

The Night Before School Starts

by Dianne McKnight-Warren

A familiar ritual by now, she finds a thin spiral notebook from last year or the years before in a box in her closet. She tears the first few pages out, the overly careful notes she takes at the beginning of the school year before she snags or drifts away like a stick in a stream.

The words on the page change to doodles and then the doodles disappear. By the second or third week the pages are blank.

On the days she doesn't cut school, she sits in class and stares at the wall, at the floor, at a book opened to some random place. The teachers mostly leave her alone.

The days she cuts she stays home after her parents leave for work, after they back the old Plymouth out of its space and drive off looking straight ahead. If it's cold she stays in bed or sits in the hallway in front of a heating grate that blows warm air when the furnace switches on in the cellar. The air leaves black shadows shaped like flames on the wall behind her.

She knows she's a nobody, feels less than human. But on the night before school starts, like last year and the years before, she manages to get out the notebook and that is enough. In fact it is everything and she knows this too.

