

# Can't I Just Tweet About It

A Handful of Short Essays I Wrote  
When I Should Have Been Sleeping

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## Melodramatic Autoeulogy

The first time the hint of my ghost appeared online was in a tweet on October 4, 2016:

Ugh I feel so weird today, I feel like I am ready to molt or something.

11:29 AM - 4 Oct 2016

I don't remember this particular day, but I'm now quite familiar with the sensation mentioned. An itch under the skin, a prickling cold sweat that doesn't appear on the surface. Fidgeting, shrugging, rolling the shoulder blades, as if that'll shift everything back into place. Sometimes my ghost is perfectly aligned with my body, and moves in immaculate sync. Sometimes my body drapes too loosely over my ghost, heavy, like wet clothes or a weighted blanket or that lead apron you wear while you're getting an X-ray. Sometimes my ghost isn't even in the same room as my body, tied to it only by the slackest line. When I look at you with nothing behind the eyes, it means my ghost has probably wandered off somewhere.

I keep a mental index of the various ways in which my emotional-chemical imbalances present themselves. Neat and tidy little packages that are placed in my hands and, once opened, trigger extreme internal climate change. Their descriptors are usually physical, and can get annoyingly poetic. A fog behind the eyes. A whirlpool dragging the body down an endless choking spiral. The mind lifting out of the head, drifting along after the body's empty husk, an untethered ghost. And death. I talk about death a lot.

I've been getting such wild emotional whiplash recently..

A few days ago I was resurfacing from a months-long depression hole, today I want to shove a Cinnabon in my mouth and lie down in the road.

3:21 PM - 29 Aug 2017

I mean, I've been through cognitive behavioral therapy. Even before that, I established rules for myself (because starting things has always been easier for me than finishing them):

- Don't say cruel things to yourself; eg. 'you're being stupid,' 'this drawing is garbage,' 'shut up nobody cares,' 'I hate myself'
- Don't drink when you're sad
- Don't even fucking joke about dying

The reason for that last one being that I might<sup>1</sup> believe in some version of *The Secret*.<sup>2</sup> The power of positive thinking, or in this case, of negative. It's a pretty straightforward concept of put-in-get-out attitude. At the time that these rules were put in place, it was under the assumption that if I wasn't careful, I could talk myself into becoming suicidal.

(Obsessive thoughts become compulsive behavior. If I let myself tease out an idea, I know I'll end up fulfilling it somewhere down the line. Every time I've given myself bangs or bleached my ends or chopped off six inches, it's been after

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<sup>1</sup> I pepper my speech with 'might' and 'perhaps' and 'maybe' because I have commitment issues. I spend way too much mental energy trying to figure myself out, but I hate to define myself. I have a revolting desire to be special.

<sup>2</sup> Although I've just learned that that book is pseudoscience and pseudospirituality, not just something that Oprah likes and that I've learned about through cultural osmosis. So maybe not, after all.

at least a month of casually mentioning to everyone I know, hey-I'm-thinking-about-doing-this-but-I'm-not-sure. All the hair decisions of my adult life have been made around three in the morning, standing in front of the bathroom mirror with kitchen scissors, delirious from sleeplessness, determined to finally enact a change I've been waffling over for weeks. I'm just saying, that kind of move can be corrected upon waking, but joking about how nice it would be to be dead could yield more problematic results. I can be pretty convincing.)

Still, years later, after countless curves and dips on the emotional roller coaster, I've broken that last rule the most. It held fast for a good long while, actually, but rules are meant to be broken, especially when you made them for yourself so you feel like you're allowed to cheat, and anyways you're in a really bad place right now, so just let me have this, okay, don't punish me for trying to say how I feel.

From what I can tell, "I want to die" is an expression of a certain flavor of emotional exhaustion, at least when it's coming out of *my* mouth. It's a joke that underlines the lines under my eyes. A semi-sarcastic desire for unconsciousness. A plea for some state of rest.

I'm always adamant that, when I say I want to die, it's never literal. I'm incredibly self-conscious about not coming across as at-risk; nothing worse than trying to express your emotional-mental garbage and receiving worry, pity, hollow shallow rote encouragement in response.<sup>3</sup> So when I make that statement, I then also have to make it crystal clear to whoever might possibly even in the slightest be listening that don't worry, I'm fine, I'm just being overly dramatic as a style choice.

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<sup>3</sup> I went on a few dates with a really nice guy who didn't know how to respond to offhand, lighthearted mentions of depression aside from saying he's "really sorry I'm feeling bad." He was very kind and very sincere. Now my OKCupid profile includes a caveat at the bottom: "Don't message me unless you have the emotional capacity to joke about broken brain shit."

