deep within a check up by committee, I asked in a hoarse rasp if the lights could be turned down, even just a little bit. All my words did were stoke medical murmurs from their mouths that bounced around the room quietly. I couldn’t tell what they were saying. I could just tell that they were saying it, and as I heard their shuffles leaving the room, I winced and realized that I would be staring at the sun all day and night long, once again. Sometime during what I thought to be the night, since all I heard around me were tormented moans that bordered on the indiscernible, I began to count the beeps on the wall behind me. I was bored, and I’m not sure what really made me want to count. But I knew that every 7200 seconds, someone would come into my room, and would either stealthily add something to my intravenous or fumble feebly as they tried to find the insert, and after their attention my eyes would get heavy and the surging tide that felt like the submerged aquatic whoop whoop whoop of a submarine would overpower my

counting till I woke up once again, just in time to start anew at my number accumulation. This happened every day, regardless of what time I thought it was or what the sounds around me were doing. It was so predictable, and in that predictability, one night I realized that I was rapidly gaining on 7200, and no sooner had I thought that I was reaching that magic number, that I officially passed 7200. The weirdest feeling was reaching 7201, and on and on until the numbers got greater and greater, and my heart's beating faster and faster.

Tossing and turning as much as I could, I was bewildered when I reached 14400, then as 28800 came along my eyes were as wide as saucers in the brightly lit room. How could I have gone so long, without care, without any attention? My thoughts spiraled out of control. I could feel pain ebbing through every inch of my limbs, settling right in the middle of my forehead that felt alight with fires and flames that were slowly peeling and melting back the skin right above my eyes. Oh my head throbbed, and as I panicked somewhere near 30000, my hand crept numbly along the blanket over me and slowly felt for the button to push so a nurse would come, anyone to come, from doctor, nurse to janitor, someone who could look at me and rescue me from the inevitable death that was quickly eating away at me with every number counted.

I heard the bell chime when I pressed the red button, once, then I pushed it again and again with greater confidence. It sounded so far away, ringing in a tube that funneled nurses somewhere from far down deep.

The bell's sounding had an echo that carried on much longer than I would've thought possible, as it bounded down and bounced off of walls and ceilings. It was a crazy ball of sound that ricocheted here and there, and I prayed with everything I could that my crazy ball of panic would somehow reach the ears of someone who would be sympathetic, someone who would understand my pain and would come and help.

I heard her feet and felt her beside me. Her sighs were short and tired. "Yes," she said as she stood there, "you only have to ring the bell once to get us to come, you must have rang it..." and she went on and on, and as I counted the number of times she said 'on' between the large deep frustrated breaths she took, I struggled to remember why I'd called her in the first place. I began to think of numbers again, and then as I started counting the way her breaths surged along with the beeps behind me, I remembered why, and as I told her why I'd rung the bell, it all came pouring out of me a million miles per hour in a gigantic word puzzle that made her mutter and take out her thermometer and stethoscope. She said something about being delirious and that I'd be doing a lot better if I'd been wearing a helmet when I got hit by a car.

The room became quiet again, besides the always-present beeps and hisses. I wasn't sure if she was still in the room with me, or if I'd been left alone. My eyes throbbed so intensely that I had to rely on my hearing, and I lay there and controlled my breaths as much as I could.

I heard her talk, first quietly then louder, her quickened footsteps in the room the only sign that she was there at all. No longer grumpy and sullen, her sweet movements soothed me as she whispered about me letting them know sooner next time if I'd missed a dose or two of my medication, how she was sorry that I was in so much pain.

As she continued to talk, I thought about numbers again. I began to wonder what happened when numbers ran out, or if that was possible. And following these thoughts, I

tried to think about what came after ten million. Well, even in my state it seemed logical that ten million and one would follow ten million, and the numbers would carry on and on until they faded into the dark nighttime sky, and as that thought lingered and I was slowly submerging again into the large liquidic tank that medicine brought on, I got confused between stars and numbers, and if as numbers added up, all on top of each other, they would slowly fade into the nighttime sky, and that maybe numbers and stars were the same thing, since the amount of stars in the sky were uncountable. If numbers were unending and stars were infinite, it seemed logical as the whoop whoop whooping tide of pharmaceuticals took over my brain, that numbers and stars were exactly the same thing.

