

I LOST IT

"My sanity is the passport that I show at the interface of every human boundary. It is what permits me to stay here on earth. Without a human in the room, I freely move about in my alien ways."

The Myth of Sanity, From the Darkest Parts of My Ocean// Personal Journal Entry 03/21

Finally. Today was the day I ultimately broke out of this wretched cage, taking flight from the domesticated enclosure I called my bedroom. I found my very own escape hatch from the internal turmoil and self-torture, accessible to me only because I was labelled "resistive" in conversation for shooting down her questions. She couldn't see it on from the other side of the screen of our telehealth counselling zoom call, but my hands were trembling again. There was nothing else I could do but allow my mind to surrender to the frequencies of sweet Indica that flowed through my warm blood and submit to her request to admit me into the laughing academy. This was supposed to be just another Monday of spitting a series of half-truths to the school counsellor. She was only to warrant a rotor check-off from her survey and list a few pragmatic ways to make me feel better today. I was to do nothing more than inform her that things weren't improving but I was willing to let them. I was not to dismiss her suggestions, shrug my shoulders nor stare off at the wall for so long. Her concern levels were my responsibility to keep in a reasonable range of comfort... or else she would bolt in, with all the guns blazing, and ram down my apartment door with police officers and ambulances and trusted faculty who had no choice but to snatch me from my room.

I can't tell you explicitly where or when, if it was here or in the hospital, but all I know is... I lost it somewhere in between. When they came to grab my body that day, fragments of myself were left behind. I was never quite sure if this was a rescue mission or a robbery, for as the days went by I kept misplacing bits and pieces, whether by accident or by force. They were on their way, rushing in to rescue me from my own carnivorous mind. As a restless prisoner, I frantically paced my cage. I could feel the walls wiggling around like gelatin. *Relax, it's just twenty-four hours.* It was impossible to sit still. I anxiously threw everything in my knapsack, everything I could think of, everything the counsellor said I should pack. Overnight clothes. Toothbrush. Masks. Laptop. Phone. Underwear and socks. ***I lost my socks.*** I could not find them anywhere, the soft, fuzzy pink ones with the jagged tear in the right heels. I needed these socks. I presumed the hospital grounds would be unnaturally cold and laced with germs, blood, and detergent, so I had to prepare my virgin feet for those ungodly floors. I was sure I had them somewhere. I didn't feel brave enough to face the night without them. Twenty-four hours outside my apartment was no easy feat. It took courage, preparation, an overly eager therapist and... socks.

"Do you want to tell us what's happening with you?" the officer asked.

Guns weren't blazing yet, but they were there, nestled in the holsters of these trigger-happy campus police. Now all I needed to do was to prove why this charade of blue and red lights, the oversized ambulance and this uniformed paramedic inquisitively staring me down, was all absolutely necessary. They were eagerly waiting to hear me say the code word. *Suicidal*. The four officers leaned closer, towering over me, as I struggled to find the right words but I may have misplaced them under my breath. *Help*. I was too afraid to whisper it. *Help*. They had me cornered like a tranquilized animal. I stood as still as humanly possible. I felt their bullet proof vests pressed against my body. *Don't panic*. Bystanders were staring now. My chest was swelling with apprehension for what might happen next. The campus advisor saw the trepidation in my eyes. He paused just before returning to his car, thoroughly searching my face for reassurance that I felt safe enough to be trusted in their care. He sternly cautioned them to take it easy on me as this was all very new. The tears brimmed in the corner of my eyes, as I watched the closest thing I had to a father figure stand dripping in nothing but fear on the outskirts of the turmoil. As he rolled his car away, we exchanged soft goodbyes. *Help*. The words were lost inside my throat. I lost it. **I lost my voice.**