In turn, I find myself getting seriously sick of my need to explain myself all the time. It's like I'm shrinking ever downwards towards one-dimensionality, as I push Being Depressed as my Single Character Trait. I'm getting really bored of myself and this cycle of "I have to talk about myself" to "why am I so obsessed with myself" and back around again. With the constant talking about how broken I feel, I'm starting to think I'm subconsciously telegraphing some truly narcissistic levels of self-reflection.<sup>4</sup>

I have been trying so hard to come back to life all week and it's only Wednesday, AMA.

6:45 PM - 31 Jan 2018

There's a book called *How To Come Alive Again* that will hit shelves someday in the nearish future. I found the author, millennial Londoner Beth McColl, through funny tweets about mansplaining, and followed her for funny tweets about depression and anxiety. The book, which was crowdfunded, will be an ongoing attempt at self-help written by someone drowning in just as much mental illness as its readers, while she's in the process of drowning.

I eat this shit up. When I read the book (after it's eventually published), as I have read other personal accounts of similar experiences, it will not be in search of a lifeline. I'll likely be wallowing contentedly in it, more satisfied by recognizing a fellow feeling than attempting to use it as a resource for how to live. 'Coming alive again' is literally one of the phrases in my feelings index. Which is to say, before I come alive again, I must be dead.

This comes up a lot, lately. *Deadness* is a convenient

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<sup>4</sup> 'Starting to think' is maybe giving me too much integrity credit; one of my favorite hobbies, as you might have gathered, is flopping down and waxing poetic from the floor about how utterly garbage I feel. It's quite obvious, and not very endearing.

shorthand for a depressive episode, for that loss of emotional sensation and sometimes of the will and strength to move at all. It's so easy to picture myself as my own ghost, sloughing off the ties binding me to this great mound of consciousnessless deadweight.

In the early cold months of 2014, after I had my Big Bad Breakdown and moved back into my parents' house, I picked up the pastime of walking or driving through graveyards at night, living out some gothy teen aspiration I'd never had.<sup>5</sup> Maybe this was part of my process of developing the language to talk about my interiors; at the time, the graveyard was the only place quiet enough for me to catch my breath. I liked that there were things nearby that used to be people; I liked feeling haunted.

I'm noticing that my recent aim for 'emotional exhibitionism' really only relates to controlled output, like these drawn sequences and other writings. When emotional fog takes hold of me in a visible, physical way, I don't want anyone watching.

10:50 AM - 29 Nov 2017

There's this recurring obsessive thought that I call 'the mantra,' because I guess that's a little easier than saying "Sometimes there's a rhythmic voice in my head that chants 'I want to die I want to die.'" When the mantra comes around, I'm more angry than anything else. The mantra is an annoyance, a symptom of anxiety and obsessive-compulsion, but one that I don't know how to stave off.

At this point, I've done so much talking about my mental and emotional states that developing shorthand and

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<sup>5</sup> I grew up, for the most part, in an old, historical town out in the suburbs of Boston. (It wasn't Salem but it did have witch trials. That kind of town.) There are plenty of cemeteries to explore.

nicknames for different phenomena and symptoms has become systematized. Notice the thing; define it; name it. Pinning my experiences like bugs on a board.

Is having a language to describe these bugs helping me handle them? Does identification of the problem create the distance needed to figure out a solution? Perhaps it's easier to dismantle a construct if you're familiar with its individual parts.

Or does storing these phrases in my internal glossary keep them at the forefront of my mind, always on call to pester me? Am I repeatedly shoving my own face in it, like a dog who shat on the carpet? Am I learning the lesson or just re-exposing myself to the dilemma?

Can you banish a demon by speaking its name, or does that only serve to give it more power?



Sappho Bot  
@sapphobot

Following

I simply want to be dead.

(multiple occasions)

On Twitter, I'm following the account @sapphobot. It regularly tweets out randomized selections from *If Not, Winter*, Anne Carson's translation of the existing fragments of Sappho's poetry.

I've retweeted this at least four times now, just about every time it comes back around. I'm in love with Sappho. She gets me.

