

Fakeorexic
BY: Amani Joseph

All of the locations, names, events, dates, and medical history used in this book are all fictional and were involved for the sole purpose of the novel. Any indication of the real world is a sheer coincidence.

“ Well to you, our stories may seem like cliches and BS. But shit gets real here, and this is our lives whether you like it or not.”

-Alexis, A survivor

Admission

I always thought that driving by a cemetery on a sunny day made it seem hauntingly beautiful. As if the dead and their tombstones added a type of beauty for the living to look at. Calm, peaceful, yet an eye-opener of where you'll end up when you die. The cemetery that I had passed today on the way to Blue Meadows Recovery Center didn't have the same effect.

I was quiet in the backseat of my dad's Ford. I could hear my suitcase moving in the trunk with every bump we went over. I didn't want to come here. But it seemed as if I didn't have a choice. Leaving the city for a three-hour drive into upstate New York was *not* how I planned to spend my midwinter break of sophomore year.

All of my friends were going to a Ski Lodge in the Poconos, while I am here getting car sick from a long, meaningless drive. My dad hasn't looked me in the eyes since the original intake interview for Blue Meadows a week ago. Nor would he talk to me. The only seemingly humane thing he's done for me is packed my suitcase since I was being too stubborn to pack it myself. He probably thinks I'll end up like my older sister Tessa. Putting me through all this just as a precaution. He'll probably do the same to my younger sister Whitley when she's older.

After what seemed like hours, my dad finally pulls up into a parking lot with only a few cars; in front of it was a house. It was a small place. More like a cheap vacation type of home rather than a recovery center. He parked the car silently took my suitcase out of the trunk and locked the car. He didn't look at me, he just gestured me to follow. Walking up to the front door, I read the sign pounded into the front yard, decorated with purple font and flowers. The paint was peeling off from its eroded wood post. *Blue Meadows Recovery Center. Where Life Is Recovered.*

Life? What life? I had one until my dad forced me here. Now I have nothing. The amount of lies I had to tell my friends to avoid the truth. A recovery center for a school break? For a sickness I don't even have? *So bougie.* Not to mention that it's 9 o'clock at night. My dad pressed the doorbell and it seemed to have rung through the whole house. I stood behind him, trying to hide from the person who would walk out from that door at any moment. As if my dad was the one being admitted and not me.

Eventually someone came to the door. It was a tall middle aged white woman dressed in professional attire. My dad put on his infamous fake smile and started small talk. But, as usual, the talk came to me. My dad stepped aside and the lady walked to me and stopped right in front

of me. I didn't realize how tall she was until her chest was almost in my face. She bent down a bit and put out her hand.

“ You must be Zuriah,” she said with a perky smile.

I didn't meet the lady's eyes, I kept staring at my pink slippers hoping to avoid her gaze. “My name is Alice and I will be your admissions coordinator for today.”

Alice strongly shook my hand as if she had been waiting to meet me her entire life. She led us inside and took us to the admissions office. Blue Meadows didn't even look like a place for sick people. It was a simple two story home, with several bedrooms, two living rooms, a dining area, kitchen, a nurse's station that had chairs in front of it, and you could see all the way to the back yard if you were in the right spot.

The admissions office was small. Just enough for three or four people. The walls were a beige color and there were several small plants lined up on the windowsill. Sitting down my dad still didn't look me in the eyes. As if I were his greatest fear and disappointment. Alice began clicking on her mouse and doing things on her computer, she eventually put a thick purple folder on the desk. On top of the folder was a printed sticker, ‘Level 3 / New Admissions’ I stared at the folder for a while. Specifically, the New Admissions part. *I was being admitted. I was the one who was seen as sick. But in reality, there is *nothing* wrong with me.*

Alice finishes typing and turns to my dad and I, “ So, from Zuriah's initial admissions interview, we've decided that level three will be best for her right now. Levels can increase up to five, and decrease to level one. And Zuriah can look up the Level scale and procedure page inside of her folder, along with her schedule, vocabulary used here at Blue Meadows, rules and regulations, the whole works”. Alice then got up from behind her desk with a key in her hand and the purple folder, gesturing for my dad and I to follow.

All three of us walked to a flight of stairs leading to the second floor. Going up the flight of stairs, my dad easily carried the 60 pound suitcase of plastic and clothing up to the second floor. *Wow, I thought. He must really want to get rid of me.*

Reaching the second floor I could hear snoring from a room in which the door was ajar. How many people were here? Was I going to share a room with a random stranger?

One of my questions had been answered by the time I had stepped into room 212. It was completely empty. Both beds were freshly made and Alice had mentioned that the room had been vacant for the last week. The room itself had two twin beds with a wooden chest at the foot of each bed. Two closets, night stands and lamps made both sides of the room identical. A single bathroom was on my side of the room apparently for me to share with whoever is unfortunate enough to become my roommate.

My dad quietly places my suitcase at the foot of my bed without saying a word and observes the room for himself. He sits on the bed and runs his hand over the freshly washed fabric. *What is he thinking?* After a few minutes of deafening silence, Alice decides to speak.

“ Well, Zuriah, you can stay here and unpack while your dad and I go down stairs to finalize a few things”.

She gestured and my dad unhesitantly followed her downstairs.

Now I'm alone. Left in my empty room with a suitcase as my only reminder of home. I can hear the crickets chirping from outside the window. I don't want to be here. I don't need to be. I walk over to the room door and close it, along with turning off the lights. I slowly slouch down right in front of the door and cry. I'm crying because I'm scared. I'm crying because I want to go home. I'm crying because I'm in an eating disorder facility for an eating disorder I no longer have.

Blue Meadows Recovery Center

Where Life Is Recovered

Est. 1974

104 Willow Drive, Lahey, PA

20147

Staff to Patient Commentary

Patient ID: 604972135

Name: Zuriah Yocheved Medshovick

DOB: April 24, 1992

Today's Date: February 04, 2008

Notes: Today will be Zuriah's first full day as a patient here at Blue Meadows Recovery Center. Within initial review and move in, Zuriah seems keen and open to new experiences and hopefully open to treatment to better her illness.

Psychiatrist: Devin Mackister

Therapist: April Rise

Meal Plan: B - 1600 calories, no snacks

Admission Date: February 03, 2008

Tentative Discharge Date: N/A

Next Assessment Due:

01 Days. 00 Weeks. 00 Months

Psychiatrist Signature: Devin Mackister

Therapist Signature: April Rise

Patient Signature: Zuriah Medshovick

Everyone is sick, except for me

PEOPLE SAY THAT THE FIRST DAY IS THE MOST IMPORTANT. It holds the responsibility of first impressions that will mark you for the rest of your life. My first day wasn't exactly the best.

I woke up in my room with the extra bed beside me still empty. *Thank God, I don't have a roommate.* I stretch still laying in bed, wondering what my first day is going to be like. I reach to my bedside and grab the purple Admission folder and start going through the pages. A map of the first and second floors of the recovery house, a handout for level four weekly passes, a schedule of meals and snacks, schedule of daily activities, meetings, the whole routine. The last page was specifically about me, an info page about *me*.

Zuriah Medshovick
Room number- A227
DOB- 4/24/92
Admission Date- 2/04/08
Weight- 134 lb
Height- 5'3
Ethnicity- Mixed
Diagnosis- EDNOS/Anorexia
Level Upon Admission- Level 3
Meal Plan- B, 1600 calories daily, three meals, no snacks

The page honestly continues forever, but after my meal plan, I decide to close the folder.

A nurse comes in with a tray of food on top of a rolling table. She smiles and adjusts the table to my height as I'm still in bed.

"You know Zuri since it's your first day, you're not expected to eat everything on your tray. But by tomorrow, the doctors and staff would like to see a bit more effort."

She gave me another one of her smiles and walked out. Not giving me her name or anything. What if I needed her? What if I suddenly began dying and needed immediate medical attention? This place has a terrible system.

On my tray was two pancakes, two small containers of syrup, scrambled eggs, sausage, orange juice and milk. Who gives orange juice *and* milk? It just leaves a horrible taste in your mouth until you finish either or. Even then it's still a terrible aftertaste.

Why did the nurse say that it was okay if I didn't finish everything? This is my type of meal. I'm not sick as probably most of the people here, so I don't need any special passes.

In about twenty minutes my tray is clean. Even both of the cups of juice and milk have vanished. I stand up in an attempt to explore my small room. My stomach tightens and I feel stuffed. I extend my stomach to try and feel a sense of comfort from the stuffed sensation. A

thought soon ripped through my mind about the food. *No*. I thought. *I'm not sick like them*. I quickly erase the thought from my mind and proceed to look around my room.

Everything on my side of the room was where I left it from last night after I decided to make myself feel at home. My clothing and jackets hung up and folded, my three pairs of shoes neatly arranged on the side of my mini closet, my books on top of my bedside dresser along with my key to my locked wooden chest. I feel an urge to open the chest. Even though it was locked all night, I still want to make sure my belongings are still there. Inside is my pouch of quarters for laundry. \$20 in total even though one load for washing or drying is a dollar each. I soon noticed the most valuable thing to me in my entire room. A picture. It was a picture of me and my older sister Tessa.

It was taken when my family and I had gone with her all the way to California from New York for her first day at UCLA for college. It was a really big deal. She was the first in our family to go to college. My parents were so proud. All the straight A's and 4.1 GPA. She was the golden child. That was until she died. Died of the same thing that I'm apparently being admitted for. *Anorexia*. It killed her. She died in her sophomore year of college. My family and I had all gone to a steakhouse. Eating, laughing, and enjoying our meals. It was right before we got to eat dessert when she went into cardiac arrest right there and then. Everyone including my parents were beyond confused, until the paramedics arrived and attempted to revive her with an AED machine. Ripping open her shirt all you saw was bone. Pure, starvation lead bone. And so, my parents took no chances with me. And here I am.

I put the picture back into the drawer and locked it, putting the key back where it was. Sitting on my bed I stare at the empty bed only some feet away. Who would be the lucky person to share a room with me. Probably another sad girl with a sad story. I hope she doesn't snore. That would be terrible. I start to play with a loose string on my shirt. Sitting here makes me think about what I'm going to do all day. What am I supposed to do? Just sit in my room and wait for one meal after the next? There isn't much to do. Sleep. Read. Sleep again. As much as I like sleeping, I'd need to stretch my legs at some point and this room just won't make that happen. Yet, I haven't been invited to a different part of the recovery home yet. What if I just happened to walk up on someone's emotional therapy session. Blubbering, runny nose, the whole water works. That would be embarrassing, more for me than for the person I walked in on.

Soon enough the same nurse that brought me breakfast came and took my tray, also telling me that MST was in ten minutes. What the *hell* is MST? What does that even stand for? I look into my purple folder once again and look at the page titled *The ABCs of Blue Meadows Recovery*. Skimming the page, I finally find the abbreviation. "MST or meal support therapy, is a group that takes place after each meal for thirty minutes for patients to express feelings and emotions after a somewhat challenging meal." More feeling sharing, yay.