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I was captured. Trapped inside a metal tin. They seized my arms and stole the quantities of my temperature and blood pressure for what seemed like countless times as if the numbers weren't adding up. Maybe I was just paranoid, but something was off. My irregular heartbeat. My upside-down mind. The chill in my blood. All the THC in my system. Something was off. My scrawny limp body jolted all around the moving stretcher like a rag doll. My brain sank under the waves of mania, aimlessly swimming through the dampened flow of thoughtlessness. It was getting louder inside my head. I forgot the ER specialist's name, but I remember his small talk feeling noticeably like flirting. I remember grinning, or maybe giggling at his funny little questions, like "what's your home address?" or "are you on any medication?". I don't recall answering because I was too busy listening to the music crescendos going off in my head. *Quiet now... Concert No. 1 is playing in D major. Wait. Were my socks under my bed?*

The emergency room was expectedly chaotic, but in an unusual way. Everything around felt lopsided and slanted. The strip of white and grey hallway was now repurposed as a waiting room for COVID positive patients to check in. A makeshift front desk stood abruptly off to the side with a glass screen swinging from the ceiling. Nurses bustled around from room to room moving patients in and out of the waiting room. The swished by with wheelchairs, masks, gloves, and tubes of blood. Registration was simple. *What's my date of birth again?* The

receptionist only seemed interested in my medications and allergies before branding me with a fine-printed bar code wristband spelling out my name. I told them I was an RIT student which meant she quickly glossed over my emergency contact details and assumed I was here for observation in the psych ward only because stress was inherent to women in STEM. I anticipated my own bed waiting for me behind a curtain so I could lounge around under thick, warm blankets and stare at the ceiling until my mind allowed me to fall asleep. My escape pod should have been waiting for me on the other side of the door.

I waited for one of the nurses, but instead the officer came forward, slipped on his gloves, and asked me to stand to my feet. He commanded me to put all my belongings in the pink oversized, plastic bag opened in his hand and to wait for someone to escort me upstairs. *Wait, what's going on? I thought I could keep my stuff. Where are they going with my laptop? My phone too?* No, wait! Another pair of hands patted along my hips as I watched the other officer glide off with all my belongings I packed. Panic sent me into a frenzy. I lost it. ***I lost the tie strings of my pants.*** I watched in horror as he sawed off the sparkly, dangling strings from the cozy pajamas I had been wearing for the past four days. My pajamas would forever remain butchered. My eyes dodged frantically around the room in embarrassment in hopes that no one saw how violated I felt or took note of my pants waist now revealing my briefs.

I restlessly waited downstairs, holding my uneven breath. I gently rocked back and forth to sooth myself. Bach was still playing. Prelude No. 22 B flat minor. Across the hall, an elderly inpatient in her wheelchair cackled on the top of her lungs. I wondered if she heard the jokes too. She started telling everyone how much I reminded her of a beautiful butterfly. Laughing. Her off-tempo outbursts irritated the nurses. "What are you looking at!" she yelled at them. I refused to make eye contact, staring deep into the palm of my hands. I began to hide inside. Her voice, no matter how loud, gradually faded in the distance as I withdrew into myself. Everything felt so far away. Everything was trembling. My hands. My heart. My thoughts. I was shaken with fear for what awaited me on the other side of this elevator. Eventually, the officer escorted me to the 7th floor. My life moved from one hand to the next. He left me in the custody of one of the psych wards nurses who welcomed me inside. I gazed out to the expansive open space filled with chairs and benches, arranged like the waiting room of a dentist's office. Surely this was not all of it. Everything in here was porcelain and wood. Breakable. Empty. Hollow. It Lacked any kind character and would drive any one insane with its lack of interest. It was an odd sort of soul staring contest. I simply stood there, underwhelmed, and deflated. This was worse than my bedroom. On the bright side, at least my toes were shielded with these dingy, reused hospital socks. I tiptoed across the halls into a private room to discuss with the floor nurse my reasons for wandering into yet another cage.

"What is today's date?" the nurse asked.