## Telegrams from the bed I can't get out of this week

SORRY I WONT BE COMING IN TODAY IM REALLY SICK STOP

YEAH I ENDED UP TAKING A MENTAL HEALTH DAY IM JUST REALLY NOT DOING WELL LOL STOP

I JUST SAID IM SICK STOP I MEAN ITS TRUE LOL I BASICALLY AM IMMOBILE RIGHT NOW STOP

DIDNT EVEN NOTICE MYSELF FALLING ASLEEP BUT HEY NOW ITS DARK OUT STOP GOTTA LOVE WINTER THE NIGHTTIME STARTS SO DAMN EARLY STOP

A SLEEVE OF SALTINES FOR BREAKFAST BECAUSE I CANT MANAGE TO DRAG THIS CORPSE INTO THE KITCHEN STOP

OKAY ITS DINNER TIME BUT I SAY BREAKFAST BECAUSE ALL IVE EATEN TODAY IS SELTZER WHICH IS NOT A MEAL STOP

SOMETIMES I LIKE TO LIE FACEDOWN ON THE FLOOR BECAUSE IT MAKES THE PRESSURE IN MY CHEST FEEL ACTUAL AND PHYSICAL AND REAL STOP

LAID IN BED AND WATCHED TWO FULL SEASONS OF

A SHOW IM NOT EVEN ENJOYING SO THATS WHERE  
IM AT RIGHT NOW HAHA STOP

TRYING TO CATCH UP ON SOME WORK BUT IT  
SEEMS MY EYES HAVE MELTED OUT OF MY HEAD  
BECAUSE I TOTALLY CANT READ SHIT STOP

I REALLY NEED TO GET BACK ON SOME DRUGS BUT  
THE THOUGHT OF FINDING A NEW PSYCHIATRIST  
MAKES ME WANT TO SLIT MY THROAT LOL STOP

PLZ MURDER ME LOL STOP

I LITERALLY TOOK LIKE FOUR NAPS TODAY STOP  
BASICALLY I WASNT AWAKE TODAY STOP LIKE THE  
AMOUNT OF TIME I WAS AWAKE TODAY EQUATES TO  
THE LENGTH OF A NORMAL DECENT NAP STOP

STATUS UPDATE IM SUPER SUPER DONE WITH THIS  
SHIT STOP

DO YOU EVER NOTICE YOUR EYES ARE BURNING  
BECAUSE YOUVE BEEN STARING AT THE SCREEN  
TOO LONG BUT YOURE HYPNOTIZED BY IT SO YOU  
JUST KEEP STARING BECAUSE WHAT ELSE ARE YOU  
GONNA DO STOP

HAD THE CURTAINS OPEN FOR ALL OF TWO  
MINUTES BECAUSE I COULDNT STAND HOW BRIGHT  
IT WAS MAKING THE ROOM BUT SURE JUST KEEP  
LOOKING AT DUMB GARBAGE ON THE INTERNET  
UNTIL YOUR EYEBALLS ARE FRIED BECAUSE YOU  
DONT WANT TO BE ALONE STOP

REALLY WISH I COULD CRY RIGHT NOW TBH STOP  
I FEEL LIKE IT WOULD BE CATHARTIC STOP BUT  
THIS DUMB BOD WONT LET ME STOP

SOMEONE PLEASE COME OVER AND BEAT ME UP  
STOP

I ACTUALLY WENT OUTSIDE TODAY BUT I JUST  
WENT AND BOUGHT A BUNCH OF FRIES AND CAME  
HOME AND ATE THEM IN THE DARK STOP PUT ON  
MY MAKEUP AND CLOTHES LITERALLY JUST FOR  
THAT BECAUSE HEAVEN FORBID ANYONE SEE ME  
UNDONE AND KNOW IM IN A BAD PLACE STOP

IVE NOTICED THAT THE SHITTIER I FEEL THE  
CUTER I DRESS BECAUSE IM TRYING TO TRICK  
MYSELF AND ALSO THE WORLD I GUESS STOP

YO DOES ANYONE WANT TO GET DRUNK AND  
PRETEND WERE ALL DOING OKAY STOP

WHAT IS THIS ANGSTY BULLSHIT UGH SHUT UP  
STOP

THOUGHT I WAS FEELING BETTER THIS MORNING  
LIKE ACTUALLY WAS FEELING GOOD ABOUT THE  
DAY BUT THEN WHAM HERE IT COMES AGAIN STOP  
BUT HEY NOW IM LYING ON THE COUCH INSTEAD  
OF THE BED SO THATS PROGRESS LMAO STOP

STOP STOP STOP STOP STOP STOP STOP STOP

## Put Up Your Dukes!

Maybe this is an internal catalog, to thumb through until you find something that fits your needs. Maybe it's a phone book, with set parameters for elements that come and go, and change. Maybe it's an elimination bracket, and only one contender remains standing at the end. Maybe it's a roll call.

