

You are in a public bathroom.

Without thinking, you take the tube of lipstick from the pouch in your overalls and uncap it. It's not yours. Maybe it is for now. You rescued it from the seat crevice of a city bus three days ago and it's been in your pocket ever since. Your eyes train on the blunted tip of the red waxy tube.

You don't even really remember what lipstick is supposed to look like. On people, that is. Do you draw it on? Can you do multiple coats? Is it like chapstick? You suppose you could go online and look it up. But that would take time. Your heart starts beating faster. You're here. Right now. Your fingers graze the tube, stamping the glossy faux metal with your oily fingerprints.

Cheap candles. That's what you think it smells like. It looks very used and filthy. There's a hair on there and a few shards of glass. You wonder if lipstick or crayons came first, seeing as they almost-kind of operate the same? You really want to put it on. *What if it looked good?*

Refusing to take your eyes off the lipstick you feel your face heat up just thinking about it. Yeah. It would look just like *that*. Cool. Girly. Like those models you see in the 10-year-old fashion magazines you have stashed under your bed. Not that you care about that stuff. You don't. But wouldn't it be crazy if you looked just like them? The thought feels so filthy your eyelids snap closed like mousetraps

It's red. You don't know what shade. People talk about shades being important. You assume they do anyway. They *have to* be talking about the shades.

Hopefully, this is your shade. Maybe every shade is your shade. Maybe all the people talking about shades are trying to hide the fact that every shade looks good on everyone, but especially looks good on you.

You press it against your lips. Starting a quarter of the way through your upper lip. You want to be pretty very badly just in this one moment. You drag the tube around your mouth. A quarter of the way through you realize there's dirt on the lipstick. It feels grainy and gross but you do want to look pretty. You want to look pretty and natural so badly. And you will. You will look pretty. You just have to survive this. You tell yourself it will be worth it. Your heart pounds in agreement. You can almost picture yourself as pretty. Almost. Almost there now. All done. Good girl. You finally breathe.

You open your eyes. And then look down at your feet.

*Pleh, pleh, pleh.*

It tastes awful. Really, truly, awful. No one talks about that. Maybe they never had to taste it. Maybe they were all just better than you.

*Pleh, pleh, pleh.*

You wipe off the lipstick with water from the sink, but it doesn't come off so easy. You can still taste it on your lips. Taking a washrag from the sink, you scrub at your lips until it starts to burn. "*Yet here's a spot.*" You refuse to look at yourself until it's all come off. They were right about the shades. This stuff isn't for everyone. It's especially not for you.

This hurts more than you would ever be willing to admit.