

You can't see. You can't hear. You can't speak.

The world is dark and quiet. You have no choice but to feel lost, scared and confused. Your five senses have been stripped.

Everyday tasks are impossible without the luxury of sight, sound, smell, touch, and taste.

In the summer of 2022, I was diagnosed with a rare type of migraine that causes stroke-like symptoms and could potentially kill me.

Hemiplegic migraines cause paralysis on one side of the body along with a migraine headache. It also creates auras, which are changes in vision, speech and sensation. According to the National Library of Medicine, 0.01% of people get hemiplegic migraines and only 0.002% of people get sporadic hemiplegic migraines.

Although I experienced these migraines throughout middle school, the rarity of them led to doctors to chalk it up to dehydration. Since the migraines subsided in high school, it wasn't until this past year that I started taking them seriously.

One July morning, I began to feel the auras instantly. My tongue felt foreign in my mouth and as I rubbed my fingers together, I realized I couldn't feel them. When I opened my eyes, I was hit with a wave of excruciating pain.

It's like a golf ball was lodged in the center of my brain, continuously expanding and trying to break out of my skull. The searing pain behind my eyes felt like someone was trying to rip them out.

I was paralyzed in my bed, unable to get up and unable to call out to my roommate Leah. After a few minutes, I picked up my phone to text her. Through my tunnel vision, I attempted to type in my passcode.

Every number I tried to press, I missed. Simple motor functions were nearly impossible for me at this point.

Forcing myself out of bed, I stumbled toward Leah's room. My body didn't belong to me. It was like I was operating a machine and I hadn't read the manual.

"Leah I need help," I tried to tell her. What came out was complete gibberish. She began to laugh, thinking I was messing around.

I broke down in her room sobbing, trying to get any real word out. I used what little strength I had to . I took a drink and felt it pour out of the side of my mouth.

Every muscle on my right side had stopped working, including in my face. I was trapped inside my body.

Hemiplegic migraines can cause blackouts. The next thing I knew, I was lying in a hospital bed being wheeled into a room to get a CAT scan done.

Leah took me to the emergency room, where they poked and prodded to figure out what was wrong with me. The rest of the day was a blur, which I assume was because of the mixture of the drugs they injected me with and the blackouts caused by the migraine.

For days and sometimes weeks after a migraine, I found myself in a constant state of dissociation. I was a stranger in my own skin. It felt like I was watching someone else's life through my eyes. I suffered from severe anxiety for months.

The doctors eventually referred me to a neurologist, who diagnosed me with sporadic hemiplegic migraines.

My neurologist explained that foods, smells, lights, stress, too little or too much sleep, physical activity and head trauma could cause a migraine. Other times, I might get one for no reason at all. He said these can be

dangerous migraines. They can lead to stroke, coma, memory problems, permanent disability. And death.

Sporadic hemiplegic migraines are just that – sporadic. This means they can happen at any time for any reason. I may have these migraines for the rest of my life or I may never have another one again.

Even after trying multiple different medicines, I was still stuck with these migraines that seemed to control my life.

When I could barely see, I still had to get in my car and drive my 20-minute route to work every other day. I still had to go grocery shopping when I couldn't grip the grocery cart. I still had to fold my laundry when my head felt like a bowling ball.

Some days, I had no choice but to stay home since I couldn't stand. I was forced to call out of work more times than my manager liked, even with a medical diagnosis. I was fired.

