
Social Worker:" Hi! Just letting you know, three doctors will come asking you questions. Just answer them, okay? And there's food on the table — make sure you eat something."

...

Staff took away everything from Tom. All he had were the medical uniforms the hospital provided.

...

Patient:" Fuck this place. Tell the cops I want to get out."

Social Worker:" Shhhh, be quiet. He's sleeping. We'll contact them, okay? Just stay calm for now. You'll get out soon, I promise."

...

Another Patient:" I'm behaving. When can I get out?"

Social Worker:" Soon. The doctor said next week."

Another Patient:" You already told me that last week."

Sounds of things hitting the floor.*

All the staff come out from behind the glass to calm him down.

...

Doctor 1:" Hello Tom. Can you tell me what happened — how you ended up here?"

Tom:" I was walking around... I don't remember."

Doctor 1:" Have you tried to hurt yourself?"

Tom:" I don't know."

Doctor 1:" What happened to your shoulder?"

Tom:" I forgot."

Doctor 1:" Are you hearing any voices?"

Tom:" Yes."

Doctor 1:" Can you tell me what they sound like?"

Tom:" I don't know."

Doctor 1:" Okay. I'll send you back now and let you know the next step."

...

Social Worker:" Wake up — a music performer is visiting."

Kind Guy:" Here's the lyric sheet. You don't have to sing along."

He plays "Treat You Better" on his guitar. No one sings along, but he seems to enjoy it.

...

Social Worker:" Hi. We're moving you to another place. Stay safe, okay? And good luck."

Two people in police uniforms move Tom into an ambulance and chain his feet.

Tom stays quiet the whole time; he doesn't know or care what will happen to him. He just wants a place far from everything.

...

Tom finds his room in the new place. There is only one hallway, and two guards watch each end so no one escapes. All doors are locked, including the bathroom.

Nurse 1:" Hi, I'm your nurse. If you have any questions, just ask. It's almost dinner time, so make sure you eat something. Your social worker will visit you tomorrow."

...

Tom enters the dining area. Many people are already eating. He finds a seat and only finishes his milk. He notices someone talking to the window, he thought the guy is just acting cool, but it turns out the guy is delusional.

Two hours later

Nurse 1:" Wake up, Tom. It's med time. There are also snacks afterward — make sure you eat something."

Tom walks out of his room, takes the meds — he doesn't even know what they are. He then enters the TV room for the first time. He sees the delusional guy yelling "FOOTBA" over and over, a middle-aged man talking to his daughter on the phone, a crazy old woman staring at him, and a bunch of people gathered around a desk playing board games. Tom grabs a coffee, then goes back to his room to sleep.

Next day...

Tom wakes up and goes to the TV room to borrow some books. He picks up *The Golden Ratio* by Mario Livio. He thinks he'll read it but ends up sleeping instead.

...

A middle-aged woman knocks on his door:

Jacky:" Hi, I'm Jacky. I saw you take a book from the TV room. My family sent me some extras — you might be interested."

Jacky hands Tom a Harry Potter book.

Tom:" Thanks."

This is the first time Tom has spoken to someone here.

...

At dinner, Tom sits next to his roommate, an old man. The old man and the middle-aged man across the table seem to know each other.

James:" Hi, I'm James, and I'm an alcoholic."

Tom:" Hi."

James:" I know you're a good guy, unlike some others. Trust me, you'll find out soon."

Tom smiles:" Okay."

Marie:" Hi, I'm Marie. Tell me if someone bullies you."

Tom:" Okay."

...

After taking his meds that night, Tom asks the nurse what they are.

Nurse 1:" Antidepressants."

...

Next day, Tom didn't skip smoke time. He doesn't smoke, but he wants fresh air.

Staff escort them outside to a small fenced playground, nothing on sight, only smell and smoke from cigarettes.

After ten minutes, staff escort them back inside.

He goes back to sleep.

...

Marie knocks on his door:

Marie:" We're having a meeting. Do you want to join?"

Tom walks into the TV room. People are gathered around a table with a form asking about their favorite things. He didn't write anything, but he learns the crazy old woman's name is HuanNi Ta. He prefers calling her Crazy Grandma. She drew her cat.

...

At dinner, Crazy Grandma finds a hair in her food, throws everything on the floor, and storms into the TV room, cursing at the staff.

After dinner, Tom checks on her. She's asleep in a chair. The staff have already sedated her.

...

Revonda calls Tom over:

Revonda:" Hi, I'm Revonda. How old are you?"

Tom:" 18."

Everyone in the room went silent. Someone went down the hallway and yells:" Yo, we got an 18 year old kid"

Revonda:" Omg, how did you get here?"

Tom:" I'm not sure."

Revonda:" If you need anything, just ask me, okay?"

Tom:" Okay."

Revonda:" I have a Master's degree in Education, but I'm here because I needed a place to stay."

James:" I'm here because I'm an alcoholic. I was drinking one day, passed out on the street. Next thing I know, I'm here. My wife divorced me too."

Marie:" I'm an alcoholic too."