Was that a trick question? I thought it was a test or maybe another joke. *What even is today?* She looked down at me from across her desk on wheels. The drowsiness was slowly creeping in. My eyes felt heavier. She spoke so slowly, all her words bled into one another. Wait, it's the weed again. I fumbled for the words, but still managed to explain how I'm endlessly contemplating killing myself. She needed me to distinguish how and where. Well, of course, back in my favorite cage, the bathroom, laid down in lukewarm water, in the tub using the razor blade I stole from the very same neighbor who rubbed his genitals all over me last week without my consent. She made notes. Her brows knitted together, but a conflicting smile spread across her face. I made her uncomfortable. She quickly hurried the conversation along and explained the procedural changes of the hospital due to a pandemic then invited me to sit outside in the common area with everyone else.

"Any questions?"

Yes. *Where is my escape hatch?* Why can't I stay in here in this private room by myself? I piped up to express my discontent. I was under the impression that I would have my own bed and be in my own room, with all my belongings, and my own damn socks! She gazed at me with indifference and calmly informed me that these rooms were for the more, how do you say, 'volatile' patients; the ones who couldn't keep it together long enough to share the same breathing space as me. These rooms are for the disturbing ones, not for the disturbed. Not for people like me, a sweet college girl, mildly stressed out by her course work and project due dates. She thought I didn't belong here but what she did not see was the suffocated foreigner, struggling to breathe in a predominantly white educational institution. She didn't see my compulsion to throw myself into the wall nor my fixation with breaking open my own head. Is there anything more volatile than feeling terrorized in your own mind? Is there anything more volatile than someone waiting for the precarious moment to die?

Yet here I was sitting in the cesspool of unmasked mental disorders; from a hand select of loosely chaotic minds. I tried to find the best position to sit amongst the rest. Six feet was not far enough. I crept into the smaller section; the area with the TV hung up in the grilled box. I sat with my back tucked tightly between the corner by the door, so I could surveille everyone passing in and out of the space. All I had to do now was wait for my case number to speak with a social worker and then be scrutinized by a psychologist to get an elaborate doctor's note for why I was failing every single class this semester. *Twenty-four hours, that's all.* Medical grad students moved in and out, cold and calculated, like well-fed bull sharks. The dead stares and clipboards glided through the rooms, unwilling to engage the mentally ill. The infrequent courtesy smiles came with the offer for animal crackers, milk or blankets. By then, I was sure I was caught inside the plot of a poorly written Lifetime movie, debating whether I was the main character. As I observed everyone purposefully orbiting around, I was convinced we were all

doing retakes of the same uninteresting scene. Items in proximity began to feel like theatre props: the shape shifting couch with the man in his tightly wrapped gown and his whole face shielded by his mask; the old, rusting payphone on other side of the stripping yellow wall; the heart monitor machine trailing behind the pregnant woman; the dried vomit stains in the passageway, all key elements to the set design of the classic American psych ward. None of this was real. Not even clocks on the wall could be trusted. The hour and minute hands froze at ten. This was only an inconsequential dream. I stopped ticking. I stopped breathing. My inner metronome broke down and I could no longer keep count. I lost it. *I lost my sense of time.*

I believe they call this dissociation.

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"I WANT MY MOMMY!"

"I WANT MY MOMMY!"

"I WANT MY MOMMY!"

