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When I was fifteen, I took the serrated edge of a tape dispenser to my wrists. I didn't seriously injure myself—the plastic teeth weren't sharp enough, plus my mom caught me—but it was a desperate attempt to, at the very least, get the hell out of the current version of my life. I was depressed, paranoid, terrified all the time. I was dealing with debilitating obsessive-compulsive disorder: hours-long rituals and intrusive, violent thoughts. My parents' marriage had been falling apart for years but just wouldn't, you know... *fall apart*. I rarely went to school because I couldn't get out of bed, so they were going to kick me out of the advanced program I was in. There was another girl in my class who had the same number of absences, but they didn't try to kick her out. She was bitten by a spider. That was the rumor. There was also a rumor that one time she did a backflip at a party while wearing a skirt with no underwear. I guess that doesn't matter now, but it really did then.

It was a January morning. I was dressed for school. My mom didn't know what to do, so she put me in the car and drove me to New Haven because that's where my doctor was. The Doobie Brothers were playing on the radio, but it seemed weird to do something as calm and decisive as change the dial. "Black Water" jangled infuriatingly in my head for hours. We went to the ER and they admitted me. I rode in a cop car without sirens and without my mom to the Yale Psych Hospital adolescent unit.

I roomed with a cutter obsessed with Sonic Youth. I don't remember crying much because I was mostly numb. I remember eating a big cheeseburger my first day. I remember nurses saying I needed to drink all these Ensures because I didn't weigh enough. I had group therapy and art therapy and one-on-one therapy. I had a boyfriend a half-hour away.

During the week I was there, my mom brought me a new copy of *Slaughterhouse-Five* because it was important to her when she read it as a teenager. I don't know how she thought of such a thing, but I'm glad she did. She also brought me schoolwork. I had a big CliffsNotes on *Romeo and Juliet*. I had notebooks without the metal spirals because they weren't allowed. I had notes from friends pressed into my work. They said to cheer up. I was so angry then at this stupid platitude, at the idea they'd tell a suicidal person to cheer up. But now, I think: they were fifteen. Now I give them a pass.

I got word from my friends that my boyfriend didn't understand what was happening. He was thinking maybe we should break up. This should have devastated me, but there were so many other things breaking my heart.

My mom brought me my Discman and my CDs. In early 2003, mostly everyone around me was listening to pop-punk or emo, which was shape-shifting from something like Sunny Day Real Estate to something like Brand New but hadn't yet morphed into MySpace scene-kid territory. I asked my mom to bring me my happy CDs. Or at least the ones that sounded happy, which meant catchy things, which meant power pop, or maybe lots of synth or keyboards. I got most of my Weezer albums, Ozma's *Rock and Roll Part Three*. I think maybe some Ramones best-of. I listened to Ozma over and over. I listened to "Baseball," mostly.

Ozma

"Baseball"

Rock and Roll Part Three

08/2001

Kung Fu Records

To write this feels as obvious and cliché as the well-wishing notes from my friends felt to me in 2003, but when you're fifteen and everything in your life is terrifying and beyond your control, music is the thing that's going to save you. Like, yes, of course, therapy and maybe medication and hopefully your parents figuring out their own shit and you not living in fear anymore will actually save you, but odds are you're not going to come to those conclusions until you're older. So in reality, the thing that will save you immediately—save you in moments when you feel like someone's piling bricks on your chest, save you in moments when you're home alone and it's too quiet—is going to be putting on headphones.

I think I had some inkling of this, as most of us probably do when we're young, because I wanted to learn about and consume every band's discography immediately. I was mad at my parents for innumerable things, but super-low on that list was the fact that the music they liked in high school was lame, so I had no one to guide me except *Spin* and *Rolling Stone* and MTV and a (compared to what it is now) fairly primitive version of the internet. There were two real record stores in my hometown. Both are gone now. One was Phoenix Records, which seemed to be staffed by that exact type of cool, skinny, early-2000s emo guy with good sideburns that made me feel shaky, so I rarely went in. The other was Brass City Records. The owner was a guy named Walter. He was patient when I asked for recommendations my first time in at thirteen. He suggested I get *The Velvet Underground and Nico* because I liked The Strokes. He suggested I get a Big Star album because I liked Weezer. Walter was a smart dude.

But those albums sat in my CD tower for a few years. Although I wanted to learn, I also really just wanted an exact copy of what I liked; this is coming from someone who couldn't understand why people complained that *Room on Fire* sounded exactly like *Is This It*. So I think that's how I first found out about Ozma. I was on Weezer messageboards. They'd selected Ozma as an opener twice. Bradley Torreano's review of *Rock and Roll Part Three* on AllMusic claimed that "Ozma may have arguably written the best Weezer album of 2001 (and yes, the real thing also had an album come out the same year)."

I wanted, above all things, in all things, constancy. No surprises. Unless of course change could come to me in the form of health, happiness, and/or guaranteed safety forever and ever and ever; then, hell yeah I wanted that. But even with my irrational brain, and despite my efforts, I knew that wasn't going to happen. So I continued to live in a musical fantasy.