Standing up dreading the future, I decide to go into the bathroom before the group inevitably starts. The lights automatically turn on as I walk into the bathroom. I look into the mirror. I pretty

much look the same as I did yesterday when I was officially admitted. Same dark brown skin, curly afro on top of my head, not to mention my freckles and a special feature I got from my grandma; silver eyes. That's right, my eyes are like a silver - ish color. My friends in school used to call me Storm, like from *X-Men* because of my eyes. All I needed was white hair and I'd totally fit the part.

I spend the time brushing my teeth and picking out my afro. My dad would say that I spent unnatural time picking out my afro sometimes. My baby-soft curls are easily crushed, you know. And without my satin pillowcase, the moisture gets sucked right out of them.

My clothes are on a hanger on the towel rack in the bathroom. Jeans with a Fall Out Boy tee. Best statement for the first day. What is the statement? That I love punk and rock and that I really don't care about what I wear as long as I'm covered in clothes. I really don't care as to the fact that I put on my blue Nike slippers. instead of shoes.

I hear a knock on my door and poke my head out of the bathroom to see who it is, and it's the same quiet nurse. Only this time she has a name tag, *Jennifer*. So I have a white nurse named Jennifer. I honestly have no problem with that, but to be the only dark skinned person here kind of sucks.

She gives me her signature *Crest* white smile and starts to speak, " Hi, Zuri! I'm just here to bring you to MST for today. The place is small enough that by the end of today, you'll be able to navigate it yourself." I notice she has a slight southern accent, must be from the south east by the sound of it. I finish pampering myself and follow Jennifer outside of my room. Walking down a flight of stairs, I see the same Admissions' lady from last night getting ready to leave. What was her name? Oh, right *Alice*. She waved to me and gave me a small smile. I turned my head the other way, not wanting to give a kind gesture to the woman who finalized my imprisonment in this place. Reaching the group room I noticed several things upon my arrival :

- 1) There are six other patients here
- 2) The diversity is way more extreme than I thought
- 3) There's two guys here
- 4) This is a really small room

I sat down in one of two empty chairs, while everyone else, including the probable therapist is already seated. The two anorexics immediately catch my eyes. So thin and frail, one seems to have a bit more weight on them than the other. One of them is a guy, the other a girl . *A guy with Anorexia*. That's something you never hear about. He has a deep tan, he's probably from California or a tropical region to have that deep of a tan in the middle of February.

The therapist lady looks at me with a smile in her eyes. By the looks of it, she's probably from the Middle East, I just can't tell from where. I zoom in on her name tag, *Dr. Jethra*. Thick, jet black hair with brown skin. She seems nice.

Dr. Jethra clears her throat to get everyone's attention. To be honest, nobody was really talking in the first place. " Well, everyone, I'm sure you have noticed a new patient," she gestures her hand towards me,
" Everyone I'd like you to welcome Zuriah Med-"

I stop her , " It's just Zuri"

She corrects her posture as if I told her she had a hunch in her back, " Everyone, this is Zuri"

I get a couple of smiles and nods, a girl gives me a big white smile. She seems peppy. Not to mention she's been staring at me since I walked into the room.

Dr. Jethra begins again, " Alrighty, now I'd like everyone to say their names and cultural identification. And remember to be *proud*." She puffed her chest out and made a fist to emphasize the word *proud*. At first everyone was silent, so quiet you could hear a pin drop. But then the girl with the staring issue started speaking, still staring straight at me.

" Hi, I'm Alex and I'm Filipino." Alex smiled and waved around the circle. Which was weird since she probably already knew everyone.

The guy next to her began to speak, " Uh, hi. My name is Jonah and I'm African American."

Another black person, thank God I'm not alone. It continues to go around in a circle. Hadley, she's a Cherokee native (as in Native American), Lewis, the male anorexic, is Hawaiian, Gretchen, she's German and Meghan who simply described herself as Caucasian. And of course, the circle had to end with me. The whole group stared , including the therapist lady. Well, I guess it's my time to shine

" My name is Zuri and I'm African American and Israeli"

Alex's face lights up. "Wow, your from Israel?" Her eyes practically bulge out of her head in amazement.

"So your dad is Israeli?" Lewis jumps in.

" No. I was born there. I came to America when I was six. My dad, he was born in Poland."

" So your dad is white?" Jonah timidly suggests

I simply nod my head, " Yes. Yes he is."

Why are they so interested in me? No one has ever been *that* amazed about my heritage. Not even my class when I presented my family tree in the second grade.

Dr. Jethra continued by giving a full MST review. Apparently, we talk about our feelings before, during, and after the meal. Of course, no one volunteers. After a while, Dr. Jethra calls on Lewis first. *Great, pick on the anorexic.* Lewis lowers his head a bit, attempting to avoid the conversation altogether, but he just opens up anyways.

“ The meal went terribly. Everyone saw me crying over the pancakes. All of the carbs and sugars and syrups, I had to be taken out because I was on the verge of a panic attack. Eventually, they ended up tubing me before group today,” he points to the plastic tube that traveled from behind his ear into his nose. I didn’t even notice that.

“ I wish I could have finished. I would have been put on level 2, but I’m still stuck on level 1”

The room is silent after Lewis spoke. He made it sound traumatic and awful. I wish he could kick Anorexia’s butt like I did. If I even had to, but it wasn’t really a problem. So, whatever.

Gretchen was next. “ I *really* wanted to purge after I ate those pancakes. I even tried to spit into my napkin but one of the staff caught me. It just hurts, physically and emotionally, to not be able to purge after eating food like that. It’s like you people are personally trying to hurt me.”

Dr. Jethra steps in, “ what *people*?”

“ You people. All of the doctors and therapists and supervisors. All of *you* are just making me worse. Making me feel bad about myself.”

“ Making you feel bad how?”

Uh oh, here comes the deep thoughts.

“ Purging makes me feel empty. But also complete at the same time. Like I’ve completed my duty for that meal. I *hate* feeling full. It makes me feel heavy and like my stomach is constantly protruding from underneath my shirt. But no one here gets that. All I ever get back is ‘the emotions will soon pass’ and ‘ you’re stronger than you think’ which honestly doesn’t help at all.”

Dr. Jethra nods and jots something down inside of a notebook that was in front of her. Eventually she lifts up her eyes and gestures towards me. I begin to act like I don’t know who she’s gesturing to. I look left and right then behind me looking for someone else that could possibly take my place. Dr. Jethra puts her hand on mine that I had on top of the table, she looks straight at me, “ Zuri, It’s your turn to share.”

Perfect. Just perfect. Let’s get a few things straight, I’m not an open person, especially when it comes to my feelings and deep emotions. I don’t share with people I’ve just met and I don’t really have a problem with eating so, I really don’t have much to say. But I open my mouth

anyways, “ The meal went perfectly. It wasn't even an issue. But why would food be an issue? It helps to nourish and feed out bodies. I personally feel that no one in this room should be afraid.”

Everyone's staring, a couple of wide open mouths. Jonah looked like he just farted out a cantaloupe. *Nailed it*. Dr. Jethra is also shocked. Was what I said *that* impactful?

“ Zuri, What did you mean by ‘ it wasn't even an issue?’ ”

“ I meant what I said. It wasn't an issue. I don't have an eating disorder. I mean I did but it wasn't real. So I was never really sick”

The whole room looks beyond baffled, soon enough Gretchen steps in, “ What do you mean it wasn't real? And If you don't have an eating disorder, then why are you here?”

I honestly don't feel like explaining the whole situation, so I give the most simple and bland answer, “ I don't know”

“ You have to know, or else you wouldn't be here. This isn't a fun little get away Zuri. It's hell on Earth for most of us and you're sitting here taking it lightly” says Lewis.

Dr. Jethra steps back in, “ What's your point Zuri?”

I breath in deeply and let a big puff of air out. Therapy is a lot more annoying than I thought. “ My *point* is that, I'm not sick. Everyone here is sick ... except for me”. I feel relieved after making that statement. I relax and slouch down in my chair . Looking up I now have six angry faces staring at me. *Oops*. There goes my chance at making friends.

Goodbyes and Hellos

I've heard multiple people say that everyone deserves a second chance. Well in this case, that doesn't apply to me. I'm almost 100% sure that I am the most hated person in this place. After the group, everyone walks into the common room. Nobody meets my eyes as I leave the group room. Just a few scowls and a bad attempt at a raspberry. I sit in the corner of the Downstairs Living room, all the way in the back next to the window out of everyone's way. Regardless of where I am, I'll probably be ignored.

Everyone just starts to do their own thing. Lewis and Gretchen start playing UNO, Meghan and Alex are talking about going shoe shopping on their weekly pass, and Jonah and Hadley are watching SpongeBob on the TV. They're all so different. Unique. In their culture, probably family and school life. But at the same time, they all think the same. Their thinking is what got them here in the first place.

Fifteen minutes past and everyone still hates my guts. Speaking your mind seems like a dangerous thing in this place. I get up and start walking around. Exploring the house itself. Going back upstairs, I notice the bedrooms all have windows in the front door itself. Each of the bedrooms are identical. Just two twins beds, two mini closets, two night stands with a lamp and the one bathroom for two people to share. That's it. Looking into the only single bedroom, it's smaller than the other rooms here. It's also vastly decorated. Posters and drawings cover the walls, along with a pile of letters in the corner next to the night stand.

"What are you doing here!" I turn around to an angry Meghan staring me in the face.

"I'm just walking around, taking in the sights".

Meghan looked pissed, "What sights?"

She looked like she was going to blow her lid. I never knew someone could be so touchy about another person getting acquainted with her surroundings. I quickly walked over to my room trying to avoid Meghan's wrath and turned the knob, it's *locked*.

"All the bedrooms are locked during the day," this time it was a male's voice, I turned behind me to see Jonah leaning on the wall with his arms crossed. He comes closer, blocking Meghan's angry stare from my sight, "and if I were you I'd stay away from Meghan and all of her belongings."

I nod and look behind Jonah to see that Meghan was in her room sitting on her bed. Why wasn't *her* door locked?

Jonah lead me back to the downstairs living room, with his hand on my back. We both sat down to watch TV while Hadley was now occupied with chipping off old nail polish from her fingers. Jonah and I didn't make eye contact for the first few minutes we sat together. So he eventually turned to me and started talking,

“ You were just trying to feel superior, right?” He asked?

I looked at him confused. Superior? Why would I need to feel superior? “ Why do you say that?”

“ Well, because you’re saying that your not sick. Even though you are since you're here.”

“ I'm not sick, I'm just here by mistake.” The statement comes out fierce. A lot harsher than I intended.

Jonah put his hands up in defeat, “ okay, fine. Do you, Zuri. Do you.”

I begin to doze off, hoping that once I open my eyes, all of this will be a dream. And by this, I mean all of the angry patients, the special treatment and the MST sessions. I don't want to be here, nor do I need to be. But my parents and the doctors think I do. Are my parents *that* petrified that I'll end up like Tessa? That I'll die of a heart attack in a steakhouse? Did I say something during the intake that blew everyone's minds? Regardless of what happened, people at the top made the wrong choice.

