

Waking up in the hospital is like getting punched in the face twice. The first violation is the realization that you're definitely not where you're supposed to be and the second is the absolutely vile decor. I've been here long enough to wrestle with those facts, but it never gets easier. When I finally do open my eyes, the fluorescent lighting is offensive, and the stark white walls are so white they look almost yellow. I'm in a room the size of a holding cell, and when I try and scratch the itch of matted extensions on the back of my head, I realize my arms are wrapped tightly behind my back.

Welcome to isolation. It's my second time here this week, and if I'm honest, I don't even remember getting the injection that knocked me out. The dull, throbbing pain in my left ass-cheek, however, tells a different story.

In isolation there's not much to do except sit up, look dumb, and occasionally gaze out of the tiny glass window and into the main hall. Luckily, that's precisely what I plan to do—sit in a straight-jacket and peer through my very own looking glass. Occasionally someone will even look back in at me and remind me I'm still alive. I look around as if to say, 'where else would I be?' The deafening silence of this soundproof room could only exist in waking life and for a moment I think, hell, I'd rather be dead. At least purgatory has music.

On my walk to group therapy, everyone can see me limping. The other patients extend apologetic glances and nods as if to inquire, 'Booty juice?' I nod solemnly in return. Booty juice.

Group therapy is pretty much a hoax. We go around in a circle, the newbies talk about what led them here and the oldies lie through their teeth, pretending they're doing so much better. When the circle jerk of sob stories and unconvincing victories grinds to a halt, I look up to find everyone staring at me. I'm still in my straight-jacket, which leaves me zero room to portray myself as someone recovering from a recent drug-induced-psychosis-induced-suicide-attempt. The alternative to lying through my teeth is that I tell the truth. Unlike most of the other patients here, telling the truth usually gets me more attention than I'm in the mood for.

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When Ryan picks me up in his Audi A5 coupe from my mom's apartment in the flats he's still wearing his preppy school attire—a Ralph Lauren polo shirt

and khakis. I'm wearing an all-white outfit: white tennis skirt, white tank top, and white Converse that have just gotten a nasty scuff mark from climbing out of my bedroom window moments earlier.

“Get in loser, we're taking ‘shrooms,” he says mischievously. When I open the passenger door a plume of cigarette and weed smoke pours out. He lights my cigarette and tears down Oakhurst Drive towards Sunset. We're headed to Atticus' dad's house in Benedict Canyon, the one with the glass elevator. Bridget will be there too, and although I've never taken mushrooms before I don't say anything. I tell myself that even though they're seniors and I'm a sophomore, it doesn't matter. The older kids are cool, I tell myself. The older kids have better drugs.

Ryan starts talking about how Bridget just got on the pill and how it's affecting their sex life. He's speeding up North Beverly Glen now, and he's laughing. His perfectly manicured hand loosely holds the steering wheel as we carelessly hug the curves that twist and turn up Benedict Canyon.

He's expecting me to say something but all I can think about is how right now my mom is lying alone in her dark, stuffy room with the curtains drawn. Her skin is a sickly grey and there's that hole underneath her left collarbone where the chemotherapy streams into her body. Her lips are chapped and I can't remember if I refilled the jug of water that she keeps by the bed.

“Dude, are you even listening?” he asks me. I blink a couple times.

“Just go down on her longer,” I say without taking my eyes off the road.

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I decide to take my chances and go with a half-truth.

A half-truth is better than a lie.

“My mom is probably gonna die and I don't really know how to handle it,” I say weakly to the expectant faces. They look confused, or—worse, unsatisfied—like that's not a good enough reason to get 5150'd and placed on an involuntary hold in UCLA's acute psychiatric ward.

I wince as I remember my face being shoved violently on the pavement. The Beverly Hills Police Department spared no pleasantries when they handcuffed my already bleeding wrists. To be fair, I hadn't made it easy for them. Or my mother. Or myself.

Attempting to avoid spilling my life story with these sad, sappy strangers, I try to imagine a direct route that would lead them down a path of immediate understanding. Only there isn't a path of immediate understanding because the way there is littered with the nonsensical roads signs of madness like stop: roadblocks ahead.

I can tell my silence is beginning to make us all uncomfortable.

They want to know what could possibly possess me to come home from a beautiful psilocybin trip and attempt to take my own life. It looks like I'm forced to reveal my latest diagnosis.

"I'm bi-polar as shit," I say and watch the room relax.

"Language!" says the nurse.

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Halfway into the trip, Bridget starts crying, because I have some super-talent for getting people to open up to me. Ryan looks first at me, then at her, and slowly backs himself out of the pool-house. Atticus is MIA, which isn't surprising. It's his house and he's probably upstairs masturbating.

"What's wrong?" I ask Bridget, watching the tiles on the floor as they begin to form various patterns. It looks like they're mimicking mitosis. Actually, it seems like they've discovered sentience and have begun assimilating into organized societal roles. Within each tile the tiny green flecks are moving horizontally while the blue are trotting along vertically. Orange, ever the rebel, follows a cyclical motion around itself and forms the Ouroboros.

It doesn't matter what Bridget says because I can't remember. Or maybe I can't remember because it doesn't matter. Either way, she's sobbing into my shoulder, and I'm nodding as the world around me keeps breaking itself off into smaller and smaller chunks. For once, I can see the purported order

of the universe. Only here, for the briefest of moments, order trumps chaos, and I find that I'm not the one crying.

When I finally get back home, I'm in a daze similar to that of post-coital, or prenatal, bliss. I don't remember what it's like to exist outside of this space of an unborn until I open the apartment door to see my mother. Her face is as white as a sheet—which is particularly frightening because we're black. She doesn't have to say anything for me to understand. She's livid and I guess I still look high because the interrogation begins.

“Are you high?”

“No.”

“Look at me.”

I look at her as fiercely as I can, focusing my eyes with the sharpness of a lightsaber. Her black eyes burrow themselves into mine, and a spark of recognition appears in their otherwise hollow sockets. As she bursts into tears, I lose my temper. My breathing turns both frenetic and frantic. Every moment of bliss is killed continuously by Death's impending visit, every joyous moment polarized into something negative. I just want one day where I don't have to think about who's going to pay the bills or what's going to happen to me when she's gone.

I begin to contemplate the plausibility of a malevolent God. As far as I can tell, if there is a God he's either a huge asshole or he's letting me down easy. If there isn't a God, then it's becoming increasingly clear that my happiness isn't in the cards. My entire life has started feeling like a suit of clubs and I'm watching everyone else gripping aces. Fishing for one of many empty champagne bottles hiding underneath my bed, I start laughing. I'm laughing because they lied. I'm laughing because there's no mystical order to the universe—it's just chaos chaos chaos, and then someone dies. I'm even laughing as I grab an empty champagne bottle, smash it on my nightstand and slash my wrist. There's blood everywhere, my mom is screaming, and I'm still laughing.

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