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Untitled

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UNTITLED

Kalysta Fern

Some girls have Twitter; others get boyfriends, fifties glasses, asymmetrical hairdos. Maile Malone has found suicide.

Coming to school in tell-all tank tops, wrists elaborately butterfly-bandaged, Maile Malone asks:

Who's to judge?

DEFINITION NO. 1—REGIFTING

n. The acknowledgement of something never wanted nor asked for; a polite, thought-out rejection. SEE ALSO: Bad Christmas presents, the Backseat of a 1997 Chevy Coupe

She found her passion, originally, in literature. A prodigy, by the age of thirteen she had already made her first five attempts, each in the style of the immortal Lisbon girls. A jump from the roof at a cousin's birthday party had earned her more "Superman" jokes from various relatives than any genuine concern, and sticking her head in the oven had the rather unpleasant side effect of reminding her of Florida heat, and, consequently, Florida. ODing on sleeping pills just made her sleep, before bridging softly into hallucination; the venture would be remembered more for its portends of eventual narcotics abuse than anything else. Yet fitting her head into the makeshift noose of a neighbor's jump rope as yet another gorgeous Saturday drifted by, Maile felt the closest she ever would to something utterly sublime. But the nylon slipped, leaving only an angry scarlet bruise that would mark her for weeks and weeks, until finally fading away.

Finally, with a thrill strikingly similar to the discovery of a vocation, or even destiny, Maile Malone found cutting. There was something truly incomparable to tracing the gabardine latticework of veins down the downy edge of her arm (across if it was just for kicks, vertical if you were actually serious), in the din of smoky room. Barbies still lurking in the crevice between toy box and sex-toy box, wallpaper ballerinas bravely defying the twin influence of sun and band poster alike to pose inanely on the walls another day. Her face, in photographs, is still so unlined, so young. An Irish-Jew, with twin proclivities for augury and accounting—there is possibility here.

Dying quickly seeming not to have panned out, in the fall of her fourteenth she took up smoking. The days were getting shorter, the nights becoming longer. The world paused. Winter was coming. Up above, the leaves not already reduced to mulch on the fairway sang their own vivid requiem from the tops of trees. Breath froze in air, hanging like a gauze veil over a million little faces.

In the nights, reading a book or teetering on the edge of some anonymous bridge, a loneliness would wash over her, so much greater than death itself. At these times, the little cigarettes, with their friendly wee embers and evil little scents, seemed the loveliest things on earth. She'd come home smelling like fifteen generations of scum. She felt tied to something greater, an eternity of debauchery from Paris Hilton to the Marquis de Sade.

She was fifteen when it finally happened. She hadn't slept in six nights and hadn't eaten in two; the earth grew fuzzy and danced in small waves before her, a million little fever dreams taking shape and dissolving in the remote corners where her eyes met her brain.

And she thinks she's ready.

There's no such thing as a spontaneous suicide. She calls out in a high falsetto that she'll be a bit, she just needs to shave her legs. And then she'll be off, she adds unnecessarily, with an irony that will haunt and embarrass her for decades to come. Is there even anyone in the kitchen to hear her, or is she just calling out to empty upholstery?

She doesn't cry. Instead, walking up the narrow wooden stairs, she notes a million notches and crannies never apparent before. She wonders what else she's missed, if any of these insignificant details, taken together, might've been enough to save her. She heard once that only people wanting help, rather than death, take the time to write suicide notes; so she skips that part. For decorum, if nothing else.

So all that's left is to pry the razor from the frame, and it's so innocuous except for the way it's already cut into the summer calluses on the horizon of her fingertips. She knows, already, how easy it is, this her trump card, to tear into that narrow white region. She knows the burn of incidentally hitting a tendon. At first the skin merely parts, like

cuts of meat at a butcher shop. Then red forms in little dots, begins to bloom. The room jumps abruptly into focus. There is so much blood. She's dumfounded by the sheer volume of it which is cascading down her arms and into the bathtub. She is overtaken by it. It seeps into the crevices of her wrists and her elbows, where wrinkles would have one day spider webbed and creped the skin. Her lips part, and a fleck of spittle momentarily parts the red sea. Then it dissolves, and the vision's gone again. It's all happening so fast. She pushes herself up and over the rim into the bathtub, which is porcelain and porous, which she wants so badly not to stain, so she wraps her arms around her little body and crams her sallow wrists into the denseness of her little daisy-cream camisole, realizes that she's shaking, then closes her eyes and waits for whatever comes next.

And then she woke up. It's not such a bad ending for a story, when you think about it. There's a hospital room and some daisies, obnoxious magenta balloons sent by relatives she's never met. She felt worst of all, really, for her parents, who must be really embarrassed. She wanted to cry sometimes when she thinks about this.

But they kept mercifully quiet, and after a few weeks of mandatory therapy she got to go home. No one knew, they all promised her. If she wanted, this was hers to leave behind forever. The time had come to grow up, and this world was no one's first vocation. No one knew.

And who knew, maybe she'd do something. There were days when life opened up, seemed to bloom, moments so redolent with love and hope that she couldn't help but pause. Couldn't help but glance up from the Ace bandages on her wrist. Couldn't help but wonder.

The funny thing is, if she could make a single wish, it would be to crawl into the tiny eternity that lays between moments. She would burrow into the small, quiet place between the "tick" and the "tock" of clock, and that is where she would stay.

(Not to press the point but for the sake of example: like the moment when she's getting a text from a boy she's in love with is obsessed with and yet is such an utter bitch

to when she's around him, and she texted him even though she promised herself that she wouldn't until she felt more whole, more together, more capable of dealing with this mountain of shit that is her life and then there's that sound of the text message, of one little lifeless hunk of metal sending another little lifeless hunk of metal telepathic messages from across an ether an unseen plane where communication hurries across clouds and souls go after death maybe, and anyhow the thing buzzes with the ugliest little metallic click DRRRRROOOIIID like something tunneling up from the bowels of the earth, from some lesser circle of hell and she can't open it and she won't open it and anyhow the whole thing's about this blue school binder that in her words "kind of contained her academic future" that she couldn't find, and texted him as a last resort besides, but that she did find like ten minutes later and now she feels dumb oh god and she wishes she could just ignore it but there it is and now that she's written her back it means she can't undo it and oh god— all she wants is him all she wants is him, and it's moments like this that make her realize that maybe it's not this tawdry existence, but its cessation that is so intolerable after all—)

And life, or its double, carries on.