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Just Another Girl

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Abstract

A non-fiction piece that explores the causes of the author's depression while in college. While she is able to pinpoint specific events that have led to her unhappiness, she realizes that accepting her life in spite of these obstacles will allow her to move forward.

Keywords

sleep, depression, college, memoir, creative writing, non-fiction

Disciplines

Creative Writing | English Language and Literature | Mental and Social Health | Nonfiction

Just Another Girl

Everything and Nothing

Ally is lying next to me on the sun-heated pavement leading to the entrance of the studio. It looks like a brick prison, and I wonder how long it will take this time for the professor to come out and herd us back into our cells. I close my eyes and let the sun seep into my skin. It feels like someone cracked an egg on my face, and the yolk is slowly dripping down my cheeks until it pools in every pore.

“When is it coming off?” Ally asks, her eyes still closed. She’s talking about my boot. Not a fashionable one, but an air cast.

Never, I tell her. It is never coming off.

She laughs and sits up, twisting onto her side to check her text messages. I had broken my foot a month earlier. I was in heels, it was raining, the sidewalk was uneven, and I was drunk. The fifth metatarsal was broken in two spots on my left foot, just in time for alumni weekend. I was nicknamed “Grace” for the style with which I crutched around campus. People could hear me coming before they saw me.

“You going to the bars with that thing on?” Ally asks.

Duh, I reply. See you there.

Mike carried me on his back to the bar that night, while Nick toted my crutches. There is a picture somewhere of me sitting piggyback style on his back, one hand around his neck, and the other holding an umbrella above Mike's head.

They bought me margaritas and we drank to my health. "Nothing can stop us!" Mike yelled. We had gone out together every night for the past three weeks. Twenty-one days of consecutive drinking. I didn't think this was particularly healthy, and it was surprising that my friends hadn't attempted to hold an intervention yet.

"Mike, do we have a problem?" I asked, half joking, half serious.

"Yea, probably," he replied. "Do you want another?"

I drunkenly crutched up the stairs in my boot, taking each step that I didn't topple over and crack my skull open as a small victory. When I finally reached the top step, I threw the crutches like a javelin in front of me and reverted to crawling crab-style to the abandoned mattress in front of the fire escape. The boot was heavy and itchy, attached to my leg with three strips of Velcro that made a terrible ripping noise when taken off. I pulled out the bag of Cheetos I had purchased at the 7-11 from my elastic-waistband gym shorts

(which due to my lack of arms, now served as a storage device) and went to town. Artificial cheese caked my face as I sucked the puffs down like a vacuum. My back was against the wall, and I tilted my head to view the moon out of the window above. I didn't want to move—it was too much effort.

I sat on that mattress for a while, just staring up at the deep indigo sky. Tears began to drip down my cheeks, slowly, then faster and faster until my whole being was shaking with each new wave that escaped from my eyes. There was an aching in the back of my throat, as if a ball of hot air was trying to make it's way either into or out of my stomach—the final destination was unclear. My knees were tucked to my chest, and I rocked myself the way my mom did when I used to have earaches as a child.

I cried for everything and nothing.

Horizontal Thinking

I leave the blinds up when I sleep in my childhood bed. The sun serves as my alarm, not that I have anything of great importance to do when I'm home anyway. The bed is a fluffy pit that encases me like a taco when I roll to the right-center. I always sleep on this part of the mattress. The white sheets tuck under my chin, and the ribbon-striped comforter on top comes up to my nose. Under my left arm is my lifetime companion Bunky Bear, his black button eyes

peeking out from worn down brown fur. On my chest is Blanky, now more of a dust rag than a blanket. But in this bed, I can't sleep without them.

My body is sore and so is my soul. I feel defeated and useless. The new mattress curves around my back. It doesn't creak at the slightest movement like the rusty springs of my mattress at school. My bed at home whispers me sweet nothings. *Stay with me* it says. *Nothing is important here*. I moan and pull the comforter up further. I never want to think again, yet alas, here I am.

On the playground as a child, my sister and I would try to balance ourselves perfectly so that our legs would be simultaneously suspended, dangling above the dirt below. Sometimes we would achieve this goal for a few brief seconds before one of us twitched the wrong way, flinging one end up while the other slammed into the earth. I imagined it would feel effortless—that the wooden plank would support both of us in mid-air. I thought it would feel safe, with nothing below or above. I wondered if it was possible to capture this feeling for more than a fleeting instant—by the time I realized I had it, it was gone again.