I wake up to hear a nurse telling everyone that it's time for lunch. Nobody bothers to wake me up, *gee thanks*, and I end up walking groggily to the dining room by myself. Hadley and Lewis walk the slowest. Well, except for Lewis he's In a wheelchair, so he's rolling very slowly. On my way to the dining room, nobody speaks to me. Not even Jonah. I thought we had a kindling friendship. They all must still be mad at my little, “ everyone is sick but me” statement.

I also noticed that two sets of suitcases are lined up by the front entrance. Who's leaving? More importantly, who's been doomed to come in ?

Part of my question is answered once I enter the dining room. Alex's ID band is being cut off her wrist by a nurse. She has tears in her eyes and everyone is going up to her to say goodbye.

Lewis is on the verge of tears, trying to hold them all back, “ so this is like your last meal with us then?”

Alex nods attempting to prevent more tears from falling from her eyes. She wipes her face with the sleeve of her sweater and sniffles, “ You guys have all changed my life. I'll never forget any of you.”

Everyone goes into a big group hug, except for me. I was never a hugger, or a huge fan of physical contact. I rarely hug my parents, much less a group of strangers who's probably still in the mood to attack me from my immortalized statement. I make my way around the crowd and sit down at the table. I find the tray with my name on it, and sit down in front of it. A chicken

quinoa salad, cottage cheese, a bread stick, two cups of orange juice and salad dressing. Quinoa, I *hate* quinoa. I attempt to separate the quinoa from the rest of the salad and start eating.

By the time I was half way through, was when everyone settled down from the hugs and goodbyes in order to eat.

By the time lunch had ended and everyone was heading to MST in the group room. I ignored all of the socializing and chatter sitting down by the nurse's station with my head stuffed in a book trying to avoid going to MST. Occasionally I looked up to see other girls and guys walking by and a few nurses. Until something caught my eye, a new patient.

She was sitting in front of the nurse's station, alone, her skin was pale and she wore a beanie over her brown thinning hair with her ribs poking out of her *Blink - 123 t-shirt*. Which she tried to hide with a gray unzipped hoodie. She was fresh meat. Quiet and unknowledgeable of the unknown.

After a few minutes of thinking, I decided to expose her to the truth. *My truth*. I stood up and walked over to the new girl as I plastered a fake smile on my face. Grazed with a small portion of my unrelenting attitude I walked over to her and told her my ultimate truth,

“ Welcome to hell.”

At first, she was shocked. Another person surprised by my forthcoming personality. She stared at me long enough so that I could read her ID band , *Donna E*.

“Well damn,” a voice said from behind. I turned to see a boy sitting in a wheelchair. His cheekbones jutted out of his face and his fingers were gnarled and frail.

“ I hope my meeting with the Devil hasn't been cancelled because I'd really like to get comfy here.”

The boy's greenish-blue eyes shined with a type of dull confidence. He smirked as if he knew he affected me in some way with his comment.

I turned back around to see that Donna E. had escaped with her emotions intact while I was distracted. Jennifer had come from behind the nurses station and rolled the new boy further into the seating area in which I already was. He looked at me, studying me as if I were a portrait of a naked Greek maiden at the MET Museum.

“ You know, you seem different than most girls here.” said the mystery boy.

“ How would you know?” I asked, “You just got here.”

“ Well from your little welcome greeting with that other girl, I’m pretty sure no one else would use that phrase as a warm, welcoming statement.”

I scrunched up my face and crossed my arms. As I did so, I adjusted my bag as I turned on my heel and began to walk away.

“ My name is Warren by the way. Warren Weisberg.”

I turned around to see him smirk gladly planted on his face. Something that would probably be his signature look from now on. Warren waved as I turned back around to head to MST .He was one of the few boys here. Which meant, he would definitely be a pain in the ass.

What Could Have Been

It was time for group therapy, so everyone had to squeeze into the small downstairs living room. All 8 of us. Some were sitting on the floor, in-between couches, or in front of the feet of a person who already had furniture to sit on. Warren was the last one to enter. Since there was no ramp for his wheelchair to go down, one of the male nurses had to carry him to an empty recliner chair that had been reserved just for him. Warren looked so frail and weak being carried. His spine jutted out from the back of his shirt and so did his ribs. He looked cold, all of the shivering he was doing. And he looked tired, like he just wanted to lie down and take a nap. He was struggling to stay awake.

Catherine, a different worker here, began the group about an introduction to our ED mentality. Of course, by God's sweet graces, I was asked to go first. "So Zuri," she spoke in a loud perky voice, "I want to see if your ideas have changed in the last few hours. Tell the whole group what you think of your ED and how it affects you."

At first I looked down at my slides, admiring the Nike check mark. Then I looked up to catch Warren and his signature smirk staring at me. He mouthed a phrase to me, *tell the truth*.

So I did. "I feel like I don't really have an eating disorder. Never truly did. It was just some overdramatic, misdiagnosed phase that is now over. So me being here is a waste of time." Everyone was once again shocked. Including Warren.

"So I guess what I'm going through is just a phase too then?" It was Donna E. The girl who was just admitted this morning. She looked at me with hatred and disgust. I passed her and several other people had the same look on their faces too. Even Warren looked ashamed and disappointed, as if he had just seen the *real* me. A big jerk with no regards for anyone else but myself. I got up and left the room. Not thinking twice about not looking back. I could feel everyone's eyes piercing my neck. Not only did everyone think I was a cold hearted menace, but may have just lost my only friend too.

The Night Falls

I thought I liked being alone. Especially in a crowd of people who hates my guts. I was fine with it. Then I met Warren. Someone who didn't know my opinion, a person who didn't think I was a stuck up jerk. But now that he knows how I feel about being here, he won't even speak to me, and now I hate being lonely.

Leaving the dining room to go to a DBT, developmental behavioral therapy, session, I tried to look in Warren's direction. He must have known I was trying to get his attention, because he kept his head down as a nurse rolled him to the downstairs living room. I was the last to enter the room. Even the therapist, Dr. Marshall was already seated. Nobody bothered to look up at me. Or much less save me a seat in a very cramped space. I ended up sitting on the floor in the corner by the window. *Again*. At least I'll be accepted in this corner without a second thought.

Dr. Marshall adjusted his glasses on the bridge of his nose, as we all settled in for the last round of therapy for the night.

"Well, then, let's get started shall we?" The guy had a thick british accent. His brown hair and green eyes made Hadley and Gretchen swoon. Meghan and I however, appeared to be on the same page. Neither of us are impressed.

Dr. Marshall passes papers around, along with clipboards and pens, one for each of us. On the page is a simple prompt, *What has your ED stolen from you?* Jonah and Gretchen start writing right away, making sounds with their pens as they quickly try to jot down their thoughts as if they were about to float away. The rest of us had to sit for a minute. Dr. Marshall took out a cooking timer shaped like a hen and turned the dial to 15 minutes. 15 minutes of what? I don't *have* an ED. Nothing was stolen from me. I'm only here because of my over dramatic parents.

Soon enough, with only five minutes left, Dr. Marshall began rotating around the table to see what we've written down so far. Has he gets up he makes faces and "satisfactory noises" in approval of the work he's seen. Coming to approach me, I cover my page with my petite arm as much as I possibly can. He somehow finds a way to catch a glimpse of my work and stops next to me and bends down to my height, "Zuri, why is your page empty?"

Meghan decides to angrily answer for me, "She thinks she's just perfect. So perfect that she doesn't even have an ED and that she doesn't even need to be here."

I aim my eyes at the floor. I thought all of this backlash had apparently subsided. Apparently, not. Meghan turned to Warren and Donna who were both sitting next to each other, "If I were you, I'd stay away from her."

Warren lifted his head and looked at me, "Trust me, I will".

Dr. Marshall doesn't even respond to Meghan's comment. He just sighs deeply and walks back over to his seat with his hands folded. Next, he chooses someone to start the conversation.

He lifts his hand and points to Warren, " Would you like to start us off by sharing what you wrote?"

Warren nods and begins to read, still looking at me. " I used to have a life. Something that is now just a faint memory. Being captian of my school's Varsity basketball team, being treasurer of the student council, and eating tacos with my two best friends Marcus and Liam are all just memories. Memories I wish I could have back."

"Interesting," said Dr. Marshall. "Anyone else?"

No one volunteered. By the looks on everyone's faces, it seemed like Warren's answer was enough. The question at hand was too personal of a concept to share any further.

" Very well. On to our next activity then".

The gods or whatever divine force that's up there must really hate me because Meghan has moved into my room. She's putting up posters and arranging her personal possessions by the time I enter the room. She just turns at me and scowls, soon quickly returning to her work. *How fun.*

I sit on my bed, pondering how I'm going to be able to survive with Meghan as my roommate for the rest of my stay here.

She turns around and looks at me, " It's because of Warren. You're the last person who I'd ever want to share a room with. But since girls and guys can't share a room together, now we're roommates"

Meghan turns back around to her poster work. Clarification is a beautiful thing.

It's ten minutes past 10 pm curfew but Meghan and I are both still awake. I'm on my bed, and she's journaling. I've thought about journaling myself, I'd probably only write about how I hate it here and how what everyone says in group sounds like a bunch of cliches from a random eating disorder movie. I'm not ignorant or a jerk. I can see that most of, not even, all of the patients here are in some kind of emotional or physical pain. And that the best way I could comfort them is if I keep my mouth shut. But I'm not the right person. I'm not the right person to share thier pain and try to ease it if it escalates. I'm self cured. I don't need this treatment. Someone way sicker could take my place here. Someone who actually needs it.

Eventually I ended up laying in my bed just staring at the ceiling of my room . The windows gave a perfect view of the parking lot. The lights of cars from outside glide along the ceiling. Signs of people escaping, going home. Something I can't do. I zone out for a few minutes. Closing my eyes, watching the little black spots dance around my eyelids. I don't want to be

here. I don't want people to keep thinking I'm sick when I'm perfectly fine. Not that school is the number one place I'd want to be either, but it's better than being here.

“ Zuri ?” Someone calls my name, but I ignore it.

“ Zuri, Jennifer needs you.” I try to pretend I'm asleep, but a sneeze bursts my eyes open, along with a little bit of snot that shoots from my nose. Wiping my nose with a tissue, I notice Jonah standing at the door.

“ What for ?”

“ She didn't say. Just go downstairs.”

I was going to go downstairs. Until something caught my eye. Meghan was already at the window, and Jonah was quick to reach behind her. It was an ambulance in the parking lot. Several paramedics were there along with some of the house staff. The ambulance was parked at an angle where you could slightly see the person inside, but not their face.

“ So, who do you think it is?” Asked Jonah.

“ Probably someone from the first floor, the more unstable people sleep down there.” Answered Meghan.

Whoever it was, it must have been pretty serious. The ambulance eventually drove off. Sirens and lights wailing into the night.

Blue Meadows Recovery Center
Where Life Is Recovered
Est. 1974
104 Willow Drive, Lahey, PA
20147
Staff to Patient Commentary

Patient ID: 604972135

Name: Zuriah Yocheved Medshovick

DOB: April 24, 1992

Today's Date: February 04, 2008

Notes: Zuriah seems to have poorly adjusted to her first day here at Blue Meadows. Not only has she declared her illness non-existent, but has also made inappropriate remarks towards other patients, such as "Welcome to hell". Not making an effort to create a friendship, Zuriah is isolated most of the time from her peers, mostly reading or engaging with her imagination. Zuriah needs to work on socializing and accepting/admitting to her current illness.