The frequencies of insanity exponentially swelled. The shrieks reverberated from behind the glass door. I felt it in my stomach. *Same, kid. Same.* I don't know what it is about marijuana that makes me sensitive to energies, but as other patients filed in one by one, perching on the furniture, I felt the air coagulate with strange tensions. In dissociative states, I have a tendency to attune to the frequency of everything around me. The space steadily became crowded. I braced myself for the rising tide of instability circling through the air. We were all young, at least in our faces. Our brains were probably recklessly tattered and shriveled. "Get me the fuck out here!" she belted. "You do heroin *one time*, and they think they can just lock you up in here!" She was the youngest of us. I pitted her. Brutally scratching the palms her hands and frantically running her fingers through her hair. Nobody flinched. She repeatedly stormed off to snatch up the pay phone, calling for her relatives to come get her out. Indifference seemed to be on the other side of every call. The more she called and the more they refused, the more boisterous she became. Withdrawal was eating her alive. I felt it from her dilated sage green eyes and flushed white cheeks. She was inconsolable hollering for more heroin; making empty threats to bash someone's face in if they didn't let her out of her cage. They subdued her with a nicotine patch and some milk and cereal. She tried a few times to pull me into her overdramatized scenes, turning towards me to ask me when she was going to see the psychologist, but I was a prop in her story now, remaining as still as physically possible. Though, my eyes gave me away as they swirled around in my head slowly but quietly shutting down. I couldn't hold the posture anymore. The other side of this dream lay ahead.

The exhaustion gnawed at me but I didn't know where to put my head. After baking in the endless chorus of children screaming, cooing and crying on the other side of the hall, I needed a way to drown it out. Sleep was catcalling me. *Wait, where is my wrist band? It was right here a moment ago.* I only slipped it off for a brief second. I glanced across the room to see her toying with it. She squeezed the band between her thighs- the bipolar patient- with raggedy curly hair and wet eyes; the one who couldn't stop herself from crying for the third time tonight. I locked eyes with her. She played with the plastic band and stared eerily through me. I heard giggling coming from inside the nearest cubicle room. I peeled my heavy eyes away from her to see blonde, shaggy hair flopping over a ghostly meager face. For a moment, it looked like a floating black t-shirt casually swaying behind the door to a private room, but then he pressed his face against the square peep window and torted grinning at only God knows what. The door was slightly ajar. One of the disturbances was free. Now I would never sleep. I slept lightly with my ears open and my mind broken in two. I waited anxiously for my call, eavesdropping on the motivational speech from the 30-year-old ginger. His soapbox message entitled "Don't do crack, kids". He lectured us on how not to end up like him, monologuing on how many times he had been in and out of these walls in the past decade.

The bipolar girl forcefully grabbed one of nurse's arms, commanding her to bring the rest of her belongings. "I need to get in my car!" She desperately searched her handbag for her keys. She has no car. She glared at me again, looked down at the wristband now resting on the chair between us. She stormed over and snatched it and quickly shoved it in her bag. There it goes. I lost it. **I lost my wristband.** I wondered if she thought they were keys. Although I was miffed, I could not speak. I could not respond. I was becoming a deformed stone, still and numb. My reactions were delayed. My face became like a flint. I was so tired. I was so sick of sitting upright, fruitlessly fighting off the beckoning of dreamland. I was so worn out from fighting to stay awake. I was tired of being unable to escape. I was so tired of being stolen. I was so incredibly tired of being lost. I was tired of being alive

My life is a thief.

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Wait, is that guy seizing? Is he okay? Am I the only one seeing this? This dream is getting outrageous. The chatter dies down, as sleep sweeps over everyone. It is quiet, but not silent. The chair dribbles against the tiled floors. He's having a seizure! Wake him up. Somebody, please. I can't move. No, wait! It's not real. Go back to sleep. Immediately, he bolted straight up on his scrawny bowlegs, wobbling aimlessly around the lounge chair. There was the tide. Before anyone caught on to what was happening, swashes of spit and mucus went flying across the

room. He yanked his head back again and flashed his neck to spit in the face of crackhead preacher.

