

Twin Sized Mattress

You still crave lemonade, but the taste doesn't satisfy you as much as it used to. You still crave summer, but sometimes you mean summer, five years ago."

— *Alida Nugent*

Some days, my mind reads like a manuscript that got neglected in the printer due to lack of ink in the cartridges. I was eleven years old when I recognized the universal pain that hums in the background of each day, like a continuous record playing even after the party has ended. My parents gave me my first journal on my thirteenth birthday, unaware of the daily screams that would be written on the pages in the years to come. I like to think that this moment was the beginning of the end in a way, when I had discovered the power of my mind. If there's one thing a teenage girl is good at, it's internalizing everything no matter its size or importance. You can tell her there's nothing to worry about but shortly after, she'll be found sitting on the steps with nails bitten down to her knuckles. This is the way it goes. I was diagnosed with depression and anxiety a couple of weeks into high school which is strange to say because I felt as if the sadness had always been there except now, I had a name for it. My freshman year of high school was mediocre and always spent with headphones in my ears and eyes glued to the floor. It wasn't until the summer that came when my skin was shed, making all the following summers seem lifeless. I'm still trying to find my way back to that kind of happiness.

She was reusing her Starbucks cup to pour the Jack Daniels into. The remnants of a red drink mixed well with the whiskey, so she told me. We were fifteen and daisy fresh in the middle of July on her birthday, which makes her zodiac sign a Cancer. They are known for their intuition, emotion, and psychic abilities. We celebrated on an old soccer field behind an elementary school in my hometown. The grass had been cut recently, I could feel its sharpness underneath my bare

feet. There wasn't a single cloud above us to bear witness to our childish selves, running to chase the sun to the other side of the world as it set, or sitting in a circle and passing around a joint. I think our laughter shook the trees and made flowers grow where there weren't any.

Remembering is a funny thing, the way it can alter entire days or years if it wants to. Human beings like to feel some sort of control of themselves, but there is no such thing. I realized that when I met her. For the moment, pretend you are fifteen years old during the summertime. Every day feels infinite when there's nothing to worry about, a feeling you or any other human being is ever likely to experience again. That's the beauty of a moment though, it will never come back in the same form.

I met my best friend, Maggie, in 2014 although we believe we had met before, hundreds of years ago in some past life where I was a runaway and so was she. I always felt that we met so both of our lives could be better. The first day we met, I slept over at her house and she gave me the book *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love* by Raymond Carver, claiming that it was everything she ever felt, put into words and chapters. Her brother had left her a blueberry beer on her dresser, leaving a ring of water from succumbing to the summer heat. Halfway through it she says, "I'm the loneliest person in the world because I fell in love at twelve". I didn't ask her about the who's and why's of it, I just sat across from her, focused my eyes on the condensation around her fingers from the can, and admired the rawness of the moment. She had been fifteen for only a couple hours and here we were, already contemplating life in terms of centuries.

In my mind, we are sitting in the back of her mom's Honda with the windows down, driving through the streets of the suburban, white-washed town I call home. The song that plays during our drive is like the feeling of déjà vu, as if there is something else going on besides the

reality around myself, just begging for acknowledgement. I am fifteen and in love with my ignorance and I need to be selfish with my youth because I know I will never be this happy again. This is how I spent my teenage years, wishing they'd never end, knowing I was running out of time. I felt like a terminally ill patient watching the clock's hands like a wildfire, only able to await the flames that ensue. During our drive, the singer in the song playing says, *"She hopes I'm cursed forever to sleep on a twin sized mattress in somebody's attic or basement my whole life. Never graduating up in size to add another, and my nightmares will have nightmares every night."*

The lead singer is being punished by the ghost of an old relationship which haunts his heart, discouraging him from ever finding that solace in another person again. This is true for me, too. The ghosts never cease to linger in the quiet moments of the day, even at twenty-three years old. Driving home, grocery shopping, trying to get to sleep, the ghosts have always found a way to unlock that boarded up part of my heart where I keep skeletons and old journals, fearing their weight will crush me. Looking back, I wouldn't change a thing, no matter how heavy the weight of it might've been at times because there is a strange beauty in the pain. I got comfortable with being sad that summer, I think it's because the melancholy never left, unlike so many other things. While there were a million reasons to be happy I always ended up finding a million and one reasons to be sad.