Psychiatrist: Devin Mackister

Therapist: April Rise

Meal Plan: B - 1600 calories, no snacks

Admission Date: February 03, 2008

Tentative Discharge Date: N/A

Next Assessment Due:

03 Days. 00 Weeks. 00 Months

Psychiatrist Signature: *Revin Mackister*

Therapist Signature: *April Rise*

Patient Signature: *Zuriah Medshovich*

Wake Up Call

'Hopeful - One New Message'

I opened my email on a computer in the school room to see my best friend Kessie had responded to my email. She said the usual friend stuff, "get well soon, keep moving forward" and in this case "food is the best nourishment."

She was the first one to notice my ED when it was actually a problem. She noticed how I wouldn't eat like I normally would and how much I had a hoodie or a hat over my curly hair which had been thinning. She knew I'd never let anything or anyone touch my hair unless it was mousse or a comb, even in the winter. By the time I had fainted during a soccer match, that's when she knew I was really messed up. But that was months ago, and I'm fine now. But she still thinks I have a problem. Which I don't. I've overcome my demons. As for now, you can say I'm perfecting the art of sealing them in their cages.

I turn towards the door as it opens, so see several girls come in to use the computers, one of them was a new admission, Kelly Reynolds. Also known as 'Queen Recovery'. She likes to brag about her hard times and how she overcame her Anorexia 6 different times. Some people say we're alike. Personally, I don't see it.

"Hey, Zuriah." she asked as she gleamed with pride. "I didn't see you at MST after lunch today, what happened?" She made it seem as if making sure people went to MST was her personal job.

I gave my signature fake smile back, "Oh, I wasn't feeling well."

She smiled back, "Couldn't take the cliches today could you?" she smiled and sashayed away. That bitch. And no, the cliches are way too painful.

A few moments after, Warren came being wheeled into the room. I quickly turned my head back to my computer screen, trying to avoid his glance. I thought he still hated my guts, but he saw me and requested to be seated next to me. I still kept my eyes on my computer as his wheelchair squeaked into its resting position, a nurse brought him a laptop to use since his wheelchair made him too short to properly reach the computer on the table. Taking my eyes off of the computer for a few seconds I turned to him. He was pale, his eyes were bloodshot red and puffy, as if he had been crying. His face was drenched in a type of sadness, like his dog just died or something. So I decided to ask him.

“ Warren?”

“ Hmm?” His tone was distant, as if his body was here but his mind was somewhere else.

“ Did your dog die?”

He looked at me in confusion, “What?”

“ I mean, I know your parents were here for a family therapy session and whatever. Did they tell you your dog died?”

He looked at me like he was annoyed, “ No. My dog, Max, is fine.”

At this point I felt stupid for not asking a better question. So I decided to ask something a bit more genuine. “ So what’s wrong?”

He sniffled a few times. His nose began to run so he grabbed a tissue for the tissue box that was on top of the table. He couldn’t meet my eyes. My next question would be if his mom died or something.

“ They told me an estimate of how long I might have to stay here.” He paused, swallowing hard to settle the lump in his throat. “ A whole six months.”

My eyes grew wide and my jaw dropped, “ Dude, can they do that?”

Warren sniffled some more and wiped tears that had apparently fallen without me noticing. He gave a small chuckle. A depressed version of his signature look.

“ What’s so funny?”

“ I’m surprised they didn’t give me a whole year. I mean, look at me. I’m practically a skeleton. I’m too weak to walk, much less stand up without feeling faint. I have to sit down on a shower chair while bathing for Christ’s sake. I’m surprised I’m not dead already.”

My face went blank. So did my thoughts. It seems like death isn't too far off of his mind. From what he's been told by doctors, his parents, and probably from his physical sensations, he has a right to feel like he unfairly cheated death.

“ Can't they just put you in an outpatient program or something?”

“Yeah, they will. As soon as I start eating again and I'm not underweight,” he looked down at his hands, twiddling his thumbs, “ and add on a whole six months of residential treatment.”

We were both quiet for the next few minutes. Not on our computers, but not necessarily talking either. Everyone else was talking . Giggling at memes or aweing at kitten videos on YouTube. That was until Warren broke the silence, “ I'm being tubed” he said in a low pitched voice.

“ What?”

“ They said I'm at risk for cardiac arrest and a bunch of other health problems and since I haven't been eating I have no other choice.”

“ But you've just got here, that can't count.”

“ But it does, besides they had to take me to the hospital last night.”

He lifts up his sweater sleeve to expose his hospital band. The logo of *New Reed Hospital* stuck out in bold black letters. It showed his full name , birthday, patient ID, and time of admittance. I specifically looked at the time *10:15 pm*.

“ I was having severe heart palpitations just about 15 minutes after you and everyone else went to bed for the night. I was sweating, my chest was tight and I couldn't breathe. It felt like my heart was about to stop, and me being scared only made it worse. So they took me to the hospital, put me on oxygen and gave me an IV to replenish my extremely low electrolytes, which was why I was having them palpitations in the first place.”

My thoughts start to travel, back to last night. Back to the bright red, white and blue lights along with the loud, annoying sirens.

“ so that's why there was an ambulance outside last night.”

“ You saw me? Crap!” Warren's voice raised to a high pitch. He gently rubbed his face with his hand.

“ The staff promise it would be discreet. And said that since everyone would be asleep no one would notice”

He groaned in embarrassment and his face turned a shade of red.

“ I'm pretty sure with all of those flashing lights and sirens, all that action would be kind of hard to miss.”

Warren looked at me like he knew I was right. “ I guess your right”

Of course I'm right.

Lunch Time Woes

The excitement from last night's event had seemed to die down by lunch time. I sat at my assigned seat in the level 1-3 dining room. Sitting at the table, I look around at all of the other tables filled in the room. People talking and laughing, attempting to eat the food in front of them (it was taco Tuesday for lunch today) wondering if they should tackle it or try to hide it in napkins.

My table was empty except for me , my tray of food and three other empty trays. Each tray is covered in beef tacos, a garden salad, balsamic vinaigrette, milk, an apple, and a snack size pound cake. Everything is covered in Saran wrap. The nurses and staff expect us to eat everything on our trays. Even the girls with extremely bad ED's that just arrived are urged to do it. Even if their fear food is an onion (real example) they still have to eat the onion.

A nurse comes over as I begin to uncover my food to collect the wrap. She gives me a small smile as I awkwardly attempt to take off the Saran wrap.

“ You know, things will get better from here. I know it will” I give a small smile to the nurse as she takes the last of my plastic wrap. I look at her name tag “Beatrice” , she seems like a person to remember.

Beatrice walks away as I began to pour the vinaigrette onto my salad. Watching the oils pour over the lettuce, slowly consuming it. I begin to eat until I hear a familiar sound. A soft creaking sound, that can only come from one thing. A *wheelchair*. I look up to see Warren. His eyes are dull but teeming with just a bit of life.

“ We meet again, stranger.” He said with his signature smirk.

“ I have a name you know.” I rebutted as his wheelchair was locked into place by his nurse. He kept staring at me as his nurse took off the wrap from his food, as if he was trying to stare into my soul with his dull blue eyes that seemed to sink into his skull.

“ What?!”

“What's your name?” Warren asked calmly but questioningly

“ Zuriah. Zuriah Yocheved Medshovick”

“ Yocheved?”

“ Yes , it's Hebrew. My dad chose it out.”

“So, you're Jewish?” Warren responded as he played around with his salad.

“ No, my dad just really liked the name.”

He gave a small smile, which instantly disappeared as he looked at the tacos. He stared at it for a bit. Examining it. Probably trying to figure out the total amount of calories, fats, and carbs. Deciding if it went over his self-determined daily caloric limit, which it probably did.

“ What's wrong Warren?” My question came out soft. As if I was talking to an infant slowly drifting asleep.

“ I used to love tacos. Before-”

He took a deep breath and swallowed hard, as if he were about to cry. His Adam's apple became swollen with stress.

“ - before all of this. My friends and I, Marcus and Liam, we'd have taco eating contests. Marcus would always win. Liam and I always became too sick to finish.” He chuckled at that reminisced memory as if he was an old man engaging in his past youth.

“ Do you still talk to them ?”

“ No.”

“ Why-” I stopped asking when I saw the tears well up in his eyes. He'd lost something. Besides the physical and emotional things, he's lost his best friends. How? I'm not the one to ask. Especially not now.

Sitting in a chair in front of my therapist's office left me on a stage for the whole house population to see. People stared as they walked by, I kept my head down and let them walk without a conversation being held.

Walking into her office, I saw a photo of April and her wife. Yes, her wife. No shame in that what so ever. Along with two dogs. Her walls were decorated with diplomas and awards from over the years.

Sitting down, she opened a file folder with my name on it and began to read the nitty-gritty. "So, Zuri, you think you don't need help?"

Of course she'd ask, "Yes. I'm perfectly fine. I'm here by mistake."

April leans in forward, trying to make our conversation in an empty room even more private. Maybe so the plants couldn't hear, "From my ten years of therapeutic experience, those who say they're not sick are the sickest of them all."

I leaned in closer myself, "Well in this case, you're wrong".

We both sat back in our chairs and stared at one another. After a while, she started talking again. "The staff has told me that you have made a friend," She acknowledged as she flipped through a few pages "Warren?"

I nodded my head while keeping my eyes on the floor.

"Do you know why you are here, Zuri?"

"Because you, my parents, and plenty of other people think I'm sick. Which I'm not by the way, but no one seems to care about my opinion in this place."

"We *all* care about your opinion Zuri, and your health. But since you are a minor and your intake interview results showed otherwise, you have to stay here until you're medically cleared."

I breathed out heavy, and rolled my eyes with the greatest infuriating passion I could find in me. "How long do I have to stay here?"

She flipped through her pages some more, "Six weeks."

Blue Meadows Recovery Center

Where Life Is Recovered

Est. 1974

104 Willow Drive, Lahey, PA

20147

Staff to Patient Commentary

Patient ID: 604972135

Name: Zuriah Yocheved Medshovick

DOB: April 24, 1992

Today's Date: February 04, 2008

Notes: *It has been decided that Zuriah will stay at Blue Meadows Recovery Center for a minimum of six weeks. This us to ensure proper treatment and to design efficient outpatient treatment.*

Psychiatrist: Devin Mackister

Therapist: April Rise

Meal Plan: B - 1600 calories, no snacks

Admission Date: February 03, 2008

Tentative Discharge Date: N/A

Next Assessment Due:

01 Days. 00 Weeks. 00 Months

Psychiatrist Signature: *Devin Mackister*

Therapist Signature: *April Rise*

Patient Signature: *Zuriah Medshovich*

The Past Is Here

SIX WEEKS! THESE PEOPLE GAVE ME six weeks! I storm out of April's office and stomp my way to my room, slamming the door behind me. How could they? My parents, I thought they loved me. But *no*, they allow my six week stay at CAMP ED, where half of the people here still don't like me.