Jacky:" I broke someone's car."

...

While waiting for meds:

Middle-aged woman:" Have you ever tried drugs?" She's tweaking.

Tom:" No."

Middle-aged woman:" Good. Listen kid, never, never touch them."

Tom:" Okay."

A few minutes later, she starts moving in a weird, jerky way and yells:" Can you guys stop talking?"

Everyone stops talking for a few seconds, then went back as if nothing happened.

...

Few days later. Tom finds out it's James's daughter's birthday when he hears their phone call.

James:" What are you eating right now?"

"Chicken nuggets?"

"I'll be back soon, I promise."

Someone later warns Tom to stay away from James. Tom didn't say anything.

...

A fight breaks out in the morning. One person is moved to Legacy(the place everyone calls hell).

...

Doctor Khan:" Hi, how have you been?"

Tom:" Good."

Doctor Khan:" That's good. Can you tell me how you ended up here?"

Tom:" No."

Doctor Khan:" You know you can't get out unless I know you won't do something dangerous again, right?"

Tom stays silent.

Doctor Khan:" I'll visit you again. Think about it, okay?"

Tom doesn't want to think about anything. In fact, he's planning to stay here forever since no one knows what he did.

...

Thanksgiving.

Marie and James invited Tom to join the TV room to watch the parade. Everyone gets a special dinner that night.

It's the first time Tom spends time in the TV room with others. No one talks about the parade. Instead, they were all talking about their past.

Crazy Grandma walks in, stops in front of Tom:

Crazy Grandma:" Hehe, what a cute baby boy."

Marie:" Hey, stop calling him that."

Crazy Grandma:" He's eighteen. He is a baby boy to me. You don't mind, right?"

Tom, confused, but still shakes his head.

Crazy Grandma:" See?"

Marie:" Stop calling him that."

Crazy Grandma leaves, mumbling "baby boy."

James:" Trust me, you'll get used to it."

Tom goes back to his room and sleeps.

...

Next morning.

Crazy Grandma:" Good morning, baby boy."

Tom:" Good morning."

...

Tom starts visiting the TV room more often. Mostly to listen. He doesn't understand everything, especially the drug slang, but he isn't there to learn to become a drug lord, but to hear others' stories.

...

A new Turkish patient starts calling him "the Pokémon Trainer." She always pulls the fire alarm at 3 a.m. and tries to escape.

...

Troy is delusional. He has kids. His wife put a restraining order on him. He broke into her house to see his kids and ended up here.

Troy had a fight with his "brother", it didn't end up too well for him. It's the first time Tom has heard the nurse yelling Code White

...

The kind guy from the previous hospital also visited. Turns out Crazy Grandma knows how to play the djembe drum. She teaches Tom, and they play random songs together.

...

There are some real jackasses, too. One guy spits on a nurse and gets moved to Legacy(lol). Another woman shit on the walls and bed. One guy also insults Marie, and for the first time, Tom pointed his middle finger at someone. He almost gets punched in the face.

...

Few days later

Jacky left. She gives Tom her number so he can call her when he gets out.

James also gives Tom his number before moving to rehab. Hopes he's doing well and back with his daughter.

Revonda also got out and starts looking for a new job.

...

Doctor Khan:" Can you tell me what's bothering you?"

Tom:" My grades."

Doctor Khan:" Is it because you didn't do too well in your classes?"

Tom:" Yeah. It was really stressful."

Doctor Khan:" Are you getting over it?"

Tom:" Yes. I think I was just depressed. I'm fine now."

Doctor Khan:" What are you going to do after you get out?"

Tom:" I want to go back to school."

Doctor Khan:" Okay. I'll write you a note. I want you to check in with a therapist or psychiatrist weekly, okay?"

Tom:" Okay."

...

Two years later

"You lied to him."

Tom:" Yeah, I did. And I totally forgot about what he wanted me to do."

"Why?"

Tom:" Because I know what I'm doing. And who I am. And no, I'm not lying, I'm totally alive and kicking."

"How so?"

Tom:" I'm not the only one struggling. There are so many people out there with greater struggles, and they're still laughing and dancing like nothing. I really appreciate this experience."

Tom:" I also made a lot of new friends at the place and school, and they care about me."

"Then why are you talking to me?"

Tom:" Bruh, this isn't something you talk about with friends you just met. They'll find this if they want to."

"Still having stupid thoughts?"

Tom:" Nah. I'm the happiest man alive when I got my milk tea. And it's not like I can just disappear again."

"Why the sudden focus on astronomy?"

Tom:" I'm still a physics major, just leaning more toward astronomy. I feel alone at night sometimes, and the night sky is pretty."

"So you got no rizz?"

Tom:" No rizz. Twenty credits a semester, research, part-time job, chess, fencing, astro club. PURE AURA. I think I'm just tired. I'm the first one to run when someone makes a move. But if Tesla, Curie, or Galileo invited me to dinner, I'd gladly attend."

...

"Can you describe her?"

Lie or truth?

Lie first.

She's prettier than Vega.

And the truth?

She's prettier than the entire cosmos.