My dreams were way more interesting than anything that happened when I was awake. With stars and numbers on the brain, I dreamt of passing far away constellations that, the closer you got, turned into one's and two's, in some parts all clustered together forming planets, and other places spaced far apart, forming milky way highways that looked smooth enough to slide on. I thought about their smooth gliding highways as I slowly floated past, and I dreamt, even in my dreams, of milkshakes with straws that towered overhead in menacing stripes that made the straws look like maypoles for giants. Dreaming I thought this unfair, and even as I slept I could feel my tongue salivate and my tongue hunger for something almost solid, something almost real that I could intake and digest.

My hunger grabbed me from my dreams and rocketed me into my bed at the speed of light as the constellations around me scattered and fractioned to earth. In the half lit hospital room, my stomach's growls ricocheted around the room and with every growl made me hungrier. I felt feral. I knew it from the baseness of it all. I wanted to hunt, gather, run around the hospital and accumulate as much as I could and stash it all under my covers, where I could gorge myself in the midnight polar light of the hospital ward. But even with these urges, I could never get out of bed, with the tubes and casts that kept me weighted down.

In a panic I rang the bell again, and I heard her footsteps shuffling down the hallway, each swish of her white runners saying 'what now, what now...' and as she rounded the corner, my eyes widened and I saw her, and her face changed as she saw me staring back at her.

"Oh," she exclaimed as she walked to the bedside, "you're awake. Why are you awake? You should've slept longer..."

I cut her off. My lips cracked as I opened my mouth to speak. My voice sounded like an old barn door that creaked violently on the hinges of neglect. "I'm hungry..." I mustered, "I'm so hungry."

Looking at me, her eyes searched my expression for something, and I wasn't sure if it was fatigue or her gaze that made me want to shut my eyes.

"I'm hungryyyyy," I said again, sounding younger than I was, whiney and small, but I felt desperate. And I wanted juice, suddenly I wanted juice more than life itself. I would've traded a glass of juice straight across for my life. Life was no fun anyway just sitting in the hospital, so a glass of juice made much more sense than drawing out the inevitable. "I want juice too..."

She said nothing as she left the room. My heart sank and I tried to focus on the intravenous that went into my arm, willing the liquid to change into a thick pulpy orange juice, freshly squeezed, a dark orange with seeds that would slowly get stuck in the intravenous tubing. Now that would be nice I thought as the tube's liquid ebbed and morphed into my arm.

I heard more footsteps enter the room.

They were talking, and I opened my eyes just in time to see the hairy nostril of a man with glasses. His coffee breath made my eyes cringe. It smelt like heat, a fire of sour acidic musk that wafted into my nose and made my stomach lurch and my desire for food almost wilt. Almost.

I still wanted juice, and I struggled to dig up what I'd dreamt about, and as I went down that familiar path of numbers and stars, I remembered the milky way, and how it stretched towards the horizon like a gigantic milk shake, and as I remembered this, I yelled "milkshake!" which was probably more of a moan than a yell, but it did make the doctor step back and look at me with more curiosity than clinical gazing.

"Are you hungry," he asked, writing something down on the clipboard at the end of the bed.

"Yes," I said, trying not to get my hopes up, but as I talked, I heard my excitement ringing through the room. Beside me, I could see the waves of my pulse on the screen get bigger as I got more and more excited about milkshakes and juice, or maybe an orange juice float with a three scoops of vanilla ice cream. Now that would kick ass.

The doctor seemed to hear my heartbeat as well. He watched my pulse carve a green ever-rising swath across the monitor, arcing more feverishly with every heartbeat.

Saying something to the nurse, his voice was disguised by the growing noise that filled the room, and I didn't hear him as he turned and left.

Minutes later, she brought a bowl and a large liquid container into the room, a jug that had a spiraling straw that bent at the top, and it reminded me of the dream I'd had, and I was startled that I had dreamt exactly what I wanted, and now it was here in front of me. I was excited, so excited as the nurse held the straw to my lips, and I gulped with the thirst of someone who'd been stranded on a desert island for years.