Walking into my bathroom I close the door shut. Tears start falling before I could even notice. I never cry. Even when I broke my arm two summers ago I didn't even cry. I stayed there. Just standing in the bathroom. Crying. After a few minutes it turns into one of those dramatic ugly cries. Wailing, runny nose, blubbering speech. The whole works. I want to know why they think I have a problem. I'm self cured. How hard is it for them to believe that? Eventually, I decide to test the theory. To see if I really am sick. So I go over to the mirror and stand in front of it. Doing something I haven't done in months, lifting up my shirt and looking at my body.

Here Are My Demons

Demons are seen as these creatures from hell. The devil's henchmen. They prey on your dreams and drive you insane or to your own death. In my case, they'd deteriorate me from the inside out. Starvation is a powerful thing. Your muscle, organs, your thoughts are all at the mercy of your hunger pangs and mood swings. My demons are coming out. And I can't stop them. The thoughts of my body. How ugly I am and how fat my thighs are. How my stomach isn't perfectly flat, and don't forget about the stretch marks. The need to count every. Single. Calorie. That went into my mouth. Restricting to perfection and purging for strength. I need to walk as often as possible again. Yes. And stand as much as possible as well.

I need to avoid my body as well until it's in its perfect state. Maybe I could avoid taking showers to limit my eye to body contact. Just maybe twice a week, maybe even less depending on how little I sweat. I could even try to fake a fever or sprained ankle so that way I can eat alone and hide the uneaten food with ease. Hide it under my pillow or flush it down the toilet. It'll be perfect

What demons ?

Jeez. I'm sorry. I've seemed to have lost my decorum for a few moments. All of these group talks are getting to my head. I'm perfect. I'm fine. All of my demons are sealed in their cages . I'm too perfect for this place. I need to get out of here. It's driving me crazy. I have to escape, and never come back.

I'm Still Fighting

Warren's POV

Three Weeks Later

Stepping off I could hear the beeping sound the scale made. Displaying numbers to the nurse that I was forbidden to see. I thought that being promoted to level 3 would allow me to see my own weight, but I guess after a day, I still haven't earned that privilege.

I took off the hospital gown they had given me and put back on my regular clothes. To be honest, I'm scared to. My jeans have gotten tighter. I can't even button them closed much less pull up the zipper. I feel even worse than I did before, uglier and fatter. As if the help isn't help at all. I feel bloated and uncomfortable all the time. Not to mention the stomach cramps I get during every meal. I try cover it up with my long white t-shirt and head to the dining room for breakfast.

I shiver as I walk down the hallway. I pull my arms into my short sleeve shirt, wishing I had gotten a sweater from my room before staff locked it for the day. That's the thing about being sick. It's 75 degrees in the recovery house and yet, I'm shivering my butt off. Anorexia takes away more than just the fat and muscle that you feel is unnecessary and is making you feel fat, but the source of fat that keeps you warm 24/7. The fat that makes you sweat on a hot day. I don't have that anymore. Which is why most nights when I can get away with it, I sleep in a thick pair of sweatpants and shirt. Besides my blanket it's the only thing that keeps me warm at night.

It's noisy as I walk into the small dining room. New patients come in every day now. About one or two. Another guy came just last night. His name is Damion. I had overheard the nurses talking about him the other day. Diabulimia was his diagnosis. What is it? I have no clue.

Grabbing my empty tray, I go and join Jonah and Gretchen already standing online waiting to choose their meal. That's one of the perks of being at level three. Getting to make your own tray. Your therapist, nutritionist, and psychiatrist feels like you're responsible enough to choose your own foods. So you get to choose from a list of foods depending on our meal plan and put the food on your tray yourself. It's like regaining your self control.

Walking up to the buffet line, I pick up the menu with my name written on it

Name : Warren Weisburg

Meal Plan : Plan B - 1600 calories

2 Starches, 1 Fat , 2 Meat, 1 Milk, 2 Fruit

Please only check off ONE box for each category.

Starches

- ☐ (2) French Toast
- ☐ (2) Pancakes
- ☐ (2) Croissants

Fats

- ☐ (1) Butter
- ☐ (1) Peanut Butter
- ☐ (1) Avacado, 4 oz serving

Meat

- ☐ (2) Scrambled eggs

Milk

- ☐ 2% Milk , 8 oz
- ☐ Chocolate Milk, 8 oz

Fruit

- ☐ (2) Apple
- ☐ (2) Apple Juice, 4 oz each
- ☐ (2) Orange
- ☐ (2) Orange Juice, 4 oz each
- ☐ (2) Banana

I huge smile spread across my face when looking at the menu. *French toast*. It's my favorite thing in the world. Well it *used* to be my favorite thing. The past few weeks and months I couldn't stand the Ides of putting a piece of bread to my lips. Much less one that was covered in powdered sugar and syrup. But now it's different. I'm here, in recovery. And I was promoted to level three for a reason.

I stand behind Gretchen on the buffet line. Walking slowly behind her, observing all of the food choices in front of me. My hands start to shake at the sight of all the food. There's so much food. Carbs, fats, meat. Eggs. There it was, my biggest fear food. Eggs.

I tried to ignore the trembling in my hands and the knocking of my knee caps as I grabbed an empty tray from the buffet line. Gretchen had no issues choosing her own food. Brave and confident. Unwavering. I tried to absorb some of that confidence the closer I got to the rows of food. But, the trembling only got worse. I could barely stable myself as I attempted to pick up a plastic knife and fork from the cutlery holder. My breathing became more ragged, and by the time I got up to chose my food, it was like I was breathing through a straw. I only saw the lady behind the buffet table for a few seconds. She was a ginger, with bright green eyes and freckles. She then held out a serving spoon with eggs on it, I think that's when I passed out.

I woke up with in my bed with an IV stuck in my arm. A nurse was hovering over me, using a small flashlight to look at my eyes. With dark spots dancing in my vision I look towards the

door, several other patients were standing there. But left immediately after they saw my gaze, all except Zuri.

The nurse eventually packed up all of her things without saying a word. Leaving me alone with an almost finished IV and Zuri standing in the doorway. We both stood silent for a few minutes. Looking at the ceiling, the carpet, our shoes. Anything to avoid making contact. I don't understand, why would *she* want to talk to *me*. I'm the one who's ignored her for the past three weeks. I'm the one who made her feel like a jerk. I knew her just a little bit better than some rushed *I-just-need-to-answer* statement. I should be sorry, not her.

Zuri stepped a little further into my room, just so she was a few inches away from the edge of my bed.

"Are you okay?"

"To be honest, I don't really remember what happened."

"You were on-line for food at the buffet when you started having a mini-panic attack then you passed out."

I chuckled at the passing out part, "So, am I okay?"

"I don't know, I'm not your doctor."

I went quiet with guilt for a few moments, "Look Zuri, I'm sorry for how I've been treating you the last few weeks. Yes, that statement did hurt me. Yes, it did make me feel... feel small. But you were only stating your opinion, and you're entitled to that".

The room went silent. We both stood there with an uneasy feeling lingering in the air.

"Well, MST is starting in a few. So I should get going"

I waved goodbye to Zuri as she left the room. Or more to a strong colored woman who isn't afraid to speak her mind. Who was smart, cable, and willing. A girl I'm lucky enough to know. Most of my friends outside of here are only good for one-sided conversations. I just wish she didn't have a friend who cried over spilled milk and scrambled eggs.

After about an hour, Jenifer came and detached me from the IV, having me sit in a wheelchair. She is told me that I was going to have to talk to my therapist about what happened at breakfast. I was weak, but I was still shaken up from earlier. I was still shaken up by the time I entered my therapist's office. I thought I was ready, that I could handle getting my own food again. Without knowing the calories, without knowing the amount of fats or carbs. I thought that

being promoted to level 3 is what really marked my way uphill. Turns out, I feel like I haven't moved an inch.

April, my therapist was already seated by the time I was wheeled into the room by Jenifer. She pushes me up to the table and then locked the wheels on my chair. I held my head down. I've failed April. Not even just her, my family, my dog, myself. I went back on my promise with April.

I told her that if she allowed me to be promoted, my tray would be spotless, that I'd be the first one to conquer that buffet line. Yet, here I am.

A tear dropped from my eye, "I'm a failure."

"Warren. Listen to me, recovery isn't linear. There will be ups and downs. Even when you do leave this recovery center, there will be mistakes made. You may even relapse, but it's all apart of recovery."

"I need to be perfect, I need to do it correctly. I can't mess up."

"Warren, it's your perfectionistic nature that got you here in the first place. Remember?"

I sit quietly, silently marking her remark correct.

"I think it's best if we end our conversation here. I would like you to go to the downstairs living room and join MST"

I turned and looked at the clock, "It's over in fifteen minutes."

"Doesn't mean I don't want you to share."

An Unsatisfied Disorder

Warren was late to MST. Whatever it was that slowed him down, his wheelchair, emergency therapy session, he was late. Not to mention, by the time he came in, there was only five minutes of group left.

The door creaked open as Warren entered the room, leaving his wheelchair in the hallway. He slowly walked down the three steps into the living room and sat next to me on the couch. I could feel him looking at me, staring even, but I kept my eyes on Hadley as she was talking about his life outside of the hospital.

“It's hard you know,” Hadley sniffled. “To not only have an ED, but that it's not “apart of my culture”

“What do you mean it's not apart of your culture?”

“What I mean is that, you don't see native Americans with eating disorder in the media or on TV. My own father didn't believe my diagnosis. Even as I was lying nearly dead, in a hospital bed, in a coma because of my illness, he *still* doesn't believe it”

“What does your father think now?” asked Jonah

“I don't know. I'll ask my mom sometimes and she'll just stay that he's 'trying'”.

“Well, that's our session for today. I'll see all of you later. But I'm pretty sure that Dr. Jethra will be here in a few moments so hang tight.” Devin picked up her things and left us all in the living room by ourselves. I took a book from the shelf nearby and started reading, only to notice Warren did the same. Eventually, he started scooching closer to me while I wasn't looking. It wasn't until I jumped from his hand touching my leg that I realized how close he was.

“What do you want Warren?”

“ I'm sorry -”

“ You already told me that”

“ I know-”

“ And saying it a second time doesn't make it any better.”

Warren stayed silent.

”Look, I accept your apology. Let's just move on.”

Warren perked up, ”Fine by me”.

“ Are you going to watch the movie tonight in the upstairs living room?”

“ I don't know. By what people are saying, most people might just skip it and hang out elsewhere.”

“ Would you like to go with me?”

“ Like what a date?”

“ No. Just us, as friends so I can get to know you better.”

“ I thought you already knew me so well from my statement and all.”

”That's the thing, I don't. Nobody here really does know you or anything about you. But, if it's alright with you, I'd like to be the first.”

I cracked a small smile, someone was finally giving me a chance. ” Fine by me.”

Dr. Jethra came in late to the evening group today, she looked disheveled and unorganized. But what was more concerning was the fact that she had one single sheet of paper, and that was her meeting plan. A meeting plan of her's that was usually about seven pages, was only one single piece of paper. Not to mention it was written on college ruled loose leaf and it was slightly crinkled.

Looking around the room everyone seemed generally concerned. But Dr. Jethra just went on like nothing was bothering her.

