

The third-place poem in the 9-12 age group, "*the unit of happiness*," concerns an authentic look at depression and the medicine used to treat it. The title refers to the amount of medicine taken to make the speaker "happy." The poem succeeds because of its straightforward tone, its realistic view of depression, and its purposeful line breaks.

The first stanza, we assume, takes place in a doctor's office with a Dr.'s words and the speaker's reaction. He prescribes "300 milligrams, twice a day" and speaks "slowly, carefully / as if he doesn't want to scare me away, / maybe he can tell I'm afraid of pills." This opening gives us essential information about the speaker regarding medicine and depression that impacts the rest of the poem.

The second and third stanzas change in time and place. The speaker is home, or at a residence. The fear of taking medicine surfaces, and he or she asks another person in the poem, "jess," for "a glass of water" and "quick!" [I] place the pill "on my tongue." When Jess asks the speaker, "how's life been treating you?" the speaker "lies out of habit" and says, "I'm happy" because "that's what I've been promised." The speaker's automatic reply signals a reluctance to speak honestly about being depressed and perhaps leads us to believe that he or she may not easily recover.

Sleep—an elusive state for this speaker—controls the next two sections. The speaker says:

there is no one to distract me anymore.
like clockwork, I begin to wonder
when it all stopped being enough.

when friends became chores,
and nighttime routines became secrets.
when happiness stopped meaning smiles,
and started meaning 300 milligrams twice a day.

The heavy cloak of depression causes this speaker to question what this medicine has promised. At night with no distractions, the speaker's candid thoughts about "friends as chores," "nighttime routines as secrets," and happiness that "stopped being smiles," easily surface. In spite of this, the reader hopes that "300 milligrams twice a day" give the speaker respite from the downward pull of depression.

Sarah Mook Poetry Contest, 2018
Third place, grades 9-12 "the unit of happiness"

Thank you for the pleasure of reading your work!

Marie Kane, Final Judge
Sarah Mook Poetry Contest, 2018