We only went outside once during my week at YPH. I think there was snow on the ground, or else there was that kind of reflective, shiny whiteness in the air. It was freezing. The staff made us play basketball on the little patch of blacktop even though no one wanted to, and a boy, one that had puked all over the hallway on my second day, asked if I believed in God. I don't remember what I said to him.

I did puzzles with one kid, and talked about music with my roommate. The first night, everyone started screaming when someone shit all over one of the bathrooms. When my family came for therapy, it went terribly. I didn't want to leave Yale because I knew nothing at home would change. Every atom of my being seemed ready to explode. I put on my headphones.

We watched *Eight Legged Freaks* and *The Adventures of Pluto Nash*. I shared Doritos and gummy bears with my puzzle friend. He read *Jurassic Park*. My sisters cried when they

visited me, and the youngest one was ten so she probably shouldn't have come at all. I put on my headphones.

They checked my vitals. One night, a schizophrenic boy cried as he talked on the phone. He was all folded in on himself. You could almost see him wrestling with his brain. I ate okra for the first time in my life, in a gray gumbo from the cafeteria. I wore pajamas. I put on my headphones.

They put me on different medications. I had a schedule and an early wake-up time. They checked on us in the middle of the night. A doctor said I'd need to attend out-patient therapy in my hometown. I was to take a van there after the school day ended. My roommate got discharged while I was in group, so I didn't get to say goodbye. I cried and wrote in my spiral-less notebook and put on my headphones and rolled the dial with my thumb to as loud as it would go.

"Baseball" is about a romantic relationship ending, and although that was surely going to happen to me once I left the limbo of YPH, I didn't clutch to the song for that. (For what it's worth, when he did finally break up with me, it was Finch's "Letters to You," a song from a band I didn't even like, that got me good.)

The pre-chorus from "Baseball" tore through me during each listen. I didn't want to be the sacrificial lamb in my family, the one navigating all of this, the one calling them out on their bullshit, doing *something* because no one else would. I wanted to go to the mall. I wanted to go to punk shows at the VFW. I just wanted to be fifteen again.

*Every time I think I've finished being young
I catch myself having fun*

*But the moment passes as the sun moves on
So I turn myself back to you*

Then, the chorus starts, driving home the inevitable ending of the relationship, unfolding the baseball metaphor. It's winter. It's freezing. It's over. But *can you still remember, April to November?* Can you keep alive floating on that memory of warmth?

Then, the bridge. Ryen Slegre's voice cracks a bit at the culmination:

*And so I drive
Straight up I-5
To let you know I'm still alive*

The falsetto in the last line warmed itself around my brain every time I played the song. It's a quiet moment after the desperate, cracking scream a second before—a moment that could only be followed by a break, a pleading guitar solo. That falsetto held everything for me: complete vulnerability while mustering up something, using the last bit of air squeezed out of your lungs, to claim your goddamn life.

That's what I was reaching for, that line. I couldn't yet parse out its complicated meaning (for me now, it's one of survival, of managing illness and living day-by-day), but back then I only understood the feeling, felt it in my gut. It seemed like such a *fuck you* in a lot of ways to be able to say I was still alive. But I just couldn't get there yet. There wasn't enough air in my lungs.

The cover of *Rock and Roll Part Three* looks like a Lite-Brite version of the band. Neon against a black background, boxed off like it's made with a Day-Glo Etch A Sketch. But the image still hits me in some unhealed nerve when I see it, reminds me of the dark New Haven streets I could see from the lone window in my room, the cord of the blinds hidden behind Plexiglas, the bad yellow glow from streetlights. Cars slushing by on wet pavement. The kind of winter you really have in Connecticut—wet, dirty snow, cracks on your knuckles.

I never play the album during any other season but winter. Something carved deep into my memory must alert my body to play it at least once after the first snow fall, and more and more as the days get shorter and bleaker. I tend to retreat back into my high school soundtrack during the winter, settle into the aching memories as well as the good ones. I can't tell if it's self-flagellation or what, but I'll probably always do this. I think I'm still sifting through everything over fifteen years later.

Because the album is so deeply entrenched in this part of my existence, it's hard to view it objectively, but I guess I see it kind of like those high school memories themselves: pretty fun, with pockets of melancholy. Now, I listen to it when driving alone, leaving it loud so I can feel the buzz of the opening guitars in my back teeth. I listen to it alone, and I scream the words. I remember all of them, all the wordplay, the metaphors. I scream the words alone in the car, existing as a thirty-one-year-old woman with a family and a job and the ability, despite mental illness, despite the past, to etch out a version of normalcy, to create some worth, and I think I scream those lyrics in my car because I never thought I would be *able* to scream those lyrics in my car. I didn't think I'd be here to do it, I mean.

And when I sing "Baseball," when I get to that bridge falsetto, I feel fifteen again. Only this time, I feel like I have enough air in my lungs to belt out the words.