“All right, everyone,” Dr. Jethra announced. “ Do you know why I am in this sort of — humble state today?

Humble? She calls *that* humble? More distressed and confused.

Donna looked down at her hands underneath the table, trying to avoid the question. Jonah and Gretchen were both staring into space, while everyone else just sat consuming the silence. Dr. Jethra starts tapping on the table with her fingers. Jonah seemed to have snapped out of his daze. But still, the room was completely silent. No one answers.

“ Well then, I'll ask a different question,” Dr. Jethra imposed. “ What is something that makes us all unique and special at the same time?”

More silence. Lewis raises his hand, out of what seems like desperation for the silence to cease. “ Our eating disorders ?”

Meghan turns over to Lewis, “ Since when does anorexia, bulimia, or some other eating problem make a person special?”

Lewis shrugs his shoulders, “ I don't know. How about you say something to contribute,” Lewis hissed. “ Or at least something to break the silence.”

Nobody seemed like they wanted to speak. From what people had said during MST, everyone's had a bad day. Lewis, because his stay has been extended for another two weeks. Jonah, because he was told his insurance is running out. Which means no more treatment. Donna because she was told that her pet turtle, Snuffles, had just died this morning. The list goes on and on.

Dinner Isn't Served

I once read in one of my favorite books of all time, that antidepressants don't really make you happy. It only makes you dumb. It suppresses your feelings and emotions. The only thing you have left afterwards are unrealistic reactions, and a body you feel as if you no longer live in.

I walk into the dining room and all talk ceases. Everyone's eyes immediately attach to me, some frightful of what I could possibly do next. I walk over to my usual table, a table in which I never seems to be on the track of leaving. By the time I arrive, Warren is already seated. Anxious as usual, tapping on the table with his brittle fingernails. The nail on his middle finger breaks in the process, he cursed under his breath and detached it, throwing it on the floor.

I look up to his face to see that his feeding tube is still attached to his face with tape and entering his nose. "I see your not on the machine for dinner."

He chuckles, "Don't get too excited. This is only a one time thing."

"You don't know that. Maybe by this time next week, you could be off the tube completely."

I saw regret in his eye, "I doubt that".

We both sat in silence for a while, waiting for one of us to say something. I wanted it to be him, but the quiet made it too much for me,

“ Have you ever heard of Prozac?”

He wasn't listening the first time, “What?”

“Prozac. It's this antidepressant medication.”

“ Oh yeah. I've heard of it. I was on it for a while but, it made me dizzy. I was just going to wait it out. Like, you know, any normal side effect. But several falls and a few personal attacks from my toilet seat later, I switched to Zoloft. *Way* better than Prozac. For me, anyways.”

Our trays were placed in front of us by a woman I had never seen before here at Blue Meadows. I read her ID tag that was clipped to the front of her shirt, Madison Marks, Volunteer. She *was* new, and hopefully wasn't staying long. The act of sharing my philosophy with newcomers was getting old. But it was a belief I'd never abandon.

One by one, I unwrap each plate from the Saran wrap. Everything seemed okay, corn on the cob, an apple, a slice of chocolate cake. It wasn't until I saw the main dish that made my hands start to shake. I paused for a moment before I took off the plastic. Trying to guess it's contents through the semi translucent wrap. Warren must have seen a look on my face, “ You okay, Zuri?” I nodded my head Yes, never breaking eye contact with my dish. I slowly began to unwrap it, praying that it wasn't what I thought it was. Then I jumped, pushing my self and my chair back. Almost falling on the floor, I regain my balance and walk back even farther until my back touched the wall.

“ Zuriah, what's wrong?” Ms.Patty the cook came rushing out from the kitchen.

I feel it becoming harder to breath, “ there's a fly in my food.” I lie.

She walks over to my tray, “where?”

I point with my shaky finger to the white blob on my tray, “ There”.

My voice cracks, I feel tears welling up in my eyes.

“ Oh honey, that's just the skin from the potato.”

Meatloaf. Mashed potatoes. And gravy. That's what decorates my entire dish. At this point I can't breath, I'm wheezing and my knees are buckling so hard

I might just give out. Warren gets up and walks over to me slowly with his arms out, “ Zuri. Zuri look at me. Relax. Everything is going to be okay.”

No. No it won't you goddamn liar. Nothing will be alright. I can feel everyone staring at me. The wide eyes and gasps. I didn't even notice when I started running, I didn't even consciously know where I was running to. Before my thoughts could even gather I collapsed. I collapsed on my bathroom floor crying and sobbing. I lied down on the floor and curled into a ball. I was terrified and frightened. I couldn't go back downstairs. Not now. Not to that meatloaf and mashed potatoes.

I am too scared.

A Theater's Romance

Warren rushed into my bathroom after me. He didn't say a word. I could see him getting on his knees and getting onto the floor. Soon enough, he had curled up right behind me, caressing my cheek with his thumb.

” It's going to be okay Zuri, I promise.”

We stayed there for a few minutes. My crying and panicking subsided. We both sat up, I couldn't look Warren in the eye after what just happened. I was too much of a coward.

” I told you it was going to be okay, ” Warren spoke softly

” Yeah right, ” I sniffled. ” I'm a mess.”

Warren stood up and stretched his arm over to the roll of tissue sitting on top of my toilet, ripping a piece off and giving it to me.

”We're all a mess. That's why we're here.”

”But I'm not supposed to be. I don't know what came over me.”

” It's okay to admit it, Zuri. You have a problem and you need help.”

”No I don't. I - I just had a moment. It was completely unrelated to any eating disorder stuff.”

”Zuri-”

" I'm serious."

Warren looked down at his sneakers as if admitting defeat in our argument. " Still want to catch that movie in the upstairs living room?"

"Is it about to start?"

"Yeah in five minutes,"

I sniffed and wiped my nose again, "sure".

Nobody else was there when the movie started. It was just Warren and I. We sat down next to each other in silence. Watching scene after scene I began to fall asleep. No wonder no one else showed up, this movie was beyond boring. I began to close my eyes and laid my head on something that was right next to me. Didn't pay attention to what it was, but it was comfortable.

" You're welcome, " Warren said.

"For what?" I was slowly falling asleep.

" For letting you lay on my shoulder."

I jumped up in embarrassment, my face felt red and hot. " I'm sorry I didn't mean to-"

"Don't worry about it, as long as you're comfortable."

I lay my head back on his shoulder, but this time I was wide awake.

" You know, I asked you to watch this movie with me so I could get to know you better."

I looked up at Warren, " then ask away."

"Favorite color?"

"Sea blue."

"Favorite type of music?"

"Pop and heavy metal"

"Hmm, interesting. Tell me about your family."

That's when I got hesitant." I have a sister, named Whitley. She's seven years old. And I have two dads".

" Two dads, cool."

" Thanks"

We continued to watch the movie, I was glad we moved on from the family topic. I didn't want to mention Tessa or come close to doing so, it was too personal.

The movie finished and we were left in the dark with romantic music and end credits floating on the TV screen.

"That movie sucked, no wonder nobody came to watch it."

"They probably had a heads up. Unlike you and I, Warren, we were left in the dust"

Warren chuckles and straightens up, I lift my head off of his shoulder and we make direct eye contact.

"What is it Warren?"

Then without warning he kissed me. Straight on my lips. At first, I wanted to pull away, caught off guard by this sudden movement. But then I realized how much I liked it. How much I wanted it. I kissed him back passionately, taking my hands and cupping his face while his rubbed my thighs. I thought it was going to go on forever, that was until the lights switched on.

We both stopped kissing and looked up and saw Devin standing in the doorway. Warren's face was red as a tomato.

"Zuri, come with me please." Devin asked.

I awkwardly got up and waved goodbye to Warren, following Devin all the way to her office.

" I'm fine, I was just being over dramatic." I tried to convince Devin that what happened at dinner was nothing , but she didn't believe me. I rolled my eyes and sighed, trying to figure out a way to convince her that everything was okay, and that she was over exaggerating what had happened.

"Zuri, I know you're hungry and I know you had felt frightened when you saw what was on your plate. If you'd just allow me to-"

"I'm fine Devin. Really I am". I got up and walked out of her office, avoiding a conversation that I didn't want to have.

Blue Meadows Recovery Center

Where Life Is Recovered

Est. 1974

104 Willow Drive, Lahey, PA

20147

Staff to Patient Commentary

Patient ID: 604972135

Name: Zuriah Yocheved Medshovick

DOB: April 24, 1992

Today's Date: February 04, 2008

Notes: Zuriah had an episode at dinner and refuses to talk about it with any of the recovery center staff, her therapist or psychiatrist. It is currently unknown what caused the episode.

Psychiatrist: Devin Mackister

Therapist: April Rise

Meal Plan: B - 1600 calories, no snacks

Admission Date: February 03, 2008

Tentative Discharge Date: N/A

Next Assessment Due:

01 Days. 00 Weeks. 00 Months

Psychiatrist Signature: Devin Mackister

Therapist Signature: April Rise

Patient Signature: Zuriah Medshovich

My Demons ... They Aren't Real

I didn't speak to anyone at breakfast this morning. Not even Warren who sat right across from me. I had looked up at him once to notice that he still didn't have his feeding machine with him. But that was it. My head was in my scrambled eggs and sausage all morning, along with my blueberry muffin and orange juice.

My morning was mainly composed of trying to come up with an excuse for my break down last night. I can say I was just being over dramatic, or I stand by my statement of there was a fly in my potatoes. Yet nothing seemed to be believable in my head.

Sitting in front of my tray I began to spread some butter onto my muffin. I heard Warren cough silently, I ignored it, concentrating on my muffin. The second time, it is louder and more obnoxious. So this time I look up.

I took a bite of my muffin, "What do you want Warren?"

He leaned in closer, "I spoke to the devil."

I nearly choke on my muffin, spitting it out onto my plate, "What?"

"I'm just joking, I spoke to the president of this place."

"What for?"

He breaks eye contact, and starts to play around with his eggs, "About you."

"What do you mean about me?"

"Warren," he stays silent. "What about me?"

He finally look me up in the eye. He looked ... scared, "Ms. Carbenara, the president, headed about your night terror and your breakdown yesterday

through staff reports. So she interviewed the staff and random patients to see how they felt.”

“ And?”

“ And, I don't know anything else.”

I slouched down in my chair in disappointment. What does the head of this place want with *me*?

Warren and I walked out of the dining room together and to head to MST. My heart was racing, not only were people being interviewed about me, but now any type of excuse that I make up will automatically be illegitimate. My hands start to shake half way there. I try to hold them stiffly to my sides as if they had been glued down, but it didn't work.

I kept walking when I realized my hands had stopped shaking. Both of them, even though a feeling of comfort was coming from only one. I looked down to see Warren's hand intertwined in mine. His hand was cold, but his grip was strong and reassuring. Like he would protect me no matter what happened in that MST meeting today. I just hoped that feeling became a reality.

All eyes were on me when I walked into the downstairs living room. Warren had walked in before me, trying to see if anyone was really paying attention. It stayed quiet, nobody was really jolted by his entrance. I kept my head down as I walked to my usual seat. As I sat down, and once I sat down. All I saw were the hardwood floors and my boots the whole time. That was until I saw Warren's shoes, I looked up at him and he gave his signature smirk; only this time, it meant something way more.

