The Hairpin

The Best Time I Went to the Orthodontist on LSD

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by Samantha Vincenty



I met up with Debi in the center of town. It was our second week of summer vacation; I was 17 and she was 15. I plopped down on the grass next to her, where she'd gathered a bunch of dandelions in her lap.

"Do you have mine?"

Debi nodded and produced an abused-looking tinfoil rectangle. She unwrapped it and there was a much smaller red rectangle inside, perforated into four tiny squares.

"I took one a little while ago," she said. "I'm starting to feel it."

She handed me the package. I tore one square off and put it on my tongue. "What do you want to do now?"

Debi shrugged, tracing a dandelion along her cheek. "We could stop by Sonia's house and see if she's home."

"Maybe … nah, let's just hang out the two of us. Sonia's not gonna be on our level." I gave Debi the facial expression equivalent of air quotes when I said *on our level.* As Debi herself once pointed out, the most honest and effective anti-drug PSA might be one that captures all of the unbearably cheesy and cliché-sounding things a person doing drugs actually says. *Don't do drugs … because then you'll start talking like someone who does drugs.*

We sat on the grass and talked for what seemed like forever while Debi wove a chain from the dandelions. The dandelions: all of a sudden they were so yellow and the stalks were so green, and it seemed like the longer I looked at them the yellower and greener they got. A warm loosey-goosey feeling was spreading through my insides as if I'd had a cup of liquid hugs. My stomach flip-flopped and I couldn't stop bouncing my right foot. I was spellbound by my bouncing foot and started turning my hands back and forth in the grass like I was twiddling knobs. "Hi my name is Joe and I work in button factory," I said under my breath.

"What?" Debi said, looking up at me with giant pupils.

I broke into a grin. "I almost feel like I could eat something right now, like it would feel really crazy to chew on something? Am I talking really fast?" I couldn't stop smiling.

Debi reached in her pocket. “Want some gum? It’s cinnamon.” As she said *cinnamon* I tasted cinnamon in my mouth and the silhouette of Debi’s face and hair lit up, an outline in hot pink neon.

“I want some gum but I’m not supposed to ha — OH MY GOD!” I jumped up suddenly, flapping my arms.

“Is there a bug on you?”

“I forgot I have an orthodontist appointment at 2! That’s, like, right now almost!” An orthodontist appointment at 2, an orthodonist appointment at 2, that was a fun phrase to say. “I have to go or I’ll be in trouble. That’s okay right? It won’t be that long, right? It’s okay,” I said again, to reassure myself.

At this point in our career as young degenerates, Debi and I had been taking acid for well over a year. We never kept track of how often we did it but we’d been tripping at the supermarket, tripping in my mom’s car, tripping at all-ages shows, and tripping while lying on the beach with our throats exposed in hopes that vampires would attack us, so this seemed manageable. A bit of a style-cramp, but manageable.

Debi got to her feet. “Let’s go. We need to bring this,” she said, holding up the dandelion chain. I nodded in solemn agreement. We linked arms as we walked across the grass to cross the street. We were bold and we were brave, and Dr. Steinlauf’s office was less than a block away.

The office was cold and quiet. Debi took a seat in the waiting room, between two boys our age. I walked up to the receptionist’s desk.

"I'm Samantha Vincenty and I'm here to see Dr. Steinlauf for my appointment," I said with the stilted delivery of an actor in a local cable commercial, scrawling my name on the clipboard on the counter.

The receptionist smiled. "I know who you are, Samantha. You can go on in, he's in the very back."

I walked down the longest hallway that ever existed. Dr. Steinlauf sat on a black swiveling office chair at the other end, fishing around the mouth of a boy my age. The boy had buggy eyes and made me think of Evil Ed, the best friend in the 1980s horror movie *Fright Night*. I squirmed into the empty exam chair trying to get comfortable and above all, act natural.

Dr. Steinlauf swiveled over to me and got down to business, picking and tightening. Except for the ongoing challenge of sitting still, it was not unpleasant. Dr. Steinlauf liked to hum along to the Lite FM radio hits and I watched his black and gray nose hairs vibrate in time to the humming. Lionel Richie had never sounded so good, and the tinny clinks of his tools against my braces made oddly satisfying echoes in my head.

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"It's no fun for you and Billy here to have to come in on such a nice day, eh?"

