

Visitor

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Please feel free to email me and comment on my story.

Honestly, I'd really love the feedback!

“Allie, you have a visitor.”

They treat me like one of their patients with Dementia. Of course I have a visitor. It’s 5 o’clock and I’m already waiting by the door, just like I have done every day since my best friend left me here two months ago, or at least it feels like it’s been that long. She’s come everyday at five because that’s when visiting hours start. She’s been the only one to visit and I don’t appreciate their reminder.

“Thanks,” I say. The more normally I respond, the faster the doctors will see that I don’t belong here – that I’m not crazy.

She walks in and gives me a hug. “Is it getting any easier for you?” Mandy asks.

“No! It’s just as frustrating. They’re constantly asking irrelevant questions and trying to make a psychological connection between my bulimia and everything that I do. According to them, the reason that I have this problem is because I’m trying to impress *you*, Mandy, not people in general, not boys, just *you*. They think I’m gay, and the fact that you’re my only visitor isn’t exactly helping to prove my case.”

“So what if you were?”

“Exactly! That’s what I mean when I say they always ask me about *irrelevant* things.”

“Now now, Allie, don’t go misconstruing my words to your little friend here,” said Dr. Ramada. He’s always doing that: lurking around corners and jumping into conversations where he’s not wanted. “I have only asked you that once.”

“Directly, yes,” I snap, “but you’ve beat around the bush at least four times and I’m about tired of it.” I knew as the words were coming out of my mouth that this comment alone would cost me at least another full week in here before release due to “unstable behavior.”

“Alright. Well, if you’ll excuse us Mandy, it’s time for my daily evaluation with Allie.”

Mandy leaves. He disregards my comments so quickly every time, I know that it’s not even worth it for me to bother snapping back at him anymore. Unfortunately, at times like these, my emotions seem to get the best of me.

“I really need to talk to you about this diet plan you have going on for me. I looked up the average weight of an 18-year-old 5’4 female and with the track that you have me on now, I will be at least 20 pounds overweight by the time I *graduate* from this program.” I emphasize the word graduate so that he realizes that I’m not taking this seriously. I should be graduating college, not a weight gain program.

“The point of this program is to help you to understand that image does not matter as much as you think it does.”

“I thought the point of this program was to help me learn how to maintain a healthy weight.”

“Yes, that too. But underweight is not healthy, that’s just what society leads you to believe. Remember, Allie? We’ve talked about this.”

“Well, being overweight isn’t healthy either, and it’s not normal. That’s just what the American society leads *you* to believe.” I look directly at his triple chin as I talk to him.

He obviously doesn’t appreciate my sense of humor. Dr. Sensitive gets up and walks away from the conversation. I overhear him whispering to my nurse that my mental stability is digressing. I knew it. Baker-acted for yet another week. I don’t know why they think that I’m trying to kill myself.

* * *

Today, he decides to take a different approach. Today, it's my family's fault that I'm like this. Not Mandy's fault. And surely not the fault of American society.

"Let's talk about your past, Allie. Your family."

"You already know about my past, Dr. Ramada. My mother was an alcoholic, my father was abusive, and their marriage was falling apart."

"Why are you so okay with it?"

"It's all in the past. It's over now. They're better – my parents have dealt with their problems and moved on. Besides, I don't live at home anymore."

"You said that your father was always gone?"

"You make it sound like he left. He's a pilot. Of course he's gone a lot. He was just doing his job, and doing what he thought was right by providing for his family."

"How does this make you feel?"

"I don't blame them. I love my parents very much and if I could ever get out of this God forsaken place I would probably go home for a while to spend time with them and my sister."

He leaves again. He's just so rude. Whenever I don't give him the answer that he wants to hear he just gets up and walks away. He tries to talk to me about "normalcy in society" but last time I checked, walking away without ending the conversation was not normal. It was rude and uncalled for, and it makes him seem as though he is lacking in social skills.

* * *

It is time for my favorite part of the day, the Doctors' meeting. They gather around the big round table, the same one that I'm required to gather around for group therapy sessions. I like to pretend they're the ones with the "mental problems," and I'm responsible for diagnosing and solving their issues. They're about as crazy as some of the patients here. Dr. Ramada specifically

reminds me of my roommate. She's always second-guessing herself; she never knows which personality she is that day – always so confused. Dr. Ramada is very similar. He's always second-guessing his diagnosis as to why I am the way that I am. He likes to pretend that he understands me, but, in all reality, he has no idea why I am this way, and he himself is very confused. The reminder of how complex of a being I am puts a smile on my face – even if I am only complex because of my issue.

