1

We're sitting outside on the terrace in front of Mo's place. His parents are never home, I hardly know them. On my lap lies a paper towel that's soaked in blood. We prepare for the upcoming beer by having a smoke. It's a stout, and we all hate stouts. Mo, Fisch and I. Next up is a cherry flavored Belgian beer and after that two more stouts. Mo is responsible for this wild arrangement of beverages. It's obvious that he selected them primarily because their label looked cool.
I've sunken down in my chair far enough to make my back hurt tomorrow, and enough to see Ursa Major without tilting my head upwards. Following the bending of the handle with my eyes, I find Arcturus which is colored slightly red. Continuing further along this curve, I should arrive at Spica, which is the fifteenth brightest star, but apparently it has gone missing tonight.
"Whatever happened to the ancient Greeks?" Fisch breaks the silence that came over us so long ago that no one bothered to fill it anymore. The Greek word for a bleeding nose is Epistaxis.
"They died I guess", Mo tries to help.
"No, I mean what happened to their whole culture. They were on such a good track, but down the line all of that kind of got lost" Fisch says.
"Maybe there was this crazy war where all their libraries and buildings blew up, and there weren't enough Greeks left to remember what this stuff used to be like." Mo replies. Fisch makes a sound of unconviction.
So I say, "Maybe that's just what happens when you drink wine and lay in the sun all day."
And Mo says "Fuck" and Fisch and I slowly start laughing. It's a 4 am kind of laugh. Usually you can tell the state of an evening by the kind of music coming out of the stereo. Right now it's silent apart from a soft static hum. Instead, we are listening to the crickets celebrating the pinnacle of summer, from time to time they are accompanied by the distant rushing of passing cars down by the main street. *Those are the good days*, I think to myself, and I can feel myself getting older right that instant.



A few days ago I turned 18, but I struggle to remember that myself. That's probably because I struggle to remember a lot of stuff. Almost everything in my head is blurry. That's why I'm thrilled when Mo brings up some old story that I can hardly recall being a part of. It's always a good opportunity to learn something about myself.
I don't really know where my bad memory comes from. Maybe it's because my Mum

kept drinking two months into her pregnancy. I don't blame her for that though, she was used to her period being off and tried to hold on to her youth. Fisch once told me his Granddad's dementia set in shortly after having his hip replaced. I had a ruptured appendix when I was 11 and got surgery under general anesthesia. That summer I was in the hospital for six days, but do not have the slightest recollection of it.
For years, I kept a diary because I was ashamed of forgetting things. I wrote down the five most important events of that day. The problem was that the bullshit and the important stuff started to mix up. For example, one entry reads:

- Skipped History
- Chess with Mo (1:3)
- Went for a walk
- Read *The Timemachine* by H. G. Wells
- Watched *Columbo* with Mum

And the one from the following day:

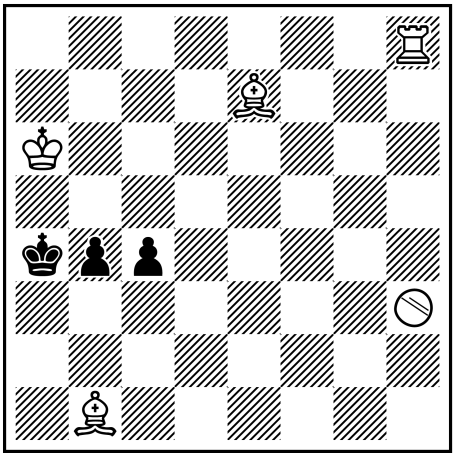
- Scrabble with Mo and Fisch
- Went for a walk
- Read *The Timemachine* by H. G. Wells
- Grandma died

The second entry only has four bullets, because after writing down the last one, I realized that keeping track of your life that way is quite stupid.
I also used to assign each day a color. From the ones up there, the first one was teal and the second one dark green. It's not that there are better and worse colors, they're just different. And it's not like I made those up, these days actually were teal and dark green. No doubt about it.
There are people who can tell you their entire life story just like that. It's like a magic trick for me, though I'm tempted to think of them as somewhat egocentric. It wasn't that long ago that I didn't feel like I'm a person at all, all the way up until high school to be specific. Before that, I was a piece of paper drifting in a stranger's wind.
To give you an idea of the school I went to, it's probably enough to tell you that it had a dedicated room for playing chess. Actually it was supposed to be a room where students could spend their break time in and the cupboards in there are filled with a whole bunch of different board games, but somehow chess got the upper hand. So the school stocked up on boards and clocks, and Thursday became the official day when everyone who played gathered there. They even started hosting competitions. I always wondered why there was no protest against this development. The conclusion I arrived at was that if you don't like playing chess, you probably wouldn't spend your time in the

school's break room anyway. To give you an idea of me, it's probably a good start to tell you that I spent most of my afternoons there.