I imagine myself in pieces, each an iteration of me with different drives and priorities. I imagine them getting along, or fighting it out, or trying to come to some diplomatic solution through gritted teeth. I make bets on the outcome of each fight, then rig the game. My life, playing out as performance carefully curated to appear unstaged.

It's not like I'm unique in treating my life this way – everyone's putting on different faces for different situations, everyone has internal conflict – and maybe I hate that. It's so easy to resent yourself when nobody else is making it look as hard as this feels.

Who's the 'I' talking here? Because she's the one in this overpopulated head who keeps trying to line up grudge matches between the occupants who she sees as each others' nemeses: Lazy Olivia versus Need-to-Succeed Olivia, Emotional Exhibitionist Olivia versus Desire-for-Anonymity Olivia, Pragmatic Olivia versus Indulgent Olivia, et al. This bitch is the one who's truly getting on my last nerve; who signed off on her event permit?

I guess she must be the 'I' who needs concrete answers in

order to be content. The analytical one who's endlessly frustrated that the scientific method can't be applied to her own thinking processes. She keeps running experiments, getting stuck in recursive thought loops, trying to track the pattern of what-made-this-happen-and-how-can-it-be-prevented-in-the-future. Listen, she's trying her best, so I shouldn't be mad at her. But her efforts are *exhausting*.

(Picture me holding up popsicle stick dolls, all looking like me but with different oblique facial experiences that could mean pretty much anything. I'm trying to make it easier to follow along but I keep losing track of which character is which, myself. I think they're switching name tags whenever my back is turned, just to fuck with me, or because they keep changing their goddamn minds.)

This is the Dungeons & Dragons-style alignment chart I made to remember the Freudian model:

Id – Chaotic Neutral

Super-ego – Lawful (Good?)

Ego – Trying its goddamn best, okay

A year ago, I decided to just let all my internal garbage spill out in the open. I was tired of holding it in, and anyways I was in such a bad place that it was the only thing in my head that had any form of clarity, the only thing that I could grab onto as a subject for artistic expression. Mental illness accidentally became My Brand. I call it 'emotional exhibitionism,' because if all of this is coming out anyways, I might as well have a tight handle on the way it's presented.

I joke about having commitment issues, but it's that kind of joke where you laugh while you say something so you can

pretend you don't know it's true. All these little warring bits inside me are constantly campaigning to be heard, and I'm such an easily influenced pushover that I can't come down on any one side most of the time. But when I do make a commitment, I am absolutely loathe to let it go; it was such a struggle to get there, it feels like an unacceptable waste of energy to then change my mind. So, while I'm getting sick and tired and, frankly, bored of publicly dissecting all my mental-emotional processes for whichever audience enters my orbit, I'm determined to see it through until the end of the project, whatever that may be.

You see, I can't even trust that part of me who's whining that she's sick and tired and bored and wants to stop with all this. That girl's in the middle of a depressive spiral, she can't be trusted to *put in energy* to *actually do things*. She can't even drag herself out of bed. She can't even call a fucking therapist. She doesn't have the authority to make decisions for me. At least once a week, I'll find myself wondering if the constant and obsessive self-analysis and internal cataloguing is helping or hurting me; but it's a lot simpler to dismiss that thought as the product of laziness or messy brain chemicals than to consider the idea that it might be wise to change course. So I keep chasing those diminishing returns. I call it 'mental ouroborosing.'

Wherefore this turmoil? Who is causing me to endlessly spin my wheels to no avail? Anxiety brain, surely. Anxious and paranoid and drained and searching frantically for one nice, concrete, overarching, all-embracing, all-constricting rule of law that will turn my dancing popsicle stick puppets into one big popsicle stick monster that is content with its lot and knows what it wants and realizes that it's fallible and that that's okay.

I'm constructing myself with no instruction but the inspector keeps coming around and tutting that the thing with no blueprint and no necessity is wrong anyways.

I've established a precinct of the Thought Police in my head and set them to monitor my inconsistencies, my flaws, my forbidden behaviors. I make up rules in the name of taking care of myself, then set myself up to fail. It's always been easier to sabotage my efforts and excitedly point out my fallibility – "Ha! See, see, you couldn't do this thing you were worried about accomplishing, SO THERE, I WAS RIGHT" – than to pour my heart and hope into expecting success. It's always been easier to relax into the gut-wrenching feeling of being wrong.