The liquid burned in my mouth and made my teeth leap in pain.

I traced the liquid as it ran through my body. I could feel it splashing down into my empty stomach in a large crash that sent the acid billowing into my throat, but I didn't care. It was water, nothing more than water, but it was the single greatest thing I'd ever tasted, yet even in that ecstasy of the liquid as it rebuilt me, I focused on what was in the bowl.

I pointed to it, willing it to come to my side so I could eat it. The nurse picked it up, and took out a spoon and slowly slid the spoon into my mouth. I looked like a little bird getting fed. It bounced on my tongue and sent a wave of taste that made my eyes bulge from the tartness of it, yet I welcomed every spoonful of the Jell-O with an open mouth, like a ravenous dog who'd eat their own master, if only they'd fit into the bowl.

The days went faster with Jell-O and water. But my wandering dreams of constellation milkshakes never made it to my mouth.

My eyes no longer hid behind my eyelids, nervous of the light that lingered around my slowly healing body. I stopped surging with the onslaughts of medicines that I was

slowly being weaned off of. Also, my dreams stopped being the crazy meanderings that forced me to be wary when waking up. I didn't have to check my breathing as the hospitals whirrs and beeps became audible, to take stock in the silence of my body as I tried to figure out where I was. All of that was slowly fading away. Sure, my dreams were still floating way above my head, and after I awoke, I would still plummet to earth from the stars that were all numeric. But other than my fascination with numbers, everything seemed to be getting back to normal.

I could tell that everything was falling into place by the way my parents looked at me, by the way my brothers and sister looked at me. My dad no longer had those fidgety eyes that spooked me when I looked into them. His eyes had buzzed with panic that sent them side to side like the wings of a bee.

My mother always tried to be calm, her voice soothing and her touch reassuring. But even as she held it together while sitting beside me, I could never ignore her sputterings and sobs when they left the room. Her chatter would alter between 'poor baby' to 'we're so lucky that he lived, think about Mark's parents...' and then I'd stop listening, trying to remember if I knew what had happened to Mark. In fact, day-by-day, the more I thought about it, I couldn't remember anything happening to Mark. We'd ridden bikes not too long ago, I remembered that, and I knew that was a real memory because I was jealous of his bike that was so new, so shiny, so big. He had shocks and a fake gas tank, and could do everything on it; catwalks, bunny hops, brake stands, he could do it all, even ride without hands. He was so much better than I was at riding.

I wondered what had happened to him that my mom would be sad.

Days, weeks or months into my stay, I woke up to balloons and cards. My heart raced. I wondered what was going on. In the unfamiliarity of celebration, I thought everything had been a dream until a nurse came to me and handed me a picture of all the nurses that had helped me throughout my stay, and as she handed it to me, I felt her kiss on my cheek. It made my face blush and everyone in the room roar with laughter. I was my last day at the hospital, and as I watched the faces of everyone around me, I knew that it was a big deal.

Free feeling yet unsure, I walked out of the hospital on crutches, and smiled under my weight as I struggled. I didn't want to go in the wheelchair, as everyone had wanted. I wanted to leave on my own steam, not to look like a sick diseased kid that would get sympathetic glances for passersby, even though there was nothing wrong with that. I didn't want sympathy because I felt I didn't deserve it. I wasn't sick and hadn't battled the relentless villain of cancer or something terrible. The only thing I knew was that I'd only gotten hurt, and even though no one had really told me how I'd gotten hurt, or how badly it had happened, I still felt lucky and wanted to be my own.

I'd even said no to the hat my dad had brought, since my hair was still all uneven with the crosshatched stitching that made my head look like a Raggedy Anne doll.

Outside, stopping on the sidewalk, I faced the sun and let the warm breeze slowly flit through my eyebrows and eyelashes. I loved the way the air felt, with a slow caress somewhere behind the initial breeze that lulled the fears away of starting my life again. I knew that everything would be ok.

