

Title of Work: What Do You Mean? A Rambling on Youth

By: Rachel Goldenberg

He asked me what I meant. What was I supposed to say? All I said was that sometimes I think about those days when everything goes wrong at once.

Am I supposed to tell him that sometimes I close my eyes and I can see the whole world?

Am I supposed to say that it happens to me sometimes, but never on the days when everything goes wrong?

Do I tell him that I wish they were the same days because that would help me a lot?

Sometimes I think I'm crazy. But really, I just want to be good.

Sometimes I can't post pictures of myself online because I start thinking about all of the children dying in Syria. And, yes, I know people are dying everywhere, everyday, so I really shouldn't want to post pictures of myself ever, because that's futile. But some days it doesn't affect me as much. But still, this is what I'm talking about—if I could wake up on days when everything goes wrong and think about the whole world like that, maybe I would stop feeling like something was eating me from the inside out. Because I would be thinking about poverty and death, and then maybe I would be better, because I'm not impoverished or dying. Then I would be good and not crazy.

I'm cute, though. I think he's noticed that already.

Sometimes I just want to be touched--by anyone, I don't care. I probably shouldn't tell him that.

When I'm at bars with my friends, guys will come up to me, and after one drink I'll think to myself something like, "Oh yeah he could touch me." But instead of asking to touch me, he'll

ask me for something stupid like my number. I hate when guys ask me for my number, because then they'll text me or call me and then it will be weird and I'll lose all interest and it just isn't worth it. So I just say no.

I think people give up on me pretty fast. They always say they'll stay, that they won't leave me. But I know that isn't true. I've been "too much" for a long time, and no part of me has drained out. I actually think I've gotten heavier. I've become even more. How fucked up is that? You'd think that as you get older you'd learn how to be a better person, but the older I get the more lost I become.

The last time a guy gave up on me he had nicer hair. He was the same though, asking questions he didn't want to know the answers to. I remember I told that guy I was a writer and he asked me what I was writing and I said I wasn't and he looked at me with this confused face that made my eyes dry out and I remember blinking at him a lot. I remember he told me that he knew what I should write about and I said oh really, what? And he said,

"You should write about a person who has a voice in their head that always makes their decisions for them."

I was still blinking a lot while he continued talking.

"Like that voice gains the person's trust, you know. In specific scenarios where the person has to make a risky decision—this voice will know if making the riskier choice will pay off. Should this person lie or tell the truth? Should they break up with their girlfriend or boyfriend? Should they turn right or left? The voice will always know what is better. But the voice could betray that person at any time; it could tell them to befriend someone that would ultimately kill them. It could tell them to steal something and they get arrested. And the person doesn't even know what or who the voice is—it could be their conscience or it could be the Holy Spirit or the devil even, anything. You could even reveal it at the end of the story. I don't

know, though. I've just always thought that would be a cool thing to write."

"Why don't you write it?" I remember asking him. He replied,

"I'm not a writer."

And I think about that statement all the time.

And I think about that voice. Sometimes I feel like I have a voice like that.

One time I actually fell in love with a guy that I talked to like this who asked me questions. It's usually about 10:50 pm every night when I start thinking about him.

When we first started hanging out, we'd sit on his bunk bed and he would tell me that he thought I was beautiful. There was always this odd light coming in through his window and he would ask me to read him books he hadn't read before. And sometimes he would interrupt me and kiss me in the middle of a sentence, and he would touch my cheek, other places too but specifically my cheek, his hand would burn into my skin and the touch would go past it, further than my flesh, as though it existed in this space in the in-betweens of myself that I've never been able to reach on my own.

One day he told me he just couldn't put me at the top of his list.

I should've seen it coming anyway.

But you know, days go by and things get easier, life goes on. Days are just like that. One day you move across the world, one day you study, another you write, another you sing in the streets and make eye contact with strangers, every minute different than the last. But the nights are different. The nights highlight everything that hasn't changed.

And I still wake up every morning with my hand on my cheek.

I'm tired, you know? Of being when I don't know how to be.

Is this even important?

How do people do important things?

Is it supposed to be this confusing, this painful?

I've never known how to explain myself but I've always felt the need to. To justify feeling how I feel or thinking how I think. Is that normal? I want to give explanations to questions without offering a defense but I don't know how.

How could my thoughts ever be important when I'm just me in a world with seven billion other "me's," and everyone is just everyone and everything is everything? I don't want to be relatable; I want to be the only person who is like this—but goddamnit why is that so cliché?

I feel like I push people away because I know that no matter what I do they're not going to understand me and if they do understand they probably won't even care. I don't know why I feel so much all of the time.

I wanted to have a plot in my life, I wanted something to happen that would make me think about things other than bunk beds and window light, and guys asking me questions about myself in coffee shops.

It was all supposed to be exciting and wonderful, wasn't it? Being young?

I thought these were supposed to be the best days of my life.

I've heard that youth is wasted on the young, but I've always associated being old with wisdom and peace. I kind of think being old is wasted on the elderly. Because honestly I could use some wisdom right now, and I sure as hell could use some peace.

"I don't know what I meant." I replied, blinking.