The little characters in my head are so sick from fighting that I often find myself utterly frozen; no energy or ability to make a move in any direction, everyone's either tied up with rope or exhausted from the effort of the tying. The only option, sometimes, is to lie in bed for a week and languish in the knowledge that I – every warring part of me, somehow, every part that makes up the whole – have been defeated.

Is this a defense mechanism, the natural instinct that causes the deer in headlights to forgo fight-or-flight, to freeze? Is it stopping me from making self-destructive decisions, opting for the slightly-less-destructive act of inaction?

My parents started a company around the time I was entering middle school, so I grew up having business books and productivity gurus quoted in my direction. My mom pulled this one analogy specifically for me:

"You think too far ahead. An envelope with your name on it comes in the mail, and you assume worst-case-scenario it's the IRS saying you haven't paid your taxes. Then you're in court. Then you get punished. You still haven't opened the envelope and already you've worried yourself into jail."

I'm in postal hell. I'm rigor mortis, perpetual worry machine, stuck in a single block of ice like a cartoon caveman. I'm staring at the pile of mail, cursing the USPS worker, cursing the IRS,



fantasizing about how nice it would be to sink into the floor and disappear, imagining a life behind bars, not fact-checking anything, still unable to tear the envelope open and realize that they just need me to confirm my address.

Would you like to meet my own private Prometheus? He is self-awareness; he is cursed. He scrambles to retrieve some form of enlightenment, some torch to brighten the path. The flame he finds is flawed, casts terrifying shadows that I'm not ready to see. He is punished accordingly, for abstractions beyond his control. He is obsessive-compulsive self-flagellation. He does not deserve this treatment, but he receives it nonetheless. The story repeats, without end.

I wonder sometimes, do I think too highly of myself, or too poorly? Every sentence I write lately is an 'I' statement; the narcissism is palpable. I'm obsessed with myself as the most interesting and intricate puzzle, self-absorbed to the point of utter ridiculousness. So stuck in this loop that I'm not even sure I can properly engage with others anymore. Everything someone says in conversation, I bring back around to shine through my own lens. "You're telling me about an experience you had? Hey, here's my experience, whether it's relevant or not; let's talk about that instead."

(I promise I'm not always this venomous, but then again, who knows if that's actually true.)

Right now I'm doing this experiment where I write a letter to myself every week. I talk to myself all the time as it is, on paper and in the notes app on my phone. Something about trying to formalize the conversation, even by just typing out casual and

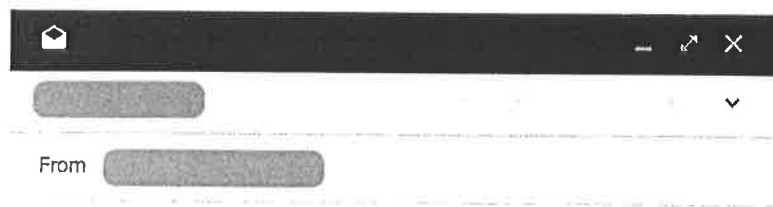
rambling missives to my future self, feels like trepanning. Boring a hole into my skull to let the pressure out. I want it all to leave. I want to void my body and mind. I want to be empty.

Now as I write this, an unforecasted storm is raging. I find, to some surprise, that I am holding back hysterical screams while I put these words to the page. I find that I am grinding my teeth down to dust. So maybe instead this process exacerbates symptoms, creates new faults in the system. Does being aware of a problem make it better or worse? Lately I have been allowing my anxieties and depressions to cannibalize me, and justifying that with lines like "Oh, well, if it's happening I should just ride it out. This is a byproduct of mental illness and it's better to cope than to fight." Acceptance is the final stage of grief. Does that apply to this situation, or am I being overdramatic again?

I'm not sure if I truly want to be freed from this battle, or if I somehow need it to keep functioning. Someone recently told me that I'm addicted to stress, and he's not wrong. Is the constant struggle to rise above the melee of myself the only thing that moves me forward? Would my identity stay intact without it? I'm afraid to find out.

So for now I'll keep fucking fighting.

A stilted email to my mom, who asked me during a recent phone call to explain various elements of my broken brain shit in a way that she could understand. I never sent it.



### Follow-up on last night.

Ma,

Here's what I could come up with after trying to put this stuff into words.

#### Depressed does not mean sad.

Major depressive disorder, clinical depression, depression: Before modern medicine they called it 'melancholia,' which I think is actually a better word for it nowadays if you don't want it to be confused with a general sad mood.

Not to say 'sadness' isn't part of it, but I'd be more inclined to characterize it as a dulling of the emotional senses. So it's not really feeling anything, or being detached and distant from what you should be feeling.

