

When I was born they said I was priceless, one of a kind, the most precious thing on this earth. There I was, covered in blood and all kinds of goo and probably a little bit of faeces, but I mattered. I was a fresh, innocent hunk of human; made up of so many pounds and ounces, less than a size zero, filled with metals and fats and bone and a million tiny eggs inside me, half of which would die before I'd even be ready to use them and only a few of them ever destined to live outside me, outside this body, this new body, this body stuffed with potential, with natural talent just waiting to be discovered. I could be a superstar, a scientist, a billionaire. I could be the most important person on the planet, along with all the other hundreds of babies born within a minute of my birth.

When I was five, I'd just started school and was already at the bottom of my class. I had a teacher who'd shout at me for not colouring in these pictures of carrots and potatoes faster. I didn't know why it was so important, but I kept on scribbling over the paper with those orange and brown crayons as quickly as I could, sweating with the pressure, fearing failure, fighting tears. If we were good then maybe they'd give us a gold star, a house point, a certificate, a prize at the end of the year, or, best of all, a book token for WHSmith. We sat in our neat rows and stood when asked and sat when told and waved our arms like mad and sang with every bit of breath along to songs we didn't understand about being cold and naked with creeds and colours in assemblies that numbed our bottoms and gave us cramp in our legs; dressed in uniforms that had to be tucked in and done up and straightened out or else the school would fall down and crush us and we'd all die horrible slow deaths.

When I was ten, I found out about sex and was disgusted and then I had my first crush and was intrigued and then I remembered that I was actually supposed to be bothered about which school I was going to go to next and where I was going to get into and how I was going to pass the 11+ and why this would accurately determine my entire future forever and ever. If I could do this one thing then I would be set for life and I would prove that I was worth the time and money and effort of a grammar school education. It would prove that I was more worthy than the other children in any case. It would separate us. The wheat from the chaff, the sheep from the goats, the bankers from the plumbers... or the pupils whose parents could afford to have them privately trained and live in the right area and the pupils whose parents couldn't, but that doesn't really scan well.

When I was fifteen, I decided I would be a doctor. I was good at science and I knew that being a doctor was basically the highest you could go in science. It came with status and money and I'd be helping people, saving people's lives, jetting off to war-torn countries struck by natural disasters and exotic diseases. I'd be a superhero. I'd be worth my weight in gold. I would think about this as we ran around the race track on sports day, spitting out laps; we'd compete and find praise and companionship on the pitch, on the courts, in the changing rooms. Hearts pounding, sweat dripping, limbs aching, we were together, fighting each other, winning against them, losing against us, coming out as number one, or number two, or number sixty-three. Then, trailing at the back, jogging, walking, jogging, stopping, tripping, walking, the fat ones, the big beauties, the sausage roll, bacon bap, pork pie pudding, tumbling along with their red rash faces, right at the back of the field. Our sport teachers hated them, bullied them, patronised them, and ignored them. They were left at the bottom of the heap, while the quick, slim, agile ones raced over them to the top. I wasn't the fastest or the slowest, so I pottered along in the middle, paying no attention, looking at my own goals, my own finish line, my own trophies.

When I was twenty, I'd dropped out of medical school and gone back to living with my parents. I'd lost my passion and my path and had decided that having a degree didn't really mean anything. I watched people around me of all ages still on their paths, still on track, still moving in the right direction, whatever that means. I realised that adults were just grown up children.

Now, I'm about to turn twenty-five and I'm a freelance artist a.k.a. unemployed and I've never really had a proper long term full time job. I had all the advantages, all the support, all the privileges I could ask for, but I don't know yet if I've earned the right to be alive and living in this country. There are people who might hate me, who might think I'm a waste, might think that people I know, friends of mine are a waste. I don't know; I don't know how to value myself. How to measure my own worth. I'm still made of human, I guess. I still have the same skin and tissue and mess of organs inside. I still wake up and go to bed. I'll still die someday, I'll still die and I won't know why. None of us will know why we were born and lived and worked every day in a shop or in a school or a museum or an office or anything. We won't know why it was important to have a 20k, 50k, 100k salary or why we measured each other in GDP or how many bits of paper and metal we had in our wallets and pockets and down the back of the sofa or how many numbers flashed through our bank accounts. We won't know why we paid people more money for making money than we did for being kind or helpful or generous or brave or loving or fair or for making things better. I am nearly twenty-five and when I see people, I try not to judge their worth by what they do for a living, or the grades they got in school, or the prizes they won, or whether they came first or second or last. If they're a stockbroker, a policewoman, a criminal, a nurse, a drunk, a tory, a radical, a jobseeker, a CEO, a columnist for the Sun, a dictator, a porn star, a person without a home, or a prince. Instead I try to think 'they were someone's baby'.