I press my ear against the closed door to my room. Little do they know, but I can hear every bit of what they say when they talk about me. “I’ve had a breakthrough with Allie today!” He starts off the meeting with the same sentence every time. I wonder if it’s as annoying to the other doctors as it is to me. Apparently, we have daily breakthroughs. I didn’t even think that was possible. That’s how I know he’s full of shit and not a real doctor. “She has complex feelings toward her father and the way of expressing this is through her weight.” He made it sound as though he was an advocate of Freud’s Oedipus complex. The thought disgusted me and I slightly gagged. It took everything within me to hold it down, because if I didn’t, the doctors would think it had something to do with my bulimia. “She feels as though she can gain his love, approval, and attention if she is more beautiful, which she believes is synonymous with being thin. Her lack of self esteem is derived from her father, yet, she doesn’t realize this, so, she doesn’t resent him for it.”

It took him a full five minutes to explain what I could have said in five words: he thinks I have daddy issues. My bulimia stems from my dad. That’s what he believes. Maybe if I pretend to have an epiphany and reiterate his words, they’ll let me out of here. My heart starts to race. I forget to listen in on their conversation. I pick back up into the conversation and he’s mid-sentence.

“...and she quite possibly may do that as a normal reaction. Thanks for the input. I’ll be sure to add that to her file. Her weight is stable, and she’s finally healthy. Her dopamine levels have also stabilized; so, self-harm is no longer an issue. I think it may be time to release her but first—”

My heart stops. That’s all I hear. Three weeks of this. Finally done. Over with. It’s hard to think that I’m actually going home, getting out of here. This stupid doctor who knows nothing is finally letting me out from his grip.

The Doctor continued, but I turn around to look at my clothes strewn across my bed and begin packing. I focus on the possibility of leaving becoming a reality and completely tune out his words. “But, first, I think we need to find a way to address the underlying issues she has with her father. Her father was physically abusive to her and her mother when she was younger. Also, her mother was an alcoholic, so we need to be mindful of those tendencies in her. Honestly, the best thing I think we can do at the moment is refer her to a psychologist and have her attend family therapy sessions.”

* * *

5 p.m. Monday evening:

I have everything packed and it’s all sitting neatly by the door. I stare blankly at the white walls for what I think will be the last time even though my heart is racing out of my chest. The walls are only a constant reminder of how the doctors think of me as a crazy person. I’m not allowed to decorate. I’ve asked them before why I couldn’t, but they never got back to me with an answer. Not like it matters anymore since I’m getting out of here today. Where the hell is Mandy? The one day that she is going to be allowed to check me out of this place and she’s late? Seriously?

I think back to the only other time that Mandy was late visiting.

“Dude! What the hell took you so long?” I asked.

“Allie, you don’t even know how crazy these people think you are. I swear they’re the crazy ones.”

“What are you talking about?”

“I brought you a sub from Publix. But apparently I’m stupid for even thinking that I could bring it in to you in a Publix bag. Evidently, you could attempt suicide with this. They asked if I was trying to endorse self-harm.”

“Wow. I’m not a mental patient. And more so, I’m not suicidal. Really, I don’t know why they think that.”

“Wait, it gets better. I brought you a pair of clean shorts. But they were drawstring, so they said you couldn’t have those either. But listen, here’s where it gets good.”

“Oh, no. Mandy, don’t tell me you did something you’ll regret.”

“What? Oh, come on. They need to hear it from someone that they’re full of shit. Anyway, I pulled out a pair of pajama pants and they said that I could take those to you because they didn’t have strings. So, I took the legs of the pants and tied them around my neck and pretended to choke myself out. You should have seen the looks on their faces, Allie!”

I sat stunned. Not knowing how to respond. I was so afraid they were never going to let her come back. I wondered how could she pull a stunt like this. She knew how much it meant to me that she visited every day. It was the only thing keeping me sane. Without her here, I may actually have tried something like that. Then I realized how crazy the idea was. I was overreacting. Everything would be fine and they would let her come back. I joined in with Mandy and bust out laughing.

“Allie, you have a visitor.” I snap back into reality as the nurse reminds me for the thousandth time. I notice a girl standing behind her was wearing a hospital gown that had drawstrings in the front.

“What the hell. How come she gets to wear drawstrings? Who the hell is she, and why is she so special?”

The nurse paid no attention to my outburst, “Allie, you have a visitor.”

Right, focus. That’s the only thing that matters. Mandy is here to take me home.

I start walking out to the hall talking loudly to make sure she can hear me coming.

“Mandy, you’re late! What took you so –”

My parents. Standing in front of me are my parents. Not Mandy. I try to hide the tears forming in my eyes but I know it’s too late. They know I’m not happy to see them. The reactions on their faces tell me that this wasn’t the reaction they were looking for from me. I don’t even care. Their feelings are the last of my worries right now. I turn and run to my room, gasping for air, because now I am fully and uncontrollably crying and I don’t care who sees. I sit on my bed, stare at the white walls, and figure out exactly what is going on. I know what they’ve done to me. I know what this means. This means I’m not going home. This means I’m still stuck here, alone, with just these white walls keeping me full of anxiety.

A few minutes later Mandy slams open the door to my room. “What in the hell is wrong with you?”

I sit straight up on my bed, confused. “What are you doing here?”

