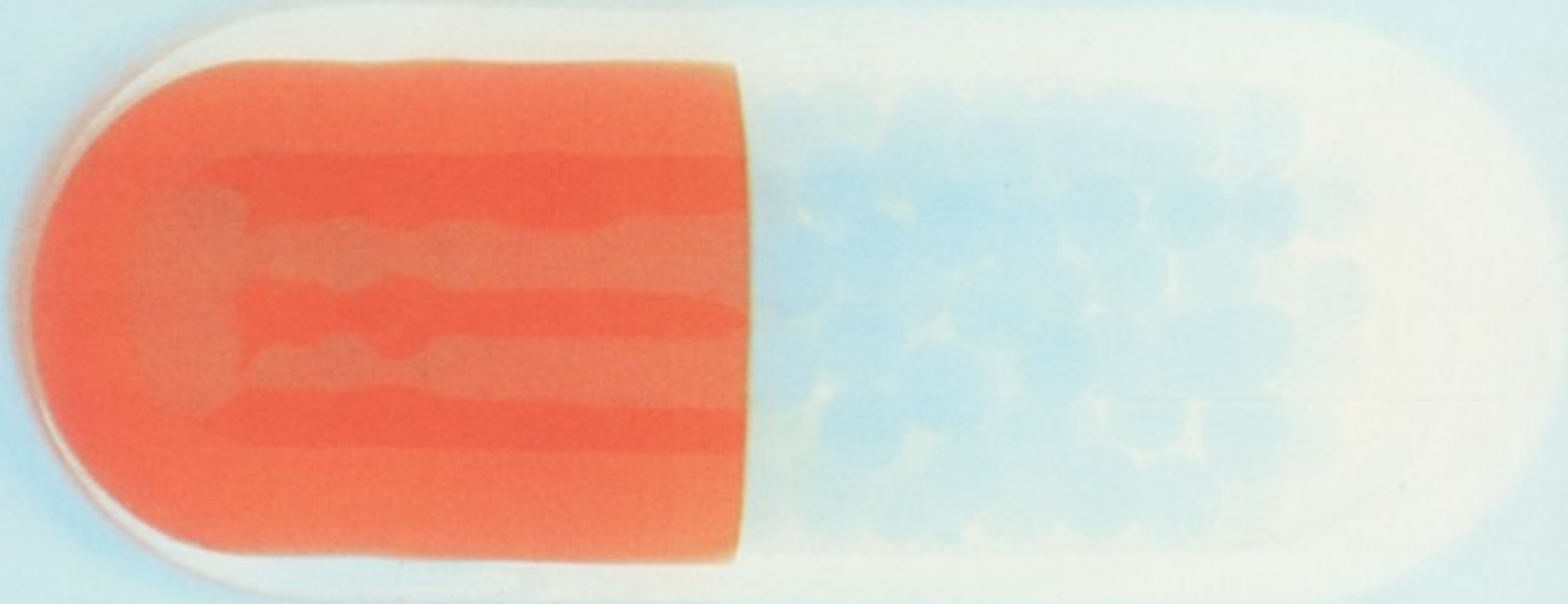





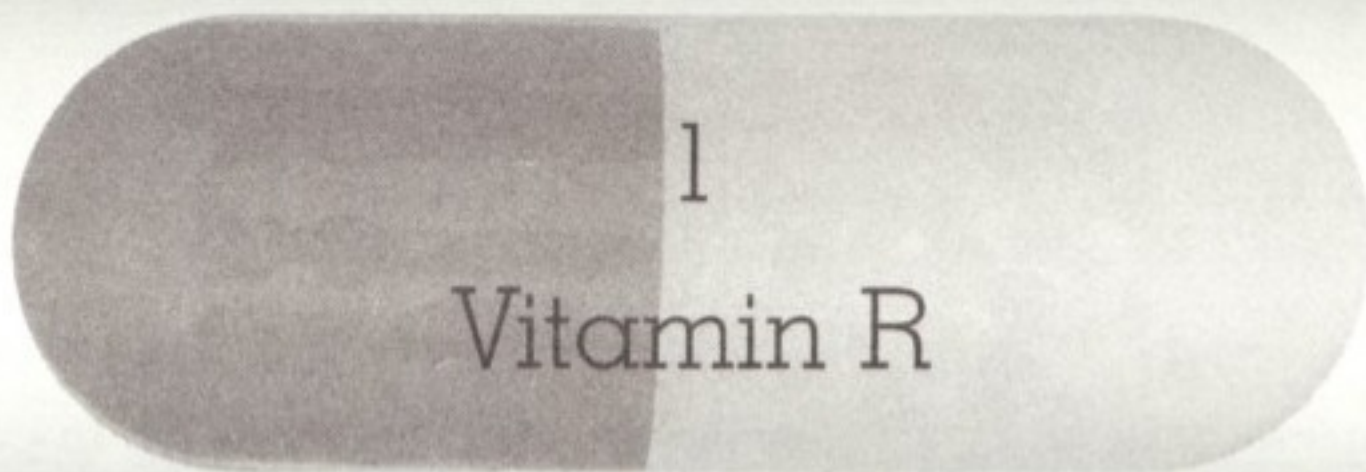
Rx



a novel by

**Tracy Lynn**





Well if they're making it (making it)

Then they're pushing it (pushing it)

—Chevelle

"CHEESE!"

A strobe of red followed by a flash of bright white, hopefully bouncing off my teeth and sparkling in my eyes. I tried not to giggle.

"That's it, everyone," the school photographer announced with a smile.

Everyone on the school literary magazine fell forward, now released from our pose. We were all giddy from just having put the spring issue of *Veritas* to rest. Even Will, who just designed the cover, had smiled unexpectedly for the camera. And Meera had actually dressed up. Sort of.

"Congratulations, everyone," Mrs. Tildenhurst said. She put her arm around me and gave me a special squeeze. "I am so sorry you're not going to be with us next year, Thyme. You did such wonderful work."

I blushed a little and felt genuinely bad. "Sorry, I just don't have the time. I think I should concentrate on my strengths my senior year—and unfortunately, they just don't include anything of literary merit." Besides, I had been on the magazine for three years now, and junior year extra-currics counted more than senior for college applications. Or so the legend went.

Tildenhurst gave me an odd look. "That's a funny thing for someone so young to say. Don't you think it's a little early to write off—pardon the pun—poetry and fiction and journaling?"

"I guess I just know my own limitations," I said self-deprecatingly, winding down our conversation. She was going to be my AP teacher next year, anyway—we'd have more chances to talk then. And I was anxious to get back to the group. They were talking about going to a movie and I didn't want to miss out. They were the closest thing to a clique I had.

All of Ashbury High is divided into three main groups: the rich kids, the jocks, and The Twenty—my nickname for the approximately twenty most overachieving, good-school-bound juniors. They were a social force to be reckoned with, no matter how nerdy. Less important socially (in order) are the partyers, the stoners, the do-gooders, the geeks and freaks.

