

balance.

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Tap. Tap. Tap. No, that wasn't even. Tap. No, too long in-between. That doesn't feel even either. Tap. Tap. Tap. Four. Four is even but it's close to five, and multiples of five are better than even numbers. Tap tap tap tap tap tap tap tap tap tap. Now it's even and a multiple of five. The girl sitting next to me is staring. I lower my hands and fiddle with my pencil, the itching in my face finally gone now that I've restored the balance. She turns away but glances back at me every so often, waiting to see if I'll tap my face again like I'm a child—or losing my mind. I might be losing my mind. I avoid eye contact.

Paint. Asphalt. Paint. Asphalt. A misstep and my shoe lands on the crosswalk paint strip with maybe an inch landing just past it. The balance is thrown off. My other shoe has to do the same; paint strip, an inch on the asphalt. That still doesn't feel right. Fine. Now an inch on the paint strip, the rest on asphalt, one foot and then the other. A car honks at me. The walk sign has long passed. Paint asphalt paint asphalt, I hurry to the sidewalk. Can't step on any cracks. I just want to get home.

Pain in my left hand. I unclench my fist to see four crescents dug into my palm—only on my left. No, I don't want to. I need to stop. My right palm itches. I step on a crack in the sidewalk and stop, just standing there. The balance, it's gone to hell. The itching spreads from my palm to my foot, to my brain, but I've had enough. I don't want to do this anymore. I can't do this anymore. Some days it's barely there, but days like these it stops me every few minutes, interrupting my life until it's taking it over. Balance. I need balance. A bell dings at me and a boy on a bicycle flies past. My right fist clenches tight. I step on another crack, with my other foot this time. Balance is restored. God, I don't want to do this anymore.