“Sorry, I’m a little late today. But, holy crap, man. I always show up, don’t I? Way to overreact.”

“It’s just that you’re the only one who’s been here for me every single day. I thought that they made you stop coming or something.”

“Allie, you know they couldn’t stop me if they tried. Your parents are out there waiting for you, too.”

“I know. I don’t want to see them. I’ve been in here for what feels like forever and they didn’t even try to visit me before. They only came running when the doctors called.”

“Allie, I love you, but you’re being irrational. The only thing that matters is that they are here now, and they want to help you because they love you. There’s no doubt in my mind about that one.”

The nurse taps on my door. “Listen, sweetie, I wasn’t trying to invade or anything, I just happened to overhear your friend talking. She’s right, you know. They really do love you. Now, I’m not going to make you go out there, and I can send them away if that what you *really* want. I’m just encouraging you to maybe take a step back from the situation and realize that all they want to do is help you. I think it’s a really good thing that they’re finally here. You should really take advantage of that.”

I blow my nose and it came out obnoxiously loud. I automatically feel my face flush and feel embarrassed. I was about to say something when Mandy cut me off. “Come on, Allie. I know you’re good at holding grudges but now is not the time and you know it. I just want what’s best for you.”

I say the first thing that comes to mind. “But there are so many things that could go wrong.”

The nurse jumps in again. “But there are also so many things that could go right, Allie. It’s your decision but I really urge you to think about it carefully. Want me to come back in a few minutes to check again?”

I stare into her eyes for two seconds and a million thoughts fly through my mind. The sincerity in her voice is so refreshing. Someone who actually cares about me, yet also respects me enough to make my own decision. She seems so wise. So, if she thinks this will be the best idea, I guess I can trust her on this one. “No,” I say, “I think I’m ready to go out there and talk to them now. Thanks for eavesdropping, your input really helped.” I could tell by the smile on her face and her lack of defensive words that she understood my humor and didn’t mean anything by it.

I walk hesitantly out to the common area. Strangely, it was cleared out. It felt so big with so few people in it. It was like everyone knew I needed the space. I finally begin to feel some respect around here. Sitting on the couch were my parents, my doctor, my nurse, and Mandy, who was by my side, as usual.

Dr. Ramada begins the conversation insensitively, as usual. “Mandy, since you’re not exactly part of the immediate family, I’m going to have to ask you to leave.”

I laugh. “No, she’ll be staying.” I hold tightly onto her arm to let him know that I mean what I said.

“Fine. Let’s begin,” Dr. Ramada flips open my file and addresses my parents formally, “Mr. and Mrs. Bartmess, I know I’ve already filled you in on all the details, but I’d like to just quickly recap. Allie Bartmess is to be released today under the conditions that she will live with the two of you for a minimum of two months to ensure that she does not regress, and the three of

you will attend bi-weekly family counseling sessions, also for two months minimum. Does this sound reasonable, Allie?”

His sarcastic tone pisses me off, but I’ll say anything to get out of this place already. Mandy squeezes my hand as though she knows I’m raging inside. It calms me down and brings me back to reality. “Yes, of course.” I say smoothly.

“Good,” he continues, which is such a shame because I really thought he was done. “I feel as though it is implied that you should maintain the same eating habits and schedule that we have created for you here, at least until you are confident enough in yourself about your disorder.”

“You said it yourself, Dr. Ramada, I’m getting better. Mostly thanks to *my nurse* who created my awesome eating plan. Thank you again, Nurse Sonya, I really appreciate all of your hard work and patience with me. I promise on staying on-track with this course and call you to let you know when I really believe that I’m fully recovered.” I really wanted to emphasize that *he* had nothing to do with my progress. She smiled.

Mandy turned to my parents and asked, “Can I come stay with you? I just really want to be there every step of the way for Allie, and then we can both come back up together in the fall again for school.”

My parents agree and I am more than overjoyed. She has been my saving grace. What would I have done without her? I say a quick prayer to thank Him for putting such a great friend in my life when there was no one else. She was the only visitor I needed.

Dr. Ramada quickly pulled out a piece of paper from under my file. “Allie, before you go, I have something for you.” He seemed genuinely excited. “It’s a print out of a bunch of successful people that also dealt with disorders. You can do it, Allie.”

The first three names on the paper were Sylvia Plath, Edgar Allen Poe, and Amy Winehouse. I couldn't help myself. I knew he was so proud of himself for this list, and he was probably just trying to help, but I bust out laughing. I hand the list to Mandy and she instantly realizes why I'm laughing and joins in with me.

Dr. Ramada looks confused, so I explain to him why I'm laughing. "Dr. Ramada, I really appreciate this, but you do realize that the top three people on here committed suicide, right?"

His face flushed, either from embarrassment or anger that I noticed and he didn't. All I know is that this just reminds me of how excited I am to go home and get out of this place. I walk out holding Mandy's hand in one hand and my mother's in the other. My dad walks beside her. This time things will be different.