

Sarah's Secret

By Michelle Zimmerman

There was a spilled bottle of pills on the counter. Green ones shaped like tiny bullets. A few of them had found themselves on the floor but most of them were on the cream tile of the counter. Her clumsy movements had knocked the opened bottle over. It was like slow motion: she saw the bottle tip over, then she heard the plastic clink. She saw the rush of green color, then heard a few drop to the linoleum kitchen floor. The whole time she stood motionless, just watching it all happening. This was just one more thing to add to her bad day. It may not seem like much, but she really did not want to deal with those little anti-depressants right now. She did not want to round up all those green Prozac's into their bottle. She did not want to do anything right now. Well, except for one thing

Sarah made her way to the bathroom. She left the spilled pills where they were. She walked in a trance through her kitchen. Past the dining room table covered with today's newspaper. Past the family shoe rack, past the cook book shelf and china cabinet. Her feet finally stepped onto the hallway's worn carpet. The carpet felt distant beneath her feet, almost as if it was not there. She walked past the linen closet and the wall covered in family portraits to her destination, her favorite room in the house. The stark white door called her in. It was half opened, just waiting for her to step into the room. She slipped past the door and immediately shut it, and made sure it was shut tight. What she was about to do was not allowed in this house, it was not allowed anywhere except for when Sarah was in the bathroom alone. It did not matter what bathroom she was in, they all became the same when she closed the door and was safe and secure with herself.

There was no need to turn on the light; it was early enough in the day to use the sun's light instead. Two more steps and Sarah would have what she was looking for, her most prized possession. She hid it in the basket of miscellaneous toiletries on the back of the toilet. Buried under it all was a Ziploc bag full of toilet paper. Not just any toilet paper, Sarah's secret. Some were stained brown. The blood had dried since she had used it last, leaving the toilet paper stiff and hard. The other toilet paper was a neat little package, that was the true treasure. Opening the toilet paper package, she held one end and let it drop like a scroll unraveling. She caught the other end with her hand. And there it was, her best friend in the whole world, the razor.

It was familiar, it gave pain, it gave control, and that is what Sarah wanted. She looked at the thin metal blade in her palm for only a second before she picked it up. She loved the way it felt in her fingers. More dainty than holding a pencil, but in the same position. Now came the hard part, finding a place to cut. She pushed her left sleeve half way up her bicep. Sarah saw her previous encounters with this blade. Over twenty in all, some only faint scars, some still red and swollen.

Her heart sank a little just looking at them; they were signs of shame and they must be hidden at all costs. Now it was time to add one more, one more secret, one more lie to the enormous pile. She picked a spot high on the inside of her arm. "Easier to hide," she thought to herself.

She raised the razor to her arm, closed her eyes and anticipated the pain. Slowly she drew the cold steel two inches across her flesh. Sarah barely felt this motion; the blades were so sharp that they cut with ease. It lasted less than a second and then the razor was once again unattached from her arm. For that brief moment Sarah felt as though she was somehow connected to this inanimate object. She opened her eyes and looked immediately at her newest injury.

The blood slowly rose, seeping through the thin line. It formed little red beads till it started to run down her arm. Sarah picked up the extra toilet paper to clean away the blood. She could not describe the feeling all this gave to her, she could not even describe it to herself.

Michelle Zimmerman is the winner of the seventh annual Award for Prose, a writing contest initiated by Karen Rosenbaum, who taught creative writing, literature and composition for more than 30 years at Ohlone.