A depressive episode (just because you have depression doesn't mean you're in it all the time) drains your energy; sometimes I'm walking around in a haze for days, or sometimes I can barely get out of bed. Sometimes I can't focus my eyes enough to process words. Sometimes I can't do anything but sleep.

A lot of the time, I'll call a depressive episode a 'spiral,' because it feels like I'm being dragged downwards by a whirlpool. I say I'm drowning because I honestly, physically feel suffocated, and I can't struggle my way out.

#### Anxiety is not just about feeling anxious.

Everyone has anxieties, everyone has scenarios that make them stressed and afraid. Not everyone has an anxiety disorder, which will set those feelings off unnecessarily.

Basically, sometimes I'll have mental and physical stress and fear reactions for no reason, or bad reason. My anxiety comes with strong paranoia, muscle tension (remember those times I literally couldn't hold my head up, my neck hurt so much?), a racing mind, the occasional panic attack.

This is super fun in combination with obsessive thoughts.

#### Dissociation(?)

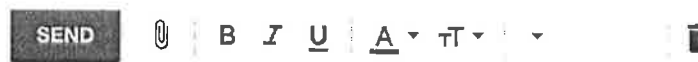
I'm honestly still a little bit up in the air about this, because I only started recognizing that I was feeling it some time after I stopped going to my last therapist. But dissociation is absolutely the word I was looking for. (I need to find a new therapist...)

There are times when I feel like I've been lifted out of my body, even as it continues to function and act. This is called depersonalization, and is apparently a symptom of anxiety. I've been feeling this a lot lately.

I can't actually send you this email, because I have customs laws at my borders that don't allow me to completely unravel in your direction. Keeping the details of what I deal with from you is what makes your home my refuge; if I can't hold it together when I'm with my family, I'll have no reason to feel the need to hold myself together anywhere else. Does that make sense, or is that ridiculous?

Anyways. Love you.

Olivia



## Something That Hurts

1. Today is Thursday. Last Sunday, I noticed a bruise on my arm. It's about the size of my thumb, and I'm not sure how I got it. All week I've been absentmindedly pressing down on it, to feel that sweet soreness. It will be gone soon; today it is a fading yellow-green, and getting close to non-tender.

2. Here's what it's like to cry in public.

You've been feeling emotionally dead for a couple of weeks now – nothing new – and you're just trying to come back to yourself a little bit. Your favorite place to waste time is the big Barnes and Noble in Union Square because you're a *fucking nerd* and being surrounded by books is your comfort zone, so you're sitting here in their fake Starbucks with a large coffee and a stack of design magazines, ostensibly reading about responsive coding but mostly just spacing out on the same sentence over and over again. Your eyes can't seem to focus properly.

Then you flip to an interview with some British illustrator whose work you're not familiar with. They're talking about how they stay productive; that much you can make out through your broken-ass eyes. Your broken-ass eyes, which have started... leaking? They're dripping or something? They've cracked open and all that gel inside is escaping? Now you can't see *even more* than you couldn't see already, because something wet is crowding, clouding your vision. What the *hell* is this all about, you're just trying to read some fucking magazines.

When you're emotionally dead, it's a lot easier to get mad than sad. You do so quite willingly now, silently fuming at your

table in the middle of the motherfucking *cafe in Barnes and Noble of all places*, stonefacedly weeping over a motherfucking *magazine of all things*. There is *no reason to be doing this right now so you have no idea why it's happening but you're sure as hell not pleased about it*. Your jaw clenches furiously as you attempt to stem the flow of tears using an obstinate crossness. You're sure you look like an idiot, but let's be real, this is New York and everyone's seen much worse.

Not long after this, you'll lose your goddamn mind and unofficially and unceremoniously drop out of college five months before graduation and move back to your parents' house in the boring-ass suburbs and sleep for a long long long time, so keep your eyes peeled for that fun event.

3. Three years ago I fell down some stairs. Literally just four steps, on a pretty rooftop bar in Cambridge. (I maintain that I was not drunk! I'd had like two drinks, okay, with food.) I sprained my left ankle pretty badly – when I got home an hour later and took off my boots with the three-inch heels, it looked like a baseball was trying to escape from my foot – and slammed my right shin on the edge of the bottom step.

