

The Problem With Firsts

You walk for the first time when you are eleven months old, tottering through your living room on wobbly knees and feet the length of a grown-up's thumb. Your mother is grinning behind you, bending low over your head so that you feel cold under the shadow she casts beneath the yellow living room light, and your big brother is lying on the floor to your right, playing with a doll in one hand and a Hot Wheels car in the other, the two toys meeting for the first time in the exact way that your face is about to meet the sweaty carpet below as you trip on your own chubby feet and go crashing down.

At least that's how your mother tells the story now.

You realize ten years later that you can't remember life before you walked; it's weird that something that was once so momentous is now so normal. You imagine for a moment what your life would be like if the first step you took out of bed every morning warranted the cheering and celebrating of that first one all your life ago.

Your mother's cell phone would have no space for anything but the videos she'd take.

With this in mind you come to understand that the first try will always be the most memorable, and every time you try something new you worry that with time, you will no longer feel the excitement of that very first try.

When you are thirteen you go on your very first "date." You forget that his father is sitting two rows behind you in the movie theater, and you barely even watch what's on the screen because in your mind, *you* are the star, sharing popcorn with the boy you believe you are going to marry; you know it's destiny because you are drinking from the same straw.

But it isn't long after your first kiss that your lunch dates become monotonous, and his hand now feels sweaty instead of warm, and when you approach him his eyes no longer light up like they used to. On the twelfth night that he tells you he's too busy, you realize it'll never live up to the first time he chose you over his Xbox and you chose him over the mall.

That's the problem with firsts.

When you get to high school, your first period class is English. Your teacher flies through the expectations and brings up a game of Jeopardy about the summer reading book. You sit with a new group of girls from the other middle school and your team completely crushes the

competition. You're convinced that freshman year will be fun, that these girls will be your new best friends, that every class will fly by like the first one on the first day of your first year.

But by the time you start wearing your winter boots and your fingers become too frozen to put your earbuds in at the bus stop, you find that it's increasingly hard to smile when you get to school, that regardless of when you have lunch you will always feel alone. It's funny how that can happen in a cafeteria bustling with the chatter of 500 kids.

The girls you once played on a team with in class now sit in the corner of the room and watch snowplows push piles up against the fence that guards the turf field; occasionally, you think the girls are starting to become invested in the material but you follow their gaze and are disappointed to find them watching an intense episode of snowplow vs. snowbank.

And it's in the middle of your teacher's lecture about participles that you realize how often you are picked up off the ground to see the stale truth of everything around you. All it takes is one whiff of nostalgia and you're back to that first day, reminiscing wistfully on the promise that this tedious year once held. You wonder how you would've felt if you'd never gotten to see the world from the perspective of a baby discovering the strength of her legs, or a kid tasting the sweetness of a Diet Coke alongside her middle school crush, or a naïve freshman blinded by all the potential of a new year as it begins to unfold.

Maybe things would be boring, but at least they wouldn't have let you down.

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