So, I took each day as it came, never expecting it to end and fade into another because the next day never mattered as much as the present moment. Maggie and I would always say "We're not here for a long time, we're here for a good time", at the ripe age of fifteen years old as if we knew everything we already needed to know in life. Being young is like having a handful of sand and not realizing how quickly it can slip through your fingers. It is depleting being the one who

remembers everything, down to the last cigarette smoked or words spoken, the last dance of the night before everyone goes home. During the school year I spent most of my Friday and Saturday nights riding in cars with others, whether they were my best friends or people we had picked up along the way. We said “I love you” to each other in our own definitions by getting each other coffee without asking, splitting a pack of cigarettes with them because they’re short on cash that week, or packing each other bowls of weed while sitting in the car for hours just listening, talking, crying, repeating. The only rules were to drive cautiously when someone is rolling a joint, don’t touch the volume on the stereo without asking, let the other passengers know you’re about to smoke a cigarette so they can roll all the windows down first, and forget about the struggles of that day because there’s no room in the car for those. We were the lost boys from Peter Pan, our gang of degenerates just looking for an excuse to leave home. It’s not that our families or houses were taxing on our spirits, although there were times that was true, but it was our minds that became burdensome in their constant mess of confusion and grief for ourselves or for the rest of the world. I don’t know when that stopped being enough, but there was a time when it was the last time we hung our heads out the car windows without us even knowing it.

People are so busy making memories that they forget about the aftermath they leave. Finding solace in a human being is a strange phenomenon that I’ve been lucky enough to experience, but nothing lasts forever, not even pain. So, we painted ourselves in color at night and would go out trying to leave a mark or piece of ourselves in the places we went. Smoking became a common language. We knew, of course, that we couldn’t fix each other in the ways we wanted to as they do in movies, but the company kept the demons at bay for a while as we smoked ourselves into a universe that didn’t so closely mirror the one we existed in. Looking back, it reminds me of

Plato's *Allegory of the Cave*, a story based around the idea that a person can live in their own type of reality based on what environment they're given and the details they choose to pay attention to.

Sacred memories are often cursed memories because of their sole existence like a fingerprint, a distinctiveness that not even identical twins share. Humanity has been worshiping memories since the dawn of time. Sometimes my justifications and superstitions get the best of me and I end up thinking that each car that cuts me off has a better reason for being where they need to be more so than me. But today, every person that cut me off had a license plate with triple numbers on it, so I held onto that possibility like gold, that maybe the universe noticed me today even if it was only to screw me over.

An English teacher I had in high school asked the class if we would rather have the universe notice our existence, even if it meant constant struggle, or would we rather it be indifferent to us altogether. I was surprised by the amount of kids that preferred it's indifference over recognition. More than half the class shared this ambivalence, a generation that's known for its numbness to tragedy. What I couldn't understand was the contradiction of it all. Individuals are constantly trying to gain acknowledgement from all corners of the world with the hope that they will be remembered. That's all anyone really wants, isn't it? To not be forgotten after they've left, to linger on in the hearts or heads of at least one human being because being forgotten is our greatest fear. Words have always meant so much to me, even more so than actions, I guess that's because I've always been so good at talking and talking that I never get around to the action of doing. Maggie and I both grew up writing on vacant napkins and in the margins of books, desperate to write out the words before they escaped us.

Humans imagined self-importance is the only home we've ever known, like the planet Earth, perpetually hanging in the middle of a galaxy.