The one thing I noticed above it all were the bees that lolled slowly in the drunken afternoon peace. Their careless paths crossed my body many times, yet their senses remained unbothered by my body, and they paid me no harm as they spiraled around me, laughing with their buzzing as they wandered to a hive that swarmed with like minds. My mom asked me if everything was ok as I stood there, eyes open a crack as I took in everything. My eyes watered from the intensity of the light that was so much brighter than the room I was used to, and she must have confused this for tears. She slid her arm around me for support and I felt her tremble, and I smiled some more and she coughed and cried and my dad brought around the car. They had no idea how I was feeling, but as far as I was concerned, this was the happiest day I'd known in ages.

The streets were busier than I remembered, and the trees were greener and fuller as we passed the familiar sights of my neighborhood. I was surprised that life had continued on, even though in my world it had ground to a complete stop. And that was the weird thing, realizing that life went on. It felt weird that life didn't give a shit that I'd spent whatever amount of time in the hospital, all stapled up and fed by tubes, and I felt ripped off that I'd missed the leaves unfolding on the trees. I had missed the slowly budding branches turn into a gigantic green canopy that sheltered yards and arced over the streets like an honour guard. I had missed the flowing pink and white cherry blossoms as they fell, mimicking a snowstorm as the buds piled up on the sidewalks and cars. I had completely missed the way my dad would cuss when he had to wipe what he called the caustic fucking flowers off of the car, before they ate through the clearcoat and made the car look like a leper. I had missed all of that, and I truly felt ripped off.

Turning the final corner to our house, my dad braked suddenly as a basketball careened off of the car hood, quickly followed by a pack of five year olds that didn't know the meaning of looking before crossing the street. Opening his window, my dad in his nicest dad voice told them that maybe next time they should look first before running across the street, and even as he talked I noticed something different in his voice. There was something there that I wasn't too familiar with, a note of sadness and caution in place of what he normally said when kids did stupid stuff like cross the road without looking. Normally, he would've said something like 'you damn kids! Why don't you open your friggen eyes? Do you want me to mow your little asses over. I'm gonna come back later and...' or something like that till he was red in the face, scarring the shit out of the kids and chastising them for being stupid little morons.

With the change in his voice, I thought more and more of his chastising words. I tried to focus on when or where I'd last heard them, and I kept on coming back to that day with my broken bike. I remembered his words when I'd walked along the sidewalk, straight and confused. I recalled hearing my dad's words echoing through my head, even though they sounded submerged and barely audible.

My heart raced. I tried not to think too much about that day, since things seemed to be creeping back. I opened my eyes to see if we were home, but saw another friend's house, and it stunned me. Maybe it was the way my dad sped up as we passed by it, or maybe it was the way my mom looked at me in her vanity mirror. Their actions made me drawn to the house.

It was untended, dark and unwelcoming. It felt strange to see it that way, and I worried, wondering if my best friend had moved, left when I was in the hospital.

The house had always looked nice, with flowering cherry trees and low lying rhododendrons, green manicured lawns and wild flowers cascading out of planters and hanging baskets. Now, everything looked overgrown and dry. Tree blossoms blanketed the grass in a paper mache covering that made the lawn look sickly. Mr. Watts had never let that happen, leaves rarely lay on the grass longer than a day before he'd rake them up. His house always looked the best, by a country mile.

"What happened to Mark's house," I asked, confused and trying to ignore the growing lump in my throat, "did they move or something?"

My mom's sobs sent me reeling, and I fought with all the change I'd seen and heard in the last few minutes.

Then I saw the bike, his bike, Mark's bike, the once shiny new envy of the neighborhood, now twisted and scratched, rusting in the open elements, leaning against the garage beside the garbage cans.

Then, I saw everything in context, the legs on the street that had blocked out everything, the blood and the blouse and everything else. It had been him who had been run over, it had been us that had been hit by a car when we were stupid dumb kids and had done the one thing that had sent my dad's voice careening through my head, even at the last minute, loud enough to have me pause briefly, just long enough to remain one second behind.

From that moment, looking out the car window and seeing Mark's bike, I knew I'd never forget the sound of approaching footsteps from where I'd lain on the sidewalk that confusing day, seemingly ages ago.