

## **American Plastic By Patrick Reget**

### American Plastic

*A Fortune 17 company American Health is one of the world's leading pharmaceutical producers, manufacturing 90 of the world's top 200 drugs, they employ over 55,000 people on six continents, my father included.*

The whirs and clanks of machines resonate incessantly off the walls and in to my tired ears. Some machines make plastic, others make sterile water. Some machines put the sterile water inside the plastic. Instead of glass windows they are plastic, the floors are glossed with plastic, the machines have plastic parts inside of them, the machines themselves make plastic. I realize that plastic begets plastic, the thought terrifies me. I am unsure whether there is no color in the plant, or if the fluorescent lights have dulled my eyes to any colors of the spectrum aside from the pale blue that covers the walls. My nose feels the first traces of melted plastic as I open the hermetically sealed door. Immediately, I feel miserable. I feel its scent seethe in to my skin.

We make the most sterile water in the world it can be used for asthma medicine, cystic fibrosis, and numerous other medical applications. My division uses it to make store brand eye drops. I put the drops in to boxes. Someone passes the bottle. A machine puts the label and a serial number on it. I grab the bottle and place it in to a box and let someone else close it for me. *I grab the bottle put it in the box. I grab the bottle put it in the box. I grab the bottle put it in to the box.* What are they doing together right now? Forget it, just work. *Grab bottle put in box. Grab bottle put in box.* It's probably something pretty bad. I'm sure he does everything I never did. *Grab bottle, box. Grab*

*bottle, box. Grab bottle, box. She is sleeping next to him. Grab. They spoon one another. Bottle. They wake up perfectly, with hair still done, and not even a trace of morning breath. Box. Elation on her. Grab. face as she wakes up. Bottle. She is truly happy next to him, Box. Forgotten. Grab. I'm not even a glint in her eye. Bottle. We never had the chance, did we? Box. A kiss on the small of her neck. Grab. Then the gently on the mouth. Grab. Kiss. Bottle. Hand. Box. Thigh. Grab. Kiss. Bottle. Grasp. Box. Moan. Grab. Thrust moan. Box. Bottle in Box. Climax. Grab, Grab, Box, BxBottle. Bottle box. box, box, bottle, grab. "BreAK!!!" Bathroom. Throw up. She grabbed the bottle and put it in the box.*

The break room is almost as bland as the production floor. The vending machines stand next to one another like criminals in a line-up. They are packed with Hostess snacks, various microwavable items, and pre – fabricated sandwiches. I'm certain the sandwiches come from an assembly line just like mine. *Bread, meat, lettuce, tomato, mayo, bread.* Then they wrap it in plastic, and we sit in our plastic tables, in our plastic chairs, and eat our plastic food. My food for the day stares back at me. Two weeks ago a snack looked sexy for my first break. Today the inside of my lunchbox looks less than appetizing. I settle for an apple my mom packed. The apple is store bought, with a wax coating. The only real difference between the break room and the production floor is that motivational posters and plaques dedicated to company excellence are strewn about the room. I wonder whether one would hold strong enough if I were to attempt to hang myself from it. I decide not to after reading the company policy: *A Dedication to Doing it Right the First Time.*

Time to go back to work. My only responsibility now is to simply close the boxes. *Close.*  
*Close. Close. Close.* My brain can be left out of this job. I strike up a conversation with  
the one person that speaks English as a first language. Her name is Amanda, she is a  
really sweet girl, and is a genuinely interesting person I can talk to. “My boyfriend and I  
went to this concert...” *Close. Close. Close. Close.* “...and he just gets me, we’re just  
happy with each other.” I hate Amanda. Immediately I regret speaking to someone  
balanced right now. I kill the conversation. *Close. Close. Close. Close.* Amanda looks  
pretty confused, but I just keep working. Fortunately, she is too new to keep pace with  
me. I put her to work just to distract her from the conversation. *Close. Close. Close .close*  
*close close.* I see them slowly crawl out of bed and sit next to each other during a lavish  
breakfast. *Close close.* They connect eyes for a brief moment, and she adorably looks  
down and cutely smirks at her breakfast *Close close.* They spend the rest of the morning  
cuddling in bed until its time to go to work *Closeclosecloseclose.* She is probably better  
off without me. *Cloooooose.....Close.* “Oyè! Patricio, trabaja mas rapido!” “K, Jose, I’ll  
start working faster.” “Ey Patricio, ‘chu liek Daddy Yankee?” I tell Jose I don’t like  
Daddy Yankee, nor do I like the gasolina song, or the entire genre of reggaetòn. By the  
look on Jose’s face I don’t think we’ll be talking about much for the rest of the day.  
*Close. Close.* Jose calls for break again, “is lunch tine, gringo.”

I love lunch tine. I pass the break room and escape to my car. I can feel the plant loom  
over my back in the perpetually overcast sky as I walk to the car. It quietly releases me  
from its cold jaw. My car soothes me. Inside is like a warm blanket aside from the fact

that it is actually -273 below, roughly. Perfectly serene, the harsh outside air somehow seems less dangerous as it playfully laps at my 4-door emancipation.

