

My First Panic Attack in the Art Hallway Bathroom, First Stall

by Emily W.

Quick,

name five things you can see:

1. Dark blue stall walls drown me with their whitecap waves.
2. The red eye of the automatic flusher that stares me down, threatening to act everytime *I lose my balance*.
3. Bugs, dead, in the LEDs that hang above my head.
4. The two cat sketches on the glossy white tiles above the toilet paper dispenser that taunt the janitors.
5. “*Need Help?*” in bold letters on the door followed by phone numbers I want to, but will never, call.

Four things you can touch:

1. The coarse grout that tugs at my arm hair as they rest on the tiled wall.
2. My shirt. Every time I pull at the fabric, creating space for my lungs to breathe, it tightens around my neck.
3. The rings I fidget with until I turn them so much the friction frays my skin.
4. Rows of imprinted crescents gouged into my forearm by my nervous nails.

Three things you can hear:

1. My heart thwomps, mimicking the echo of a giant stomping through a silent forest.
2. *Swish. I lost my balance.*
3. The door, that connects the outside world to this toilet oasis, opens.

Two things you can smell:

1. The toilet water splashes onto the floor, mixing with my fallen tears.
2. A person outside of my stall. The stench of their impatience is a potent onion, diced and thrown into my face.

One thing you can taste:

1. *Fear.*

Car Conversations with My Sister

by Alana V.

My eyes flicker from the road
to my sister slumping in the passenger seat.
My fingers wrap around the steering wheel
and my knuckles turn white.

The words tumble
from my mouth
before I can convince myself I'm faking it.

"I go to therapy"

There I said it.
Four words and I'm met with silence.
My eyes search for hers.

She faces the window.

I choke the steering wheel
waiting and waiting.
My face burns pink like
last night when she applied my blush.
My rapid breaths and squealing brakes
fill the car as I get to a stop sign.

Finally, she opens her mouth.
I anticipate the relief,
imagining a butterfly
taking flight with my burdens.

And
she
laughs.
She replies with two words
that break my heart.
"You're lying."

So I do what I've done since the beginning,
I laugh along and answer
"Good joke, right?"