The Steps You Take

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Recommended Citation
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The Steps You Take
Katie Lauck

right up over down over left.
up down over up over down over.
over up over up over down over down.
up over down over up over down over down over up over down.
These are the steps you take to avoid looking at the dead man lying in the hot Jamaican street.
These are the steps you take to keep your mind off the murder you’re not quite implicated in.
These are the steps you take to solve the final layer of a Rubik’s cube.

Step 1: right up over down over left
You step out of the customs room you have been standing in for hours and head right to the bathroom. You rummage through your backpack and pull a skirt up from the bottom of your things. The skirt feels much better than the long jeans you had on in the overwhelming Jamaican heat. You walk out of the restroom and look over at the beautiful palm trees outside. The corners of your mouth never fall down from their smile because this is your first time outside of the country, and you have been waiting for this vacation for months. Your mother calls you over, and you quickly get on the bus that will shuttle you to your resort. You’re lucky - you make it just before they shut the doors to drive off. You fight your sister for the best seat, but eventually you win and settle in next to the window on the left.

Step 2: up over down over up over down over
Your bus driver looks up from the road and over at the rest stop on the side of the street. He turns the wheel, and the bus heads down to the stop so you and your fellow passengers can get a drink. Just before the driver gets to the parking lot, however, a motorcycle comes out from his blind spot. As your bus hits the man on the motorcycle, he flies over his handlebars and up against the window next to your head. He falls over into the road. You hope against all odds that he will move, but he...
doesn’t even roll over. He is dead. And for some God-forsaken reason, his dark eyelids are not down. As you look into the eyes of a man who can no longer see you, your own eyes begin to sting, your heart speeds to an alarming rate, and your stomach turns over.

Step 3: over up over up over down over down

The bus finishes pulling over, and the driver leaps up out of his seat and runs over to the man as a crowd of onlookers gathers around the scarlet stained street. The adults on the bus stand up and scramble to the windows around you. You want to look over at what’s happening, but you’re too terrified after seeing the man’s eyes, so you instead look down at the Rubik’s cube in your hand. You solve it once, twice, three times. Each time you finish the final layer you start over, so you have a reason to keep your head down and your mind distracted from the whispers of a cracked head and bleeding mouth.

Step 4: up over over down over up over down over up over down over up over down

Eventually the police show up carrying the biggest guns you have ever seen and lay a sheet over the man. You solve the Rubik’s cube for what must be the thirtieth, but you can’t stop; you simply flip it over and start again. Out of nowhere the bus driver gets back on the bus and announces that he will now be taking you on to your hotel. As he sits down, you look over at your mother in confusion because you had assumed you would get more information about the man you had just killed or at least would have been moved to a bus where his blood was not smeared across your window. Your mother seems just as confused as you, but her lips turn up in a reassuring yet frightened smile. For the rest of the drive over to the hotel you keep your head down so nobody will see the tears that have formed in the corners of your eyes. The rest of the vacation goes well, but it’s hard to ignore the dark cloud hovering up above it all. On the last day, your family takes a private car over to the airport and your hands have a slight tremble in them the whole ride there. Over the next few weeks, you can’t seem to get the man and his vacant stare out of your mind. One day you get an idea, so you sit down at your computer and spend hours pouring over obituaries and death reports from Jamaica to try and figure out the name of the man you hit, but to no avail. As
time goes on, the weight of the event lifts *up* from your shoulders piece by piece, and you begin to numb yourself to the pain as best as you can. But no amount of time will ever fully numb you, and you know in your heart that you will never truly get *over* it; you may not have directly caused that man’s death, but you were a part of it and for that a piece of your heart will always lie with him six feet *down*. 