I knew the leg was bleeding, I could feel it through the fabric of my jeans. But they were a skinny fit and wouldn't roll up far enough, so I couldn't get a look until I was back in my bedroom, taking off my pants. Pants-on, there was a visible, foot-long dent going down the front of my calf. Pants-off, it was a straight gash that was ragged at the edges, and it hurt like *FUCK*. There were no proper bandages in the house, so I wiped it down with rubbing alcohol and covered it with wet paper towels, lying flat on my back to sleep. I called it a zombie bite; it honestly looked like I'd been chewed up.

The sprain was the worse of the two injuries accrued from that fall: next morning, I couldn't stand, so I crawled around

on the floor looking for any object that could act as a makeshift cane. (Like a fucking idiot, I waited another day before going to the hospital. I wanted to 'see if it would get better.' At least I could very gingerly limp at that point.) I wore a brace for a couple of months, but didn't change my hurried commuter walk or my way of running down the subway stairs; favoring the left leg messed up the right, and then vice versa. Subsequently, both my ankles and both my knees are terrible now.

The zombie bite is the more interesting of the injuries, in my opinion. It healed, and now looks more like a fading hickey from a giant. The flesh over my tibia is not smooth, still dented, like thin slices were carved out with a butcher's knife. The scar tissue is darker than the surrounding skin, and shiny, and wrinkles like cellophane when pinched.

What I like most about it is the nerve damage. When you run a finger down my zombie bite, I barely feel a dull pressure. Some strange detached sensation, perhaps, if you graze a part of the leg around the bite. Sometimes I do this absentmindedly, and it reminds me of dissociating. I'm doing it right now.

I can't really wear heels anymore.

4. I have casual crushes on a bunch of people right now. My theory is that I start finding myself attracted to everyone around me when I'm in the throes of particularly bad social anxiety, because you feel more rejected from company when you're *into* the person, and I don't like doing things by halves.

I used to have a huge crush on one of my friends and artistic collaborators. Intentionally got myself tipsy (because I'm so uptight that I literally have to plan to chemically manipulate my inhibitions away) and sent her an honest-to-god *snail-mail letter* asking her out, the reasoning being once I'd dropped it in the box at the post office I wouldn't be able to chart its progress on its way to her, and if she never sent a response to it I could just

pretend to myself that it had gotten lost. A few days later, on a Friday, she texted me saying that *of course* she would love to go on a date the next time she was in town, and we set it up. Then on Sunday I got a very apologetic email about how she realized she might be asexual, and didn't really want to date anyone at all, maybe ever, and she was so so sorry. Possibly more disappointing than an actual rejection.

We still work together, and I'm still kind of in love with her.

5. If I ever get a tattoo, it'll be a little ring of teeth indentations on my hand or wrist. Reminder, symbol, target.

There are times I separate like oil and water. My mind becomes a sludgy ghost possessing my body, sloshing around like mud, ill-fitted to its container. Dissociation is a funny thing; there's a line between feeling and not feeling, and it occupies an ambiguous, nebulous space. Gnawing on myself can help me find my way back. The sensation is sharp and tingly and real and the only price to pay is being covered with little red-and-white ridges that fade quickly from elastic skin.

6. There's this little kid I totally love. He's three years old, and my 'little brother' in the sense that he's the child of a family friend and he calls me 'big sister' in Chinese.

Once, he ran into the room with a giant grin on his face, fell dramatically to his knees, and started flailing his limbs around like he was trying to swim. It wasn't a tantrum; he was giggling the whole time.

Sometimes I wish I could do that same exact thing, but while sobbing. So I guess I want to actually throw tantrums? I want to slam my body to the ground and wail; I want to juxtapose physical pain with emotional pain. Sometimes they exist exclusive of one another, but I imagine it would be so much

simpler to experience both at once, and have done with.

7. I've grown so light-sensitive lately, I don't even like having my bedside lamp on before I sleep anymore. I've been burning more candles, at night. I've started lighting them in the bathroom while I shower in the near-dark. It's a comfort.

The water, closer and closer to searing my skin as I twist the knob towards the red H. A hail of liquid bullets.

The wax, tipped onto the back of my hand, a sharp shock that spreads and cools before I can jolt. Peeled back, close up, it's a miniature landscape of cracked earth.

The flame, a challenge.

8. I carry all my stress and tension in the roughly triangular area between neck and shoulders. Sometimes I prod at it and the muscle has gone hard as a rock. The last time a friend offered to massage it out, I had to bite down on my scarf and scream. The grinding of his knuckles was like being lit on fire, but it was a cleansing fire.

