

# trauma.

*Best Of Creative Nonfiction*

Michaela White

I showered every single day for three years. I thought it could clean me, scrub away the fingerprints and bruises. I was afraid that if I went a day or even sometimes half a day without it, I would see them again – the bruises around my neck, around my arms, everywhere. Though I gathered them gradually over time, I could picture them all together in my head, and the sensation of being touched without wanting it crawled on my skin like bugs. I wanted to stop being afraid of something that was gone. I wanted to stop waking up with my hand around my throat, wanted to stop flinching whenever I saw a silver sedan. I wanted to stop sleeping with my bedroom door locked, to stop locking my car over and over and over while I was getting gas or walking into the store, into school. Locks didn't save me anyway.

I've tried to stop showering every day, and it works sometimes, but then I reach my breaking point again, and I find myself in the shower at three in the morning, scrubbing until my skin is raw and sometimes bleeding. Then I have to walk across the hall in the dark, shivering, wet, and in pain. The fucked up thing is that I was never afraid of the dark as a child. I didn't think monsters were real. But every so often, the short walk from my driveway to my house takes my breath away and collapses me onto my knees when I'm safely in the light because *what if? What if I wasn't alone?* I think I'm being followed constantly, watch the cars behind me, that person in the gas station, that group of people in the parking lot. Yet, when I think about it, the worst part of all of this is that it could have been worse, couldn't it? It could have been worse. But when I'm locked in a public restroom, and I'm curled up on the floor because I *can't breathe*, well, I know that it could have been a hell of a lot better, too.