And my bed is the closest to giving me this feeling—the feeling of equilibrium.

Things I left in the frat basement

“How’s your ratio?” The boys joke to me. I force a smile and tell them that I’ll just let myself in the side entrance—I know it’s open. They hold the door for me, the only time that evening I will see that chivalry isn’t dead. I bounce down the stairs, each step harder than the next as the sticky beer encrusted concrete plays tug-of-war with the soles of my shoes. The basement smells of beer and mold. I push on.

From my perch on a bench against the wall, I watch girls gather in gaggles on the dance floor, attempting to shake their asses in a way that will cause some boy to grind up behind them. My cup is glued to my hand and I chug the pink liquid like a dehydrated NFL star. Some of the girls are on the couch giggling in a drunken state. I decide I’m not drunk enough and head to the kitchen. My destination is the dishwasher, where the Everclear is stored. I may as well be a brother.

“Jewelllllls,” Kate stumbles into the kitchen. “Downstairs in five, we’re playing pong.” She looks at the handle in my fist and sticks her cup in my face, spilling the drink on me in the process. “Gimme some.” I oblige.

Back in the basement I find myself in the DJ booth with a few guys I know. I’m getting increasingly drunker in five-minute increments, my speech becoming labored and vaguely resembling that of the stereotypical Californian surfer-bro. The unimportant sentences drop from my lips, each vowel over

exaggerated. At this point people are ignoring me. No one likes the drunkest girl at the party—I know this, but it never seems to stop me.

I tug on Matt's sleeve when I see that his attention has wandered elsewhere and point to a guy in an orange t-shirt playing pong. "What about him?" he asks. His voice is condescending, as if I'm some sort of charity case that he is lightly trying to make small-talk with in hopes of not coming off as an asshole. "He's ka-yuuuute!"

Matt looks at me, partly laughing, partly embarrassed, but mostly just wishing I would get my shit together and leave. This isn't likely.

I watch the guy in the orange t-shirt intently. I watch him laugh with his friends and tip his head back to guffaw when someone knocks over the makeshift table of plywood resting on desk chairs. I'm like a stalker from SVU, watching from afar as I try to predict his movements and calculate the opportune moment to strike. The sad part is that I think I'm watching him in a seductive, sexy way. The sadder part is that I think this will give me an edge. *Maybe we'll lock eyes* I think to myself. We don't.

I stop in the bathroom to squat over the toilet that is reminiscent of an outhouse that would be more appropriate for a developing country. There's no toilet paper so I do an awkward dance around the handicap stall as I attempt to shake dry without splattering on my pants. At the sink I find that there is no

soap either, and let the water run over my hands in hopes that the germs will take care of themselves (they won't).

My ears are ringing. I dip my head up to look in the mirror, and that's when I see her. Wild unkempt hair, blotchy skin, red blood-shot eyes. She looks like a demon. Everything behind the head is a blur, but the eyes come into focus.

They look empty.

Horizontal Thinking II

My phone is loud and obnoxious as it buzzes on the wooden nightstand. The vibrations drift it away from the initial resting point, moving the fluorescent blue case towards the edge of the nightstand with each proceeding buzz. Reluctantly, I roll onto my side and pull the annoying technological device into my bed. *Mama* the screen says.

"Yes?" I answer coolly, evenly. My voice is monotone so she can't read too much into my mood and then perform an inquisition about whether I'm happy or sad and why that is and if I'm telling the truth.

"Come downstairs." She isn't asking, but I don't particularly care.

"I can't, I'm busy," I tell her. My hand reaches under my bed to find a spare copy of *Cosmo* and I begin to flip the pages into the receiver, pretending that I'm doing some sort of serious research for my college senior year capstone project.

“Now. I mean it.” The line goes dead. I’ve lost.

I emerge naked from my bubble of linens, my feet resting awkwardly on the carpet as my body adjusts to being vertical for the first time that day—it was most definitely after noon. Blood redistributes itself throughout my body and my fingers tingle as I pick up the closest pair of sweatpants and a tattered t-shirt from the floor. I’ve worn the same outfit three out of the past five days this week.