This morning I woke up at 6:37 with a splittingly harsh headache. This happens sometimes, when that neck-shoulders triangle is getting really tense. Some days I'm literally unable to lift my head; I don't know if it's muscles or nerves or what, but something in there doesn't cooperate. Those days are spent lying on my side, trying to find a pillow with *juuuust* the right height to keep my neck perfectly straight. Today isn't one of those days, but I did go back to sleep for three hours and the pain was absolutely just as bad when I woke again.

(I just cracked my neck back and forth seven times and it felt amazing, so maybe the tension is starting to leave. My neurosurgeon cousin Lucy once told me that if nerves get caught between the vertebrae as you crack your neck, you can give

yourself a stroke. That scared me off the motions for a little while, but I just have to take the risk; it feels so good. Kill me, if you're going to.)

9. Every morning I wake up scowling. Unable to open my eyes properly, still half-asleep, I walk over to the bathroom mirror to examine my furrowed brow. It's crinkled there permanently; the first time I noticed that the lines wouldn't go away was after the breakdown that finally convinced me to seek solutions to my brain problems.

Back when I was just nineteen and thinking things like "I'm not depressed and even if I am it's only a tiny little negligible amount" as I posted up in bed for a full week, I discovered a new morning routine. Wake up, walk over to the bathroom, retch up little strings of ugly empty-stomach acid. Privately, I called this 'morning sickness,' though there was no way I could be pregnant since I wasn't getting laid. It was like this for maybe six months; wake up, walk over to the bathroom, vomit a sickly yellow bile that tastes like death. I still have no idea what this was about. I prefer the wrinkles.

10. In high school, before I was equipped to confront and contend with what I was dealing with in my head, it was always comforting to know that I was never suicidal. I didn't want to hurt myself because I was cowardly. I repeated that word, *cowardly*, kind of ironically, kind of jokingly, always gratefully. I knew it was a good thing, really. I was never even a little bit interested in self-inflicted harm because I was afraid of pain.

11. Consider the relationship between pain and payoff. Consider the healing that comes after the injury. Consider: Pain

is better than numbness; after pain comes, necessarily, relief.

12. Consider, perhaps: Too many recurrences of pain makes it lose its potency. Consider whether this is good or bad.

13. I started writing this two weeks ago, while examining a fading bruise. My arm looks unharmed now, but when I press on the spot where it used to be, I can still feel that sweet soreness.

## How to wake up: a list

- Wear loud earrings. Like, loud as in noisemakers. Things that jangle or clack or clink or rattle. Give yourself little sensory jolts when you turn your head.
- Breathe cold, fresh air.
- Sit in your car in the dark, or put on headphones and close your eyes. Put on music with heavy bass and turn the volume up. Feel it moving through you, and imagine your body disintegrating; let the music reverberate you to pieces.
- Pet a dog on the street, he is so pleased to see you, he is such a good boy, wow, he loves you.
- Look at a goddamn tree.
- Finish a load of laundry, dump it on the bed, get cozy in it.
- Find a corner of a room, preferably a quiet one. Stand with your back to the room, and encircle your face with your hands. Stay like this until you can breathe.
- Post a lot on social media.
- Cut off social media.

- Watch videos of babies befriending pets. Watch them again. Watch them again. Watch them again. Watch them again.
- Do really really casual yoga.
- Don't take a nap unless you've been outside today.

(Intermission: More than once, I have surreptitiously watched a middle-aged man alone in a cafe as he sits staring straight ahead at nothing. He will occasionally take a sip of the drink in front of him, without looking down at the cup. He will do this for up to forty minutes. Is this strange middle-aged man behavior, is this meditation? Are these men secretly the zennest motherfuckers around?)

- Discover a comfort food that brightens your mood whenever you eat it. Don't eat it again until you need its help; keep that in your back pocket for potency.
- Take quite a long, quite a hot shower.
- Make yourself cry. I don't care how you do it.
- Grow your hair to shoulder length, then dye it a bright color. Something unexpected to glance in your periphery. Do not let it fade.
- Turn on every single light in the room.
- Call the friend who shares your pure unadulterated passion for that one dumb thing, and chatter on about it until they have to go do something or you're running

out of phone minutes, and don't talk about yourself even once.

- Have some chocolate, tell yourself that thing about how it boosts endorphins that you think you remember reading about, and cross your fingers for the sweet, sweet placebo effect.
- Buy something you don't need that's not in your budget, and don't even feel a little bit bad about it.
- Pinch your arm very hard.
- Go out in public and make fleeting eye contact with strangers, and then look away at something vague in the distance.
- Write a list of ways to wake up.
- Wake up.
- Wake the fuck up.