I was just barely in The Twenty, possibly GPA #19 or 20 itself, but I was in. In the overinflated world of AP grades

and extra credit, staying in the top 10 percent is pretty fricking difficult. But if it wasn't for them, I wouldn't really have had any place in the school hierarchy. I'd be even more of a no one. I sucked at sports, was financially middle class (no matter how upper), never got invited to the good parties, and my interests (making beaded jewelry, e.g.) had no bragging rights among my peers. Nor did they look good on college applications. They were personal. *I* was personal. Even a little introverted, some might say.

So the people in *Veritas*, the French Club, Model U.N., and everything else were the closest thing I had to a social scene.

"Hey, what are we doing?" I asked, bouncing up to Kevin, the current head of The Twenty. I had thought he was cute for about one marking period, but constant competition doesn't really do much for sexual attraction.

"Oh, I don't know," he sighed, rolling his eyes. "I think we're going to see that action-thriller thing Sonia's cousin is in. Either that or *The Life Aquatic*."

Well, that first one sounded kind of exciting. Even if the movie sucked, we would sort of know someone in the credits.

"What are *they* doing here?" someone else asked—GPA #5, as a matter of fact—indicating the door with a similar roll of her eyes.

Lida and Suze, my peeps from the hood and my oldest friends, had finally shown up. I had invited them along to

Thyme Gilcrest **is an honors student.**  
Thyme Gilcrest **is popular.**  
Thyme Gilcrest **is on student council.**  
Thyme Gilcrest **is a drug dealer.**

Like piecing together a logic puzzle, Thyme has organized a complex trading system that enables her to obtain the meds her friends need. They all come to her to diagnose their problems and provide the "cure"—be it Prozac, Ritalin, Vicodin. . . .

She's therapist, doctor, and pharmacist all in one. She helps people. And that makes her feel a little more in control—a little more capable of dealing with her own frantic high school life. Because Thyme Gilcrest is nothing if not good at dealing.



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