2

"She loses on purpose, doesn't she?" Mo asks, trying to keep his voice down.
I see her eyebrow twitching. Of course she heard that, even though she tries her best to act as if she didn't. Mo can't whisper. It's physiologically impossible for him, which made chatting to him during class a daring move. We're both sitting with our backs against the wall. Between us, I have arranged the chess riddle from today's newspaper. It looks like this:



The weird round shape is a bottle cap that replaces the missing rook. White is on the move, the goal is a checkmate in two. Mo hasn’t looked at the board for 20 minutes. Two weeks ago, he started to bring beer with him when we played. To the surprise of everyone, nobody seemed to bother. We agreed to only drink, when there are no lower grade students around. Though to be honest, that's quite a stupid rule, because there are never lower grade students around.
Does she lose on purpose? I look across the room. There are three tables placed in equal distance to one another. On each one there's a game going on. On the opposite side of the room, Glasses and Fred are staring down at their board, trying to make the figures levitate. Apart from us, they are the only ones from our class who ever show their faces here. Both of them are possessed by an evil pensioner spirit. You might not guess that at first, but as soon as you crack a joke, the wrinkles on their forehead climb

all the way up to their receding hairline and blow their covers. Also, they smell of oatmeal and soap and move in slow motion, which might be the onsetting arthritis.
On the table in the center of the room, Jesus is playing against Ralf, an internship teacher. We call him Jesus because when he is waiting on the move of his opponent, he folds his hands in prayer. Plus he's got long hair and a beard which makes him look like 30. He seems really into chess, I suspect that the cross on the king calls him to solidarity. He's kind of part of the inventory, although I think that he doesn't even go to our school.
Closest to us, Lore and Elli from parallel class are playing. Elli is a custom here, I like playing against her because she's pretty much exactly as bad at chess as I am. It's the second time that Lore's here. The only other place you could see her those last 4 years is the school garden, where she was sitting on her own, reading or scribbling something into a notebook. She looks highly concentrated. The strange thing is that her eyes hardly ever move back and forth between the figures. I'm keeping a list in my head, she has lost every single game.
I start nodding and take a sip from my beer. What I like most about this place are the sounds: The mechanic clicking of the clocks, the sound of felt on wood, the muffled mumbling. Closing my eyes while listening to this, I get the taste of black tea in my mouth that has drawn just a little too long. A sudden metallic clash startles me, it's followed by a triumphal scream.
"Hahaaarrrr!" Every head in the room turns towards Mo. He doesn't care at all. He's beaming.
"Check and Mate!"
The bottle cap made impact on c3. He flicks it away with the pawn and moves the bishop to c2. He really got it. Mo tosses down the rest of his beer in victory. Check and mate.



It's a clear night outside, I've poked my telescope through the skylight of my bedroom, looking for Jupiter which is supposed to be clearly visible this July. Also I'd like to investigate the case of the missing Spica. After all, it's not the kind of star that's supposed to disappear. The Mayerhofers who live across the street hooked up this crazy bright lamp in their living room first floor to a time switch before they drove off with their camper two days ago. The light bleeds into the night sky and so do the Christmas lights on the garden shed of our neighbors next door. Mrs. Lichtenwagner's daughter decided to move her to a home for the elderly, after she almost burnt the place down trying to light an incense stick on the stove. She sold the house to a young couple from the city. When they moved in, they went around the neighborhood and introduced

themselves to everyone by giving out gift baskets with homebrewed beer. Their garden is pretty much entirely filled up with that enormous shed they put there. Sometimes when you're out at night, you can hear them having sex in there. At any rate, a few days ago the guy put up those red and blue flashing Christmas lights along the edge of the roof. I really don't know what their deal is.

Unfortunately I can't make out a lot in the sky tonight. So I put on my shoes which I keep inside my room. That's something I kept from the time when Dad still lived with us. I speed down the stairs, skipping every other step. There's some Post-It note on the front door, but I'm not reading it. I slip outside. It's comfortingly cold and I can smell lavender. We are living in the most cliché bourgeoise neighborhood you can imagine. Garden gnomes and everything. I hated everything about this place when we first moved here, but without even noticing it, I've somehow grown to like it. Before that we lived in the countryside. Like the real countryside, where there's more cows than people, more grass and brighter stars. In the glow of the Christmas lights I pause to light up a cigarette. I close my eyes and listen intently. Nothing. I strut down the street passing perfectly geometrically shaped box trees and ornamental ponds until I reach the main street and head north. There's a huge hemp field right next to the street, though it is supposedly not the stuff you would want to smoke.

I think about heading over to Mo's place, maybe have a beer or two. But actually I'd rather stay on my own tonight. I spend a lot of time simply walking around. Sometimes I think that that could be enough, like that's what my life could be about. Just following streets and trains of thoughts and see where I end up. It's comforting to think that, but I know that can't be true.

A group of mopeds passes me, the taste of badly filtered gasoline lingers in the air for a long time. I walk up the narrow gravel path. It is completely dark here. Well, almost. I distinguish the glow of the cigarette under my sole.

A few years ago I tried to become a regular smoker because I didn't know what to do with my hands when we stood outside in a circle after school. And when you're sitting in some pub and the music is too loud to understand anyone, there's not much to do besides having one smoke after the other.

I arrive at the top of the hill. From here you can see all the way to the city. I sit down in the grass and listen to the cars in the distance. The ground is still warm.

Smoking brought a range of new problems with it though. When I wanted to smoke at home, I had to take an extensive walk to get rid of the smell. And I always had to carry a lighter and peppermints with me. The afternoon coffee tasted like After Eight. I hated it. Actually I am a big fan of extensive walks. I mean, after all, I still walk around when I smoke. But it's just not the same when you're doing something because you know you have to. It's kind of funny, I still carry around peppermints everywhere I go, even though Mum doesn't care at all how I smell since Thomas died.