

Matthew Van Praagh

Pattern Recognition

The outlines of the tree I have drawn
are unstraight. The ink marks have blotched
the tiny fibers of the outline around my tree.

‘It is a representation of the imperfections of
nature,’ I say. It’s a desperate excuse. Maybe
I can get away with it. (I never do.)

She hangs my supposed masterpiece on the family
fridge, suspended like a painting in the Louvre.
Placed in ornate frame, fastened and bolted

to the fridge itself, until my drawing becomes an
irremovable part of it. She is proud of me.
Or she is coping, I can never tell.

My tree hangs next to my sun, my midnight
sky, my fruit basket, my Christmas tree, my
family, my best friends at the water park.

I tilt my head 45° left out of pure curiosity,
seeing if my new vantage point offers new
meaning to the scene my fridge has drawn.

Before, my tree was under my sun, parallel to my
family. From my new viewpoint, my tree is leveled
with my sun, neither is below nor above the other.

I am 27, four days away from 28, staring now
at my crayon box stored above the refrigerator.

The red crayon is peeking out of its box,
pointing toward the window, perhaps signaling
of the dangerous winds and torrents just
outside my field of invasion.

I use my unpaid bills as tissues to wipe my

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unjustified tears. One particular bill was returned three weeks ago. "You can't sign your name in crayon," an attached note said. I never listened.

Sometimes, I'd doodle on candy wrappers after I devoured their sugary goodnesses from inside. I'd then fold them into shapes I found pretty, some identifiable, most amorphous.

She would take these folded wrappers and display them atop the kitchen cupboards, absconding them with an uncertain smile on her face, that type of smile a teacher offers a student when they feel confident

on the day of the exam, despite the string of Ds they received prior. That kind of smile the candy shop worker shows as they count change after you use a \$100 bill to pay for a single package of Skittles.

I am 27, four days away from 28, staring now at the Lunchables she picked up for me yesterday.

I don't eat food, I eat dreams. When I was young, I wanted to become an astronaut. While I am young, I want to become an astronaut. I consider that dream currently unfulfilled, but brimming with untapped potential. I only eat dreams that are impossible.

I find comfort in cartoons, moving digital images that spit in the face of rational physics. My television is blaring from the other room, my favorite show is on. It's an episode I've watched countless times before, but I don't care. There is comfort in familiarity.

I grab my Lunchables, and plop down on the carpet, eyes glued to the colorful high-definition beams protruding from my favorite show. I follow my favorite character as they glide across that screen in cartoonish fashion, unrealistic and animatedly vibrant.

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I am 27, four days away from 28, staring now
not at a cartoon, but at my life at nine.

No wonder why I am entranced by the childlike wonder
in the eyes of that main character, I hadn't realized--
That character is me and I am him. Security footage of
when I had played carelessly in the backyard with my
rubber ball. Bouncing at the garage wall, my ball always
came back. It never escaped my unwaning gaze.

Control is something that I believe is lost with age.
As a child, the world is under your dominion. Rules
are meaningless, laws don't apply to you, cold hard
cash is indistinguishable from Monopoly money.
Tirelessly, I am fighting for my terrain of control--
terrain that she had let escape her grip years ago.

I walk back into our kitchen, catching her icy glare.
Her eyes follow my gradual trot; she is desperate for
control of her vision, but distractions are inevitable.
I enter my kitchen to admire details unintended yet
unavoidable. My tree has consequences; why did I
draw with ink? Were crayons insufficient this time?

I am 27, four days away from 28, tossing my crayon
box in the garbage can.

I am losing control.
There are only four days left
until it vanishes completely.