"Unhhunh," I slobbered in response.

"Well don't you worry, we'll get you out of here soon enough." He turned his chair back over to Buggy-eyed Billy and then back to me. After some more humming and picking, it was over and I was free.

I strode purposefully slowly past reception without looking at anyone, like a shoplifter trying to avoid attention from store security. Debi followed me out and neither of us spoke until we were a safe distance away from the office steps.

"That was CRAZY," Debi said, glancing back behind us.

"Yeah."

"No — you don't even KNOW." She stopped walking and leaned forward, lowering her voice. "*Everyone in that office was tripping.*"

I was skeptical. "Like, the receptionist?"

"NO! Everyone in the waiting room! Me, those dudes in there, we were all tripping!"

"Did you talk to them? What did they say?"

"They weren't talking to me, just to each other, but they were saying things that only tripping people would say. About how crazy the lights looked and whether they were acting weird. I swear! I promise they were tripping."

I decided to play along. "Yeah that's weird," I said. "Hey, let's never stop walking ever again."

“Oh no! I left my daffodil necklace!” Debi said, suddenly crestfallen.

“Don’t be sad, we’ll make a new one that’s even better. And more yellow.” I bent down to pick two dandelions and then we were back on the move.

Almost a year later we were sitting on a bench on the other side of the town green. I was in the middle of saying something when Debi pointed behind me. “LOOK! It’s the kid from the orthodontist’s that time.”

I turned to look and from 10 yards away I could see that it was totally him, buggy eyes and all. We chased him down.

“Hey!” He stopped.

“This is a weird question,” I began, “but were you at Dr. Steinlauf’s office like a year ago? With two friends?”

A look of recognition came over his face and he nodded. “Yeah, that was me,” he said, laughing. “Actually that was a crazy day — “

“Were you guys on acid?” Debi had no patience for his exposition.

“YES! We were! Jesus, how did you know that?”

Debi looked at me and threw her arms up in triumph.

Samantha Vincenty is a writer, editor, and nachos enthusiast. She lives in Chicago with her cat Caligula.

Illustration by Gigi Rose Gray.

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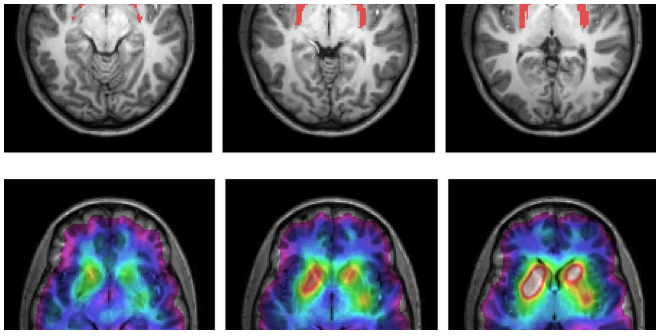
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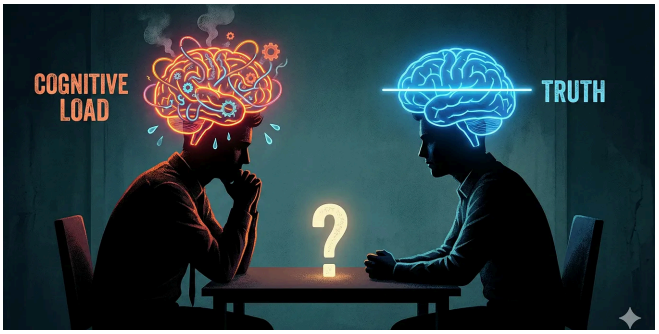
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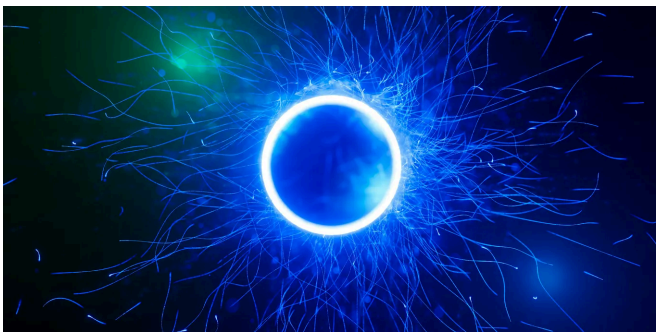


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