

## ROOM

I have left my room for something not required of me twice this week. The first instance was a rare occasion where I built up enough confidence to make my way into the cafeteria and use my meal plan. The second was when I went Doordashing on Sunday and couldn't find the specific hospital my recipient was at because she didn't put in the address correctly and the fact that Minot has literally three hospitals all named the same thing but roads apart.

When I finally got her Arby's to her my hands were frozen and there were tears streaming down my face. She offered me a cigarette, I denied, and she took her food.

Back in my car, I finished out my panic attack and tried to bring life back into my hands. I get back to my dorm and sure enough I managed to drop my student id somewhere downtown and was thus locked out of my dorm. After waiting in the chilly November North Dakota air someone finally comes out and I slip back in.

I have stayed in the small confines of my dorm ever since. I only leave to go to practice and class, but immediately rush back to my depression chamber. There are piles of laundry on my chair and floor, the dishes sitting on top of mini fridge stink with being unwashed...my anxiety won't let me go to the bathroom to clean them unless it is 3am. My TV hasn't been turned off in months; it has been my only friend during my first semester in this hell.

There's signs of being a mess everywhere, but no one ever questions me or asks if I'm alright. I'm very good at pretending.

I'm doing good in track. I have a 4.0. Ashley is smart. Ashley is just quiet.

In reality, Ashley is very very lonely.

And sad. Very sad.

I leave my room for another practice. I actually like practice because when my lungs feel like they are going to explode and my feet burn with effort I can pretend I'm not sad. Also, I often think morbidly, I'd be grateful to have an asthma attack and die on the track.

Double win.

But something is different that day when I get back to my dorm room because for the first time in a long time I am something other than sad: I am mad.

So fucking mad.

Mad at myself for being an antisocial loser weirdo who hasn't made a singular friend in two years. Mad at myself for shuffling back to my room instead of attempting conversation. Mad at myself for being stupid enough to think moving seven hundred miles away would magically cure my neurodivergence. I'm mad for making my grandma cry when I moved away. I'm mad I didn't change my mind and go right back home instead of staying here after seeing my dad sob when he left. I'm mad my friends always need my help, so I can't ask for theirs.

I'm mad.

And more importantly I'm tired.

And with my tiredness, I cry.

I cry and cry and cry. I ball my hand into a fist and do what I do best: Make bad decisions. After beating my own thighs into a mural of blue and purple bruises I pass out with a plan in mind. If I wake up mad, I'm gone.

My eyes open and the rage is still there.

I cram a couple of shirts, my laptop, the current book I'm reading, a notebook, my wallet, and Farty, my best friend who happens to be a stuffed bear, into my duffel bag and don't even bother to lock my door.

My car needs an oil change. I have a couple hundred dollars to my name and a month of a semester left, but I leave. I am one hundred miles outside of Minot before I take time and think. I think about going home. I think about my bed. My house. My friends. My family. I am going home. And even though I am running away, which is not very “responsible twenty year old” of me, I cry with relief.

I drive the twelve hours home straight, only stopping for gas. No one knows I am coming home except for my dad who I texted once I hit Minneapolis eight hours in. Four hours later, I pull into my dad’s driveway and practically sprint from the car. He has COVID at the time but I couldn’t care less. My feet carry my inside and into my dad’s open hug.

He has been worried about me, so he doesn’t question my sudden return or judge me. He’s just glad I didn’t do something more drastic, which I had been thinking about daily. I cry with relief and after our quick reunion I leave to go to my house in town. (My dad moved out when I turned eighteen; after the mess of Stepmom #2, he didn’t want to disrupt my place.) I don’t want COVID from my dad, so I don’t stay long.

The garage creaks open like usual. My dad’s hoarding problem greets me but my car fits. The floor inside is ice cold because my grandma turns off the heat when I am not home. But it’s home. I walk the long hallway and enter the final door on the right. My ceramic cats are where I left them all fifty of them. My K-pop boys are still looking pretty on my walls. My computer waits to be booted up and running Sims. I place Farty on his side of my full bed and climb into mine.

I’ll go back to Minot in January, I tell myself. It will be okay.

But for now I don’t mind staying in this room.