Walking down the stairs I hear my parents in the family room, their voices low and argumentative. They stop when my foot hits the hard wood floor. I hear the dog’s collar jingle from another room when he lifts his head—he’s heard me too.

I make my way to the family room and curl up on the leather couch, glaring at my parents. My mom is across from me; dad is at the far end of the couch. They look at me and I can see how they’ve aged. I close my eyes and picture my dad when he was younger—and happier. I can still picture him reclining on the porch in the cheap white plastic chair as the sun went down over the Sydney Harbor. He would place both of his hands behind his head during this evening ritual, his elbows forming a diamond. The profile of his face always showed an upturned smile, and I knew he was at ease. He had escaped from the uptight monotony of Wall Street and left behind the punching bag that bore the face of his boss on it, held loosely in place by a few strips of Scotch tape.

Now when I look at him, I see eyes that sag at the corners, and the lack of hair on his scalp. I switch to my mom, and observe the wrinkles that have set in deep on her forehead. Even the dog, who has now emerged from his hiding place, looks older; his fur is less and less red every time I see him. We can blame the aging phenomena on time, but I feel guilty in knowing that I have definitely accelerated this process. But I can't blame them for caring.

They ask me what's going on and I tell them nothing. They say they don't believe me and I answer them with silence.

"Julia," she looks at me with the face of concern—the face of a mother.

"We're not sending you back to school unless we fix this." They wait for me to retaliate, to ignite and go off like a bomb. She looks at him, he looks at her, and then they look at me.

"I don't really care," I say, and leave the room to go back to my bed, wondering when my Australia will finally present itself.

Nothing Good Happens After 2 AM

The library at 2 AM is a strange place. This hour tends to bring out the odd people on campus, the vampires who remain elusive during the day and emerge only at night, prompting the regular library-goers to ask, "Do they even go here?"

Nobody actually wants to be in the library at 2 AM. If they are, they most likely have a test to take in seven hours or a paper to finish that was due yesterday. There's nothing I look forward to more than retreating to my pillowy oasis at the end of the day. And when this is taken away from me? I sprout another head and breath fire.

"Take it." Liz shoves the pill in my hand and walks back to her table to pack up her books. The pill is small and white yet feels like a weapon in my sweating palm. She walks back over and gives me her water bottle. "It'll keep you awake." I glance down at my book on human sacrifices in the Mayan culture and my intestines coil together like a towel wringing out water. *Whatever* I think to myself. *Its just adderol. Or Ritalin. Everyone takes it.* I toss it back and chase with water. "Thanks."

I can hear my mother's voice in my head, nagging me about not taking other peoples' prescription drugs. She feels the need to send me weekly articles about kids who die from these medicines. I usually just delete them.

It's 9 AM and I'm trying to go to bed. My adderol/ritalin, coffee, energy drink binge has yet to wear off, and my heart is about to jump out of my chest and Mexican hat-dance its way to the emergency room. I'm lying in my bed with my eyes closed, and I feel as if they're going to burst out of the sockets. Bright pulses of purple light swim across the backs of my lids and morph into monsters

that chase other pulses of purple light until they converge as one big throbbing orb. I feel sweaty and weak and pathetic. I keep thinking that the contents of my drug-induced essay on the Mexican Inquisition is on par with Honey Boo Boo's reality show, and it prevents me from finally falling asleep.

Things I Left in the Frat Basement II

"I can't fiiiiind it!" I shriek. We're barbarically tearing through piles of sweatshirts in search of my navy zip-up hoody that says *Lancaster University* on the front. But apparently, someone has taken it. "Here you can take mine," Jerk says. He pulls his sweatshirt over his head and hands it to me. I accept without thanking him and we step into the night.

Stars are faint in the sky and I want to go somewhere we can get a clearer view. To the Peace Tower? I ask. No, Jerk responds. We're too drunk to do that. My feet carry me a few steps forward and then I find that I'm skipping down the sidewalk. I meander onto the grass, back into the sidewalk and then back to the grass again. I run around behind the college chapel with my arms at a slant—I am a plane. Jerk laughs and I know he is still with me, following me back to my room to use me. He wasn't Jerk then—at least, I didn't realize it. To me he was fun, different and off-limits. I liked the challenge.