Without a second thought, the preacher kicked him the stomach, sending him stumbling back. He recoiled, aiming again. He aggressively spat in the hair of the 17-year-old failing to shake her withdrawal. Ear-splitting screams lifted the hairs on my neck. The preacher yanked him by the shirt and pulled him away from her. He dead locked his dreary eyes with mine. I was running away from him into the other room, but only in my mind. The commotion stirred slowly, almost in black and white. The by-standing nurse, unaware of the uproar, tried trotting through the scuffle but blocked the spit take meant for me. Astonished as she was, she held her composure and grabbed the patient by the wrist. In her most authoritative voice, she scowled at him like any mother would. "No! We do not do that here!" She pressed an alarm chain dangling from her neck and angrily glared at him in disapproval. Before he regained his balance, two officers swiftly came from the front desk and pinned him down to the chair. He hollered, grunted, and kicked at the nurse. They dragged him away by the neck. I froze. Wiping the slobber off her face, she asked everyone if they were okay. The petite woman tried her best to conceal her annoyance, then stormed her way to the nearest bathroom. Everyone stood to their feet, following behind the police, as if the director yelled, "Cut."

I was left there. Petrified. Stuck inside my body. Only a prop.

Don't move. Don't move. Don't move. Keep still.
Don't move. Don't move. It's all a part of the scene...

I lost it. I lost my ability to respond.

FINAL REVISION STATEMENT:

This was probably the most difficult essay I have ever written. I was inspired by the storytelling format of "Fourth State of Matter" when I started writing this piece. I loved the way that essay was crafted. I particularly sought to mimic its foreshadowing skills in this essay. The challenge of writing about a traumatic event is memory. Writing about mental illness and trying to simulate that state of mind was hard too. I focused mostly on reformatting the structure of story to display more the forecasting features. From the feedback I received, I sought to hone on the power of inner dialogue. I played around with things I said and felt and heard in head at the time. This was the first time I would take on this task and I am satisfied with the way the experiment turned out. It was challenging trying to piece together a fragmented story that did not necessarily register to me in a linear timeline, and I wanted to highlight that in this rewrite using repetition, the inner monologue and broken visual scenes. During the events, my mind kept flitting back and forth between past and present and I felt that the first draft didn't highlight that very well. I was also unsure of how a central "I" would work since I was trying to showcase how dissociative states sometimes make you a passenger on the ride to everyone else's story.

The biggest challenge of this essay however is that even now it is unfinished. I had to find a convenient place to cut the story short which was at the end of a crescendo, but the truth is I was actually admitted for 7 days, and I lost much more than the things I mentioned in this essay. In my initial outline, I wanted to talk about the entire week. I think you asked me a question in your feedback if this was all that had been lost and the correct answer is no., I intended to write about the whole time I was there which progressive got worse as I lost: access to my phone, my hair band, my mind and lastly, my will to live.

FINAL WRITER'S STATEMENT:

I think my progression in this class is kind of ironic. I came into Creative Writing Non-Fiction with the objective to write out the pains I had been accumulating in me while I lived on campus. I was excited to write my story in full and bleed on paper, but I underestimated the energy it takes to pluck up out of the dark abyss all that hurt inside. I have been personally trying to make meaning of own my mind, will and emotions to empathize with myself, as a way to claim or discover some deeper strength to endure the agony of living with a mind that wants to devour itself. Throughout the free writes, I question whether this was ever the right time to talk about assault, or abuse or infirmity or anything else that we generally hate talking about. Even though I didn't share very often, there were some breakthrough moments where I felt like I understood my inner world a little more and that was a greater victory for me. The day in class when we were to write our 6 word essay and I wrote: "buried alive under my alter ego" was a moment of clarity for me.

From all the essays I've written, I can see the clear threads of survivorship. I could see a person fighting to keep her head above water, whether through crayons or by nature, I wanted to live. As I wrote the essay of place, it was revealed that last year when I was on my leave of absence, as much it never felt like it, I was doing things to heal and reclaim myself. These essays truly exposing me to myself in a way

that I have never experienced before. They made me question my own truths and made me realize that I can hold polarized truths inside. As much, I did not perform the way I envisioned this semester and missed out on the sweet comradery of community from fellow writers, I loved the essays I wrote, and even the ones I couldn't. They were truth telling. My writing skills have transformed, and I learned the power of articulating my own story to an audience (even if just one). I have been naked for most of these writes, but unashamed to be seen by you.