

The actual you

by [Brian Doyle](#) in the [February 20, 2013](#) issue

What are the things I should know about being homeless
That I would never imagine myself? I ask a girl who was
Homeless from age thirteen to age seventeen. You never
Saw a nicer more pleasant neatly dressed kid in your life,
This kid. The only way you can tell who she used to be is
That she has a bunch of steel teeth. Any hint of difficulty,
She says, you move. Move anyways, on general principle.
Any safe spot you find will eventually be found by others.
As for new friends, trust but verify, as some old president
Said. Learn to lie with a totally straight face. Brush teeth!
I still have trouble not lying immediately and defensively.
That's a problem for me. I got so good at it that it's tough
To not be good at it anymore. The best way to get by is to
Perform, to not be who you really are, so the actual you is
Not in danger. You can shuck the person you perform like
A snake shucks a skin. Teachers here tell me I ought to be
In theater, I should try out for plays and musicals, but that
Is exactly what I am trying not to be, which is good at not
Being the real me anymore. Does this make sense? *You'd
Be a natural*, my teachers say, and I have to laugh because
Natural at not being me is who I don't want to be anymore.