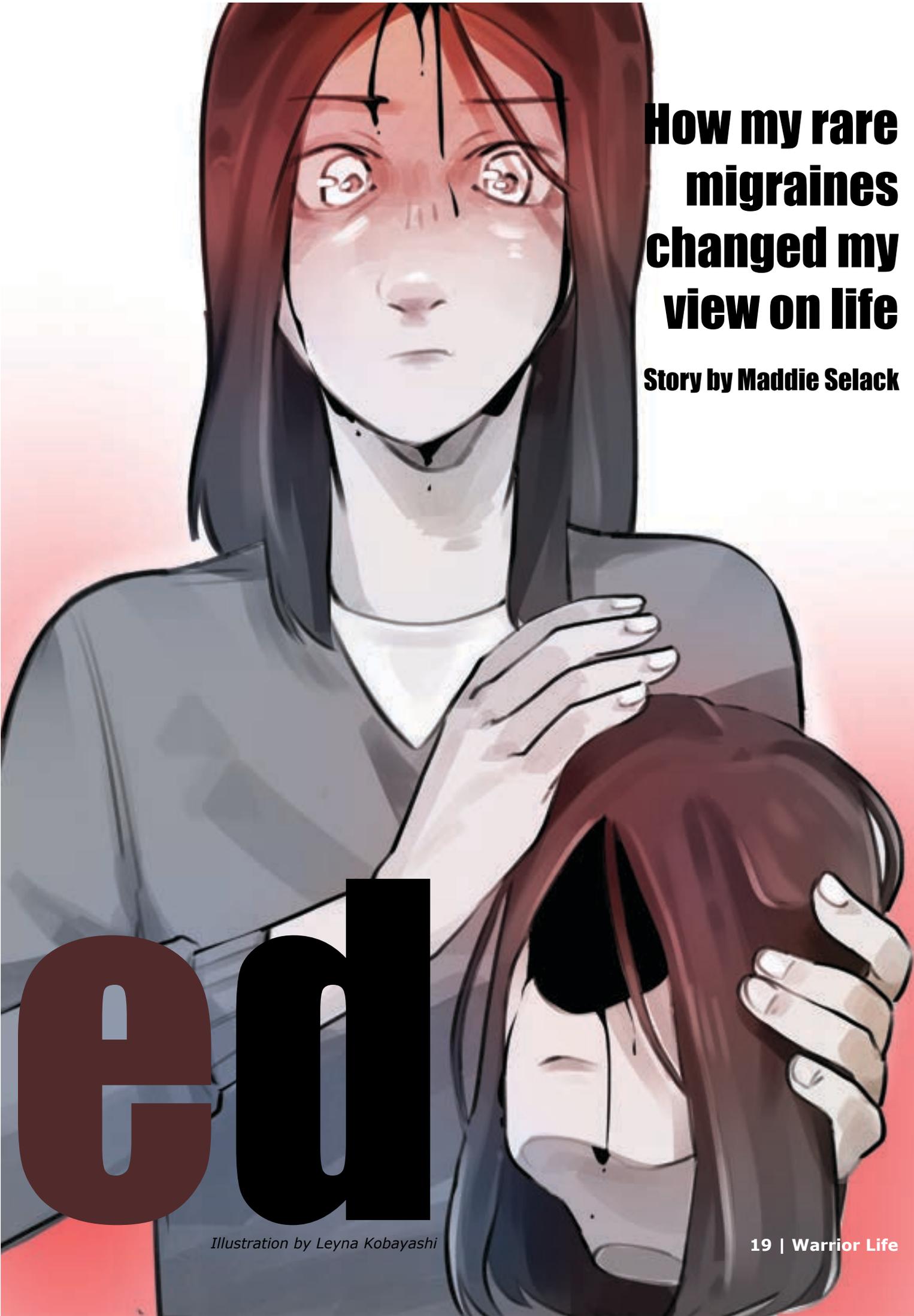
The thought of never knowing if you'll feel normal is depressing. I felt like a helpless, unemployed kid who would never be able to live a fulfilling life.

It wasn't until my dad gave me a different perspective that allowed me to turn my mindset around.

"The pain you're feeling is only fueling your courage," he said. He was right. Even though I was going through something, it helped me realize just what I can endure. If I can handle being fired and losing my senses while still earning A's and B's in college, I'm a lot stronger than I think.

Although I have been migraine-free for almost six months now, I still practice the perseverance that I was forced to learn two summers ago. This way, I know I can handle whatever life decides to throw at me next.

trapped



**How my rare
migraines
changed my
view on life**

Story by Maddie Selack

Head

Illustration by Leyna Kobayashi

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