

## Surreality TV

I hand the waitress my copy of the zine. She seems grateful as we talk at the counter. She says she's going back to school. Poetry is hard and she doesn't think she's cut out for it. I tell her it's not how well you write, it's what you say that matters. It feels right when I say it.

The sun is setting. We make our way along East Michigan Avenue from Lansing to East Lansing, weaving between cars and along streets with art spaces and restaurants, fraternities and sororities, the houses of displaced Baby Boomers..

We pass someone wearing a Gumby costume—or maybe it's not a costume at all, maybe it's the real character, also displaced into this college suburb for reasons unknown—waving a sign above their head. I think it says something about a costume shop but we all agree it's a Wanted sign.

"Wanted. Help wanted," we read. "Substance in life. If this isn't beautiful, fuck beauty. Please call."

There is no phone number.

We call it a success, as we settle into a small living room surrounded by 20-somethings with 40-somethings in their hands, their fingers stained with nicotine, crumbs of Pineapple Express, Strawberry Cough, Grape Ape in the pockets of their cardigans. Everyone is talking, sharing stories and reminiscing. I read first: something about suicide, something about delinquency, something about the beauty of flowers when I can't even remember what colors her eyes were.

Everyone reads something different, something real. A storm brews, the hairs on my arms stand on end, someone's foot on the gas pedal, 88 miles per hour, 1.21 gigawatts and we're all thinking about kissing our mothers and saving our fathers. We nod. Someone snaps.

These kids, in their thrift-store rags and glasses with out-of-date prescriptions, know more than they lead on; they're not all ironic Twitter handles and Tumblr fandoms. They're passionate about what I'm passionate about: between hits and drags and sips, they speak of the suffering they've imagined but never felt, the sadness they feel as if in a dream. There is a boy who looks like Teddy from Stand By Me, speaking slowly and patiently but I can see the frustration that he feels for those that don't have what he has in the furrows of his brow, in the lines of his face so accustomed to smiling contorting into something foreign and ugly. He is angry. We're all angry. We all nod. Someone snaps. We are doing what we can.

The next morning, we're at the diner again. I look for the waitress. I want to tell her that I was right before, that it is about what you say and not how well you say it. Even a cardboard sign, discarded on the side of the road, is a work of poetry, a thing of beauty. The boy who looks like Teddy from Stand By Me is hungover and talking about the Juggalo diaspora, the mass exodus from the ruined metros of Flint and Detroit to the polished suburbs of Lansing. On the outside, we are laughing but we all feel the twinges of pain inside. Something snaps. We all nod.

I would watch that show.