

class of 2016 (anna lance)

About half of us are going to pursue a career in engineering. There are stringent requirements even now, rising crag-faced as glaciers from the sea—signs that some destination stands yet between us and jarring solitude and that the cold steam obscures, but doesn't obliterate, direction. One of our friends is taking three science classes her senior year, two advanced, one at the community college. She requests the double enrollment the way she would extra pickles at Subway. She does not stop to ask herself whether the eyes of the students years more experienced will wrinkle her spine into the "S" that confesses insecurity—a consonant she fought ferally to straighten in middle school. Another surprises us when we look and she has the rimmed, glassy eyes of something taxidermied, snot dripping. She needs a full AP schedule but doesn't want to drop orchestra, is clinging to the smell of rosin and the perforated walls of practice rooms so hard it's making her bleed, somewhere. Our counselor assures her it can be done—it'll work out—art classes can be taken and excused away in recommendation letters. She will say: The student wished to fulfill the final year of a lifelong passion. She will say: Family troubles. They dented her record like bullets punching through rusting cars in blueberry fields. (She came to my office twice a week and ate lollipops from the jar while crying.) She will say: Well-rounded. She will say: A comeback. A fine recovery. She will cover the fissures with her manicured hands and amicably direct attention to the best functionality, the highest gloss. She will not be honest—she's done this before.

It feels like stepping center stage to face the empty auditorium and all the lights crowning the balcony. It feels like you can't forget fast enough. Even as the sounds are being spoken and you're relaying them to the audience, you're forgetting them as fast as you can, dropping your cues all over the place. Someone expects you to deflate and someone else expects you to swell until you fill the space with a timpani thunderstorm and you must do both or they will be very disappointed. We skim elbows in the hallways and break our confidentiality vows two minutes are obtaining the change to consummate them. "The grammar section—was it which or whom? Isn't 'whom' for people? Do you use it for animals? Can you consider a butterfly a person?" Can you indeed. Eight hundred heartbeat-shaped flutters scribbling pathways above the cafeteria: incandescent suntrails, gone if you breathe. The brevity of luminescence. Wings in cheeks, wings in ears, and somehow flight achieved on scraps of issue, damp from development. We make the laws of physics look the other way.

It feels like waking up. Arch, yawn—and, yes, here we have the blip of peace before everything stings. It feels like the tired buried aches above your right knee although you're pretty certain you've flourished as far as circumstances will allow. It feels like clouds spun from sugar, rain holding its breath, incipient luminism—the web of light that sticks to the sky and dumps its belly of illumination over mountain and lake. (We slept in violent languor, and now emerge blinking.) We must record this moment, and this one, and this one. This year is molting and soon we won't remember how we wore it anymore. We do not fit into old T-shirts, old proverbs, old circles. We do not fit and soon nothing will contain us—a truth the flavor of unripe strawberries, a tonguepincher—soon we will devour the Earth and then the sun and then there will be nothing left. It's terrifying. They tell us to fly and we do it without thinking, without stopping to wonder if we have another choice.