

How does one celebrate Valentine's Day? Is it when you're eight and your mother gives you little chocolates before school? Is it sixth grade when the boy you like humiliates you in front of the whole class? Is it when you're 12 and you wake up at nine on a school day? You go into your parents' room to ask why we slept in today, and they tell you that Grandpa died in his sleep last night, in the leather recliner in his living room. Is it when you're sitting on the rough suede of your couch? When you're not crying at all and don't know why? Is it when you start to hate yourself because you didn't spend enough time with him, or call him, or tell him you loved him enough? Or is it the week after Valentine's Day, when you're standing in a recreation center, glancing over at the picture of his face printed on foam-core. You're wearing black at the "celebration of life", watching your dad cry for the first time. Looking at your brother's wrists sticking out of his suit--he's gotten so tall. Saying, "Thank you for your condolences," while pushing around the catered brunch food on thin plastic plates. It's raining the hardest rain you've ever seen in your life, like God is crying for your loss. For you, actually, because you haven't cried at all, and you don't, not even when the rain continues for days and you just know the world is sad. Is it when you go to his house and the chair is still there? When you're just sitting across from it on the floor, imagining his body? When you think to yourself: "How fucked up am I? I haven't cried at all and now I'm envisioning a dead body." I think Valentine's Day is really celebrated in your dorm room at midnight, trying to type quietly while your roommate is asleep. You can already see the flushed pink faces of your friends in the morning, blushing over flowers sent from Oregon or the text messages from Ohio. You see the boy you used to like, a jerk, who reminds you of every Valentine's day you've spent alone--nineteen, to be exact. But you will wake up. You will create two ceramic pots, a painting, and a poster on Adobe Illustrator. You will get back from classes at 10 at night and you will watch tv until you're too tired to keep your eyes open. You'll fall asleep at 2 in the morning, and by then, it will be February 15th, and all the candy will be on sale.