I glance at my phone, and plainly stare at the blank screen. A sigh escapes my lungs. I look at the passenger seat and stare at the headrest for a second. She was in my car yesterday. She sat right there and we talked and argued for a solid 45 minutes. The scent of her perfume and shampoo still lingers in the headrest. I forget plastic for a second and just feel for a bit.

I call her. By the fifth attempt she answers. Her voice is cold, hard, sterile, unloving, “What do you want from me, didn’t we go through this yesterday?” I barely muster a “hello” from my dry, swollen throat. “I’m not doing this again Patrick, it’s been three days in a row, and you know what, I find it really funny that you never called me on your breaks when we were still together, but now you have all the time in the world!” “I also used to eat when I had a break, for some reason I can’t eat.” I don’t care how immature the comment was, I need to get under her skin as bad as she gets under mine. It may have worked. I wasn’t going to tell her about the girl I slept with simply to spite her yet, that was for later. “Do you love him?” .... No answer....*Tears, scream, cry.* “[expletive] YOU!!!! Who the [expletive] do you think you are? You can just [expletive] anything that walks. You are an [expletive]ing unbelievable, heartless [expletive]” ‘Click. After I call back fourteen times, I just get voice mail. I don’t know what her problem was.

I stop by the bathroom. I look in the mirror and wash away my red eyes. Slightly clear now, it’s time for more plastic.

I have a good station. If the people behind me are quick enough, I work my ass off and don't think about anything. I have to catch the closed boxes that are packaged together in a sealer, I inspect the labels, and then put them in bigger boxes for shipping. My hands shake as I reach for the first few boxes that come through the sealer. The packages rattle a bit unsteadily in my hands as I try to fit them in the shippers. I just keep breathing. Just breathe.

I'm four or five years old. I'm in the middle of an asthma attack. My chest is tight and constricted, I feel like I am breathing through a straw. I am so scared. To prevent me from panicking my mom sits me on her lap and rests her chin on top of my head. She won't let me waste any more air. She has to be strong for me. My mom can't show how worried she is for me. She has to calm me down. She puts her hands on my tiny chest and coaxes the air in and out of my lungs as we wait for the ambulance. "Just breathe Patrick. You don't need to be scared sweetheart, just breathe. You're gonna be OK" "Promise?" "I promise baby, now just be quiet and try to breathe ok? Just breathe." She whispers it right in to my ear. My chest is still tight, but I'm not so scared. Slowly, I feel my chest start to fill up with oxygen.

I try to just breathe for a bit. I wait for the oxygen, until I catch my breath steadily. I relax and focus. I see a big stack of eye drops getting bigger. Calmly I reach for a shipping box and unfold it. I inspect the eye-drops, and put in a small stack. My hands know the way to well. I have done this countless times. I let my body take over. I focus and work. Through the hour I stop thinking about it too much.

After break I have a basic job, I pass the bottles to the box filler. The average employee will pass about 700 bottles in an hour, I average about 1,100. Despite my awful attitude,

my dad did get me the job. The least I can do for him here is to kick ass at what I do. No one I work with has any idea of what the hell I think about. They don't care as long as I work as hard as I do. Everyone has the same expression. The pallid blank stare in everyone's eyes is just a part of the job. My job is simple though. *Pass. Pass. Pass.* I can't believe she loves him. *Pass.* Who the hell is this guy? He manages a Chili's at twenty eight, where is he going in life? *Pass. Pass.* They're probly having sex again, and it is amazing. *Pass pass. Pass.* I do have a full bottle of aspirin, I think that might get rid of me. *Pass.* Forget it, I'd just make this very company more money, they make that stuff in Albuquerque. *Pass. Pass.* What's really BS is when she took him to the Cub's game in the press box. *Pass. Pass.* That was my birthday present, and she took HIM. *PASS PASS PASS PASS PASS PASS.* Check that, think I might become a serial arsonist and target every Chili's nationwide. *Pass. Pass. Pass.* Why do I miss her so much? *Pass.* Things sucked at the end, but they used to be so perfect. *Pass pass.* Her smile lit up the room. She could be life-long friends or mortal enemies with anyone in about four seconds. *Pass.* Her laugh was infectious and wholesome. It didn't happen very often but it spreads like wildfire across a room. *Pass, pass, pass.* Her deep brown eyes could pierce right through anyone from across the room. Typically it was me. *Pass.* What good am I without her? *Pass.* We would connect. We could lock eyes and not look away for hours without saying a word. It was life we shared, pure and warm. *Pass.* Now it's someone elses stare she gets. How could she ruin everything? *Passpasspass.* Shit, I let her go. *Pass, pass, pass pass passpass passpass.* I drove her to this point, and now I'm mad that she got out of the car?. *Pass. Pass. Pass.* I forced the only bit of reality out of my life. *Pass?* What have I done? *Pass.....Pass.....Pass.* Let her go. *Pass.*

My car stereo plays *Pinback*. I call it a day and take my weekend.