Back in my bed I start to feel guilty as he wraps his arms around me. My head begins to buzz and my ears throb. I know I'm wrong. Jerk leans in to kiss

my forehead and I begin to tense up and recoil. I'm like a frightened hedgehog, retracting my limbs into a sphere, fending off the threat with my quills. But Jerk is made of leather and has a heart of stone. He leans away from me—he knows what I'm thinking.

“No I haven't broken up with her,” he says almost as an inaudible whisper. Just hearing the words makes me choked up. I'm angry with him for treating me this way. I'm angry with him for what he's doing to her. I'm angry with myself for being in this position for almost two months, for serving as his Band-Aid until I become so saturated with his blood that he rips me off for a shiny-new one. I'm so angry I don't know what I'm feeling anymore. My conscience hates me, my friends judge me. And I know this isn't going to end well. Jerk hugs me, as if this human action makes him less sadistic. I give in to his warm embrace and wonder how much longer I can get away with coasting in the wake of someone else's relationship.

Horizontal Thinking III

“How are you doing?”

It's mid-February and Doctor Tim has made me return back home during my final semester to ensure that I haven't completely lost it. The office is small and dingy, situated in the basement of the building. My chair is an overstuffed recliner; his is the same. There is a tissue box on the table next to me—I doubt I'll

need it. The pills extract the water from my tear ducts like the sun does from the ocean. I hardly feel anything now, and I don't particularly mind.

My lips pull back over my teeth as I begin to answer his questions, each one a tad more prying than the one before it. Tim asks me if I've thought about my career. I say Yes. He asks if I have applied for jobs. A few, I respond. Are you going to keep looking? He prompts. I know he's been talking to my parents. This is supposed to be my safe place and they have rudely intruded like when my sister used to snoop through my room while I was at dance class. No, I tell him.

He says ok.

We talk about my anxiety, homework, my thesis and my friends. I tell him what he wants to hear—but it's the truth. Nothing had gotten worse, but it hasn't gotten better either. I've just learned to cope, and now understand that sometimes being "just ok" is the best we can get from life.

Equilibrium

Friend's breath is light on my neck and slips through my spine, liquidating each vertebra as the pulse travels from one disk to the next. My skin is electric. I slowly lose control of my limbs, my legs twitching in exasperation. I shudder, pulling the sheet to my chin, wishing the feeling away so I can sleep.

Two months earlier Friend had been in Spain while I slowly wilted in my dorm room. Our bi-weekly Skype sessions gave me something to look forward to and forced me to look quasi-presentable for our digital interactions. He doesn't know how much it meant to me, and I don't think he ever will.

It's good to have him back I think to myself. That is until he snores into my ear. The sheets twist and contort into a rope, intertwined around our legs. Friend's socks are on. They're itchy and damp against my calves. The temperature is way too hot. It's like I'm spooning with a space heater. I stretch my arm out towards the wall, placing the inside of my wrist against the cold paint.

The streetlight sheds shades of orange on everything its wattage can reach. Trucks whiz by, the birds chirp. A door opens and shuts; voices are muffled. Footsteps on the stairs, pans clink in the kitchen below. My eyelids are tired, restless, waiting for my brain to take over.

Are you dating? My friends ask. I shake my head no. *Are you exclusive?* No again, whatever "exclusive" means. *But you're best friends?* I nod yes. *How do you do it?* I shrug and change the subject. Truthfully, I don't know how this "friendship" works either. But I don't question the imperfections and accept it for what it is—mine.

Twin beds were never meant to be shared, I think as he rolls into my back, now pinning me between the cold blank wall and his chest. Friend snores again, then is silent. I flex my arm, regaining authority over my body as the pulsing subsides. Nothing. My hair is annoyingly trapped beneath his arm like a piece of spinach between my molars. I am a prisoner of my own bed.

In a few hours he wakes up, joining me in my insomnia. Friend shifts me onto his chest with one hand, and I burrow my chin beneath his. Our hands intertwine for a few brief moments and all of the discomfort from the previous night disappears.

I wonder what he is thinking, if he's even thinking anything at all. My thoughts are interrupted when the alarm sounds, puncturing the silence with a crescendoing ring. We sigh.

"Did you sleep well?" Friend asks, collecting his belongings off the floor.

"Yea," I lie. "Have a good day."

I close my eyes and will him with my mind to come back and kiss me goodbye, but I hear the door click closed behind him, and I finally fall asleep.