Dr. Jethra was late, so we all had some time to spare. Meghan decided to start a conversation.

“ So your basically telling us that , that whole scene of you bursting into tears, over meatloaf, was you being overdramatic?” she asked.

I nodded my head quickly, “ Exactly.”

“No way, you just don't want to admit that your sick like the rest of us.”

“ Listen, I'm not sick okay. I just had a moment.”

“ Now that everyone has solid proof that you have a problem with food, you just don't want to admit the truth.”

Warren's voice cut through like knife, “ maybe she's putting on a facade because you people can't accept who she really is.”

“And who is she really, a lying bitch?”

“Maybe you should stop talking about your mom like that, Meghan.” rebuttal Warren

I was greatfull for Warren and for what he said. But the conversation still stayed on me even after I left. Jennifer had pulled me out of MST for the sake on an Emergency In-Person family meeting.

...

My dads, Devin, and April were already in the small conference room seated. I sat at the head of the table, while everyone else was seated on the sides. Before I knew it, Jenifer had left and it was silent. Both my parents, therapist and psychiatrist were all staring at me. As if I were supposed to start the conversation.

“ We hear you're rejecting treatment, Zuriah.”

I kept my head down, looking at the table.

“ Zuriah, your father and I are spending precious money to have you treated here. And none the less are we upset about you missing school.”

I snapped back at him, “ If *you* or anyone else cared, I would be here. I'm not sick. I'm getting treatment I don't need. Not to mention, I'm missing school, softball preseason, and these people here are rubbing off on me.”

Devin jumped in, “ What do you mean ‘ these people here are rubbing off on me’ ?”

“ The patients here, are making *me* sick. I'm picking up their habits, thoughts, emotions. All of this isn't on me, it's because someone put me in here just to get rid of me.”

I look directly at my father. He's about to cry, tears are already at the brim of his eyes. My other dad grabs his hand with one of his and grabs a box of tissues with the other.

April joins the conversation, she uses a soft and quiet tone. “Zuirah, based on your reports of your outburst yesterday, your night terror, and a psychological review done by Devin a few days back, it seems like your illness is much more severe than we thought.”

“It’s not severe, why don’t you get it I’m fine!” No one seemed to grasp the concept that I was okay. Not even my own parents.

His Recovery Isn't Finished

I sat in my usual spot in the living room, in the corner, by the window. Alone. Warren would usually sit with me, it would just be the two of us. Sometimes he would force me to sit on the couch next everyone else. Even socialize. I overheard he was taken to the hospital. I didn't find out for what though. Without him, I am just as alone and ignored as I was on the first full day that I arrived.

It was still pretty early. The rest of the patients were still asleep, the few moments before everyone had to wake up for breakfast.

The sound of footsteps made my head turn towards the door. I hoped it was Warren, but Jonah appeared instead. He gave a small smile and waved as he sat down on the couch closest to the entrance.

“I'm sorry for the way I've treated you,” I look up and stare at Jonah.
What? He's apologizing?

“Look, Zuri, I'm not going to lie to you. A lot of us felt hurt about what you said about your diagnosis. That wasn't real or accurate. It made most of feel like all of our problems were in our heads. Like we're all playing this deadly game of Russian Roulette and now we're all addicted.”

More people started to pour into the living room, but Jonah kept talking as if none of them existed.

“ You're lucky to have Warren in a place of people like this. People who'll attack you for the smallest opinion and turn it into something big. Warren, he saw through all of that madnesses. Seeing someone that was lonely and not superficially obsessing on their verbal opinion but on the real person that they are. He talks about you all the time when you're not around.”

I blushed. “What does he say?”

“ That you're smart, funny, and that you're scared. You're scared of yourself, you're scared of your reality and whether you like it or not it's there. The night you had your little moment at dinner, he couldn't sleep that night because he was so worried about you. He *really* cares about you.”

I look down at my shoes, “ I know he does.”

I turned around to see Gretchen smiling with her eyes bulging. “ Oh my gosh!”

I looked towards the door to see Warren standing in the doorway with a huge grin on his face. The closer I looked at his face is when I realized why he was grinning. His tube had been removed.

The room erupted in claps and cheers. Jonah and Lewis clapped him on the back while others started whooping. I however, just sat there and smiled like an idiot. I thought Warren would surround himself in the adornment of his cheerleaders, but instead he came over to his smiling goof of a friend. And he kissed me. He bent down and did it quickly, but slowly enough that everyone would notice. The room automatically became silent.

“ What was that for?” I was stunned

“ Believing in me.”

“ I couldn't have been the only one.”

He chuckled and plopped down in the bean bag next to me, “ You're the only one who didn't talk about me behind my back in this place-” as he turned several eyes of guilt turned to avoid his gaze, others absorbed his gaze head on.

“ And you are the closest thing I have to family here. Please don't ask me to explain it, that's just how I feel.”

I didn't question him one bit.

~~~~~

Warren was frozen in front of his tray at breakfast. His eyes bulged wide out of his head, his hands eagerly inching away from the spoon and fork on the sides of the plate. It was cereal and toast day.

In Front of him sat an empty bowl, a single serving box of frosted flakes, milk, an apple, toast and butter on the side. Warren was physically shaking. I stretched my hand across the table and grabbed his, to try and steady it. He looked into my eyes, it looked like he was about to cry.

“ I thought you chose your own meal on your meal plan yesterday.”

His Adam's apple slowly moved as he gulped hard, “I did... I just-”

He breathed in deeply trying to hold back tears, “ I thought I was ready for the reality. I haven't touched cereal in 3 years.”

“ 3 years. Was that when your ED started?”

He took another deep breath, “yeah”.

Jennifer came rushing into the room. Her face was red and she had to lean on the wall until she caught her breath. “Jonah, go to your room and pack up your things,” she huffed. “You're being discharged.”

Jonah's eyes grew wide, and then whispers started to engulf the tables.

*He literally just came here*

## The Little Details

After breakfast, everybody met Jonah by his room. Warren was also in the room helping Jonah pack the few things he had left. Nobody understood why he was leaving, he was still on level two. A level in which you were closely monitored physically, mentally, and your trays were under absolute scrutiny during meal times.

“ I don’t understand,” Lewis whispered. “ We came in the same day, we’re both on the same level. And yet he’s packing up his things and saying goodbye.”

“ Maybe he did something wrong” Meghan whispered back. Nobody knew what else to say, we *all* knew Jonah. Why he was here, just not why he was leaving.

“ I did nothing wrong,” Jonah came out with both of his suitcases, wheeling them into the hallway. “ In fact it’s not my fault at all.”

Warren came out of the room with Jonah’s blanket folded in his hands, “ What do you mean ?”

“ I want to stay here, I want to get better and my parents want the same thing for me,”

“But?” asked Lewis.

“ But, my insurance won’t cover my stay anymore. And to stay here out of pocket costs thousands.”

Everyone went silent for a moment, “ You could sue your insurance company.” I offered. Everybody shouted *yeah* in agreement.

Jonah slowly shook his head in disappointment, “ I wish I could, but for me; it doesn’t work that way.”

Soon enough Jennifer came to break up the crowd, carrying a white folder with a “ DISCHARGE PLAN” label on the front in bright red ink. “ Jonah your parents are waiting for you by the front door,” she hands him the folder. “ Here is your discharge plan that we spoke about a few days earlier, your parents are on board and ... I wish you the best.”

Jonah pulled up the handle on his bags and gave a subtle smile and waved as he walked away. Warren looked furious, “ YOU KNEW ?”

Jonah didn’t respond.

~~~~~

“ I don’t understand, how could Jonah be so fucking ignorant !” I’ve never seen Warren this worked up before. I was sitting right next to him and our knees were touching, it was as if I

could feel the heat and anger raging through his veins. Everyone was in *Handling Emotions* group with Dr. Jethra. Jonah had left over half an hour ago and the room was still filled with tension.

“ I mean the guy knows we care about him, he knew about his discharge days in advance, and yet none of us know until the last second. *Literally* the last second.”

“ And why do you think this troubles you so much personally?” asked Dr. Jethra

Warren paused for a moment, it looked like his fuse had blew off completely; “ He was like a brother to me.” He started to tear up “ I thought we were close, but it seems like we weren’t close enough.”

I took my hand and started slowly rubbing his knee, in hopes that it would comfort him. Warren took his hand and placed it on top of mine, softly squeezing my hand and stopping my current motion.

“How does everyone else feel?” Dr. Jethra announced

The room were silent. Donna, Gretchen and Meghan were silent and Lewis looked as if he was on the verge of tears as well. Jonah *really* did impact all of us. He was like a big brother for the entire Blue Meadows community, and without him; we’re all kind of lost.

I sat in my room after group. Meghan was in the living room so I had the entire room to myself. Sitting on my bed I started playing with the loose fibers from my comforter. Noticing the pink and white details with the spots of black. I found a loose string and began to wrap it around my finger. Tightening it until my finger became a whitish yellow. Then I noticed *just* my finger. How chubby it seemed. I quickly unwrapped my finger to get a better view and it turned out to be worse than I thought. How disproportionate my finger was to my nail bed.

How could I let my finger get this fat? My eyes then moved to my whole hand, then to my forearm. Squeezing and prodding at the chubby places. Then I started squeezing harder, pulling harder as if to pull all the fat right out. My heart rate rose and my head started to spin with uncertainty, I started grabbing at my forearm harder; grabbing and scratching any skin that I could.

Why won't the fat move ?

I need to take it out.

My arms are too big

I'm too big

My heavy breathing eventually turned into hot tears. I was scratching now, little flecks of blood started to appear. I didn’t care. I needed to get the fat out.

Someone came from behind me and pulled my arms apart, “ Let me go”. I pulled and shook attempting to escape this person’s grasp.

“ Calm down, Zuri” I began to slow and my mind’s fog started to clear.

“ I’m here. It’s okay.” It was Warren.

I stopped moving and rested my arms on my lap. Too out of it to adhere to the damaged I’d done, yet too out of it to look Warren in the eyes.

“ Come on,” Warren held my hand and led me to the bathroom. I kept my head down the whole way there.

I sat on the ledge of the bathtub and looked up just enough to see Warren close the door. I quickly put my head back down. I couldn’t see him, but I noticed that he had attempt to squat down to my height. All I could see were his legs. His ripped black skinny jeans were tight around his knees. His hands felt cool as he placed them on my face. He smelled like peppermint gum. “What happened Zuri?” Warren wiped a tear that ran down my face with his thumb. I didn’t answer. To be honest, I didn’t have an explanation as to what just happened either. Warren got up, I thought he was going to leave, but then I heard the water running. As soon as it started the water stopped and Warren was back squatting in front of me. I couldn’t see what he had done but something was dripping that I couldn’t make out. Only droplets of water and blood on the floor.

“Let me see your arm”, Warren took my arm and I quickly pulled back at first. “ Zuri-” I looked up into his eyes, slowly because my neck was stiff. He had a scared look in his eyes, as well as tears ready to flow over its boundaries. “ Let me help you.” I gave him my arm and he softly began cleaning it with a wet towel. I winced as the water stung my cuts as Warren went over them. He tried to be as soft as possible but it still hurt.

Everytime the wet towel went over my cuts more blood followed, almost like an endless stream. I looked down at my left hand. My nails weren’t even that sharp, practically chewed down to the numbs. Yet my hand and fingers were covered in blood and my arm was *still* bleeding. Warren got up and washed out the towel at the sink, “ I think you should go to the nurses station,” his eyes were focused on the running water. He was right, my arm was still bleeding large drops of blood and my arm was profusely swollen. Warren rang out the wet towel and left it to hang on the sink ledge, getting a dry one and wrapping it around my arm.

“ But what you can do before you leave is tell me what happened,”

I was still shaking.

“ If you want to.” Warren’s voice was gentle and soft, I met his eyes and started studying the shades of blue his eyes resembled baby blue, cornflower, even a bit of sapphire. I wish I could just stare into his eyes forever. “ I think I had a panic attack” I said it so softly I didn’t think he heard.

“ Okay,” Warren slowly sat down next to me on the ledge of the tub. “ About what, exactly?”

I held up my arms, “ About how chubby my forearms are. I thought while I was panicking that somehow I could scratch the fat out... If I scratched hard enough.”

Warren lifted up my head with his hand, “ I don’t think it was just an isolated panic attack Zuri. It’s part of your eating-”

“ I don’t have a problem,” I quickly stood up, trying to get away. “ There’s nothing wrong with me”

“ Zuri-”

“ *This* place is making me sick. The *people* here are making me sick!”

Warren stood up quick. Instantly he towered above me, his arms crossed. “ So *I’m* making you sick?”

Shit.

“Warren, I didn’t mean-” He was out the door before I could finish.

I was left in the bathroom alone. There were still drops of blood on the floor and the towel that was wrapped around my arm was turning a shade of red. I had to get to the nurses station. But now I was going all alone.

Blue Meadows Recovery Center
Where Life Is Recovered

Est. 1974
104 Willow Drive, Lahey, PA
20147
Staff to Patient Commentary

Patient ID: 604972135
Name: Zuriah Yocheved Medshovick
DOB: April 24, 1992
Today's Date: February 04, 2008

Notes: *Zurich admitted to self harm in her room, she says her motives were unrelated to her eating disorderz a*

Psychiatrist: Devin Mackister
Therapist: April Rise
Meal Plan: B - 1600 calories, no snacks
Admission Date: February 03, 2008
Tentative Discharge Date: N/A

Next Assessment Due:
01 Days. 00 Weeks. 00 Months

Psychiatrist Signature: Devin Mackister
Therapist Signature: April Rise
Patient Signature: Zuriah Medshovick

Turning Into Ashes

Warren was nowhere in sight by the time I got to the nurses' station. In one of the group rooms a few doors down I could hear talking, but I didn't bother to check and see if he was in there. I didn't want to move any closer to the nurses' station. Who knows what could happen after they saw my arm. It was a thin towel, probably for drying your face with because it was already deeply soaked with blood. I haven't looked at my arm since Warren put the towel on, much less remember how bad the damage was since my mind was pretty foggy after the incident. Maybe if I told a convincing lie it could keep me out of trouble. Like a stray cat somehow entered the building and scratched me or a bird flew into my room when my window was open and it attacked me as I tried to get it back outside. Scenarios ran through my head as I stood outside the nurse's office thinking of a believable lie. The door to the room slowly opened and sunlight from the window blinded me at first. My vision cleared as someone stepped in front of me blocking the sunlight. It was Warren.

I just stared at him, not saying much. He looked like he had been crying as his eyes were red and puffy. Behind him came out Julie, one of the nurses. She looked immediately at the bloody towel, "Warren already told me a bit of what had happened," Warren shifted his body away from me.

"I was hoping as I got you cleaned up you could tell me a bit more."
Before I knew it, Warren had quickly walked away, and now there was no lie to tell.

Sitting on the exam bed, I held the bloody towel wrapped tight around my arm. I didn't want to see the damage, much less wanting Julia to see it either. She came over to me with purple hospital gloves already on her hands, she also brought over alcohol pads, gauze and tape. I couldn't meet Julia's eyes. She already knew the whole story; well, part of it anyways.

Julia took my arm, "So Warren told me you had a panic attack,".

I stayed quiet. Staring at my shoes and studying the gray and white design. "Or at least that what he *thinks* happened."

I guess my arm went numb, because I hadn't even noticed that Julia had wiped my arm down with the alcohol pads which she was now letting air dry.

"I had a moment," I spoke under my breath. Figuring out how to speak with receiving minimal scrutiny from Julia.

"But now it's over and I'm fine."

Julia had finished bandaging my arm by the time I finished my statement. I slowly let my arm fall and rest on my lap. Tracing the soft bandage fabric with my fingers. Julia was cleaning up, throwing away her gloves and storing the tape. The room was silent, just me and her. I wanted everything this room came with, except Julia. The peace, quiet, cool air that I breathe into my lungs and most importantly, a feeling of safety.

“ Alright Zuri, I’m done so now you can go into the group room with the other residents.” I jumped off the exam bed with an uneasy feeling in my legs. I didn’t know where to go. I couldn’t go into the group room, I wasn’t ready to face Warren just yet. Going back to my room probably isn’t even an option since what I had done while I was in there alone, my door was probably locked. I walked out of the room anyways, touching the cold metal door handle and turning it open. Right outside the door was my psychiatrist April and therapist Devin. They didn’t even need to speak, the look on their faces and the eye contact to my bandage said it all. I started walking to the meeting room without any hesitation.

“ How do you feel Zuri?” April’s voice was stern. Somehow guilty as if she could have prevented what had happened to me.

“ I feel fine,” I still never made eye contact. “ Just tired”

Looking down at my sneakers all I could focus on was the tapping on April’s keyboard and the low humming of the heater in the room. The room was practically empty except for April, Devin and I. I wanted Warren to be here with me, he always made me comfortable in any situation. But he’s probably the last person willing to talk to me right now.

“ So Julia did report that Warren was present when the episode occurred,” Devin spoke softly.

Episode. I hate that word. It makes me feel like I’m psychotic or crazy or something. “ Yeah. Warren was there.”

“ Did he help you calm down faster?”

I shook my head yes. I could tell that April was focusing on my bandaged arm.

“ What made you feel like you had to hurt yourself?” April was stern, as if I was a puzzle she needed to quickly complete.

“ I don’t know, ” It was true. I *didn’t* know why all of that happened. It started with a simple thought, I was bored. Then it turned into something more. “ Maybe if I was occupied with something else or just sleeping it wouldn’t have happened.”

“ How do you know that ?”

“ Because I wouldn’t have been thinking about what I was thinking about.”

“ And what was it you were thinking about exactly?” Devin was quick to jot down her questions and prepare for answers.

What was I thinking about? I was thinking that my fingers looked like fat sausages and my forearms looked like a bloated dead animal. “ I was frustrated.” Devin’s pen scribbled fast in her notebook.

“ Frustrated over what?”

At this point I’ve reached my limit of verbal communication for one meeting. They knew I hated talking about my feelings, especially ones that were just recent.

The room was silent for another five minutes. I knew that April and Devin were waiting for me so say something, but I was already pushed beyond my limits.

“ So Zuri, we have decided that it’s best if you stay under closer supervision,” April didn’t even flinch.

What?

“ From now on you’ll be on status. It will only be for a few days, but it’s to make sure that you don’t have anymore episodes that you can’t cope with. And if you do someone will be there to properly assist you.”

“ But there’s nothing wrong with me,” now I’m voicing my emotions. “ I’m fine. I had *one* little moment, now you both think I’m insane.”

“ We don’t think you’re insane Zuri. We just feel that after your night terror and your most recent episode, it would be best for you to be emotionally monitored outside of our meetings on a regular basis.”

“ But there’s nothing wrong with me!” At this point I was screaming and looking both April and Devin in the eyes.

The silence was deafening. I couldn’t take it, I got up and left the room. Getting up and leaving as quickly as I could. Devin and April were probably calling me to come back, but I was too out of it to notice.

I immediately walked to where the phones were and dialed my dad's number. He *had* to get me out of here. The dial tone started humming in my ear, I hope he picks up within the next few seconds because I could hear April was coming to look for me.

"Hello?" Finally he picked up

"Dad you need to come and get me, I can't stay here anymore."

"One second Zuriah," I couldn't hear what was going on in the background, it was muffled. But I heard some other person in the back, someone I didn't recognize. It was like they were giving a sermon or something.

"Dad where are you, what's going on?"

"At the event for your sister. Zuriah I really can't talk right now"

"What event, for Whitley?"

"No, for-" He just went silent.

"Dad, an event for who?"

"Oh Zuriah, I'm so sorry you had to miss this."

"Dad, miss what?"

He was silent for another few moments, "Tessa's burial."

My eyes grew wide as my head whipped over to the entryway where the calendar was, *January 30th*. It was the day we'd scheduled to bury Tessa's ashes.

Tears filled my hot, red eyes, "You couldn't wait for me?"

He stayed silent, my eyes were brimmed with tears and my nose was already running. We had planned this event for months. After Tessa was creamated we didn't know what to do with her ashes. Until Whitley came up with the idea to bury them next to our grandma's grave. I was looking towards this final goodbye, but everyone forgot about me.

"You couldn't *wait*?" I hung up the phone and slid down the wall with my back against the cold surface. I missed my sister. The last chance to say goodbye. I just stared at my feet. Then my hands, my arms, my body. I wish that at this point I could turn to ashes. Just so I could be with Tessa and say goodbye to her. Maybe even be with her forever.

Blue Meadows Recovery Center

Where Life Is Recovered

Est. 1974

104 Willow Drive, Lahey, PA

20147

Staff to Patient Commentary

Patient ID: 604972135

Name: Zuriah Yocheved Medshovick

DOB: April 24, 1992

Today's Date: March 1, 2008

Notes: Zuriah has had another episode this time described as a "panic attack". Stating she was frustrated with her thoughts, Zuriah proceeded to self harm in terms of scratching her arms raw. Resident Warren Weisburg was present for the episode. Aiding Zuriah in calming down and refraining from hurting herself further. During an emergency session Zuriah denied wanting to hurt herself purposely and that she is okay after her small "moment". Zuriah is now being put on status for the next week, up to a week and a half to monitor her mental wellbeing round the clock. Further notes and evaluations will be taken during her time on status.

Psychiatrist: Devin Mackister

Therapist: April Rise

Status Supporter (M) : Catherine Hugels

Meal Plan: B - 1600 calories, no snacks

Admission Date: February 03, 2008

Tentative Discharge Date: N/A

Next Assessment Due:

01 Days. 00 Weeks. 00 Months

Psychiatrist Signature: Perin Mackister

Therapist Signature: April Rise

Status Support Signature: Catherine Hugels

Patient Signature: Zuriah Medshovich

Death?

Her name is Catherine. The name of the nurse that is supposed to watch my every move from now on. Well only in the morning, around curfew another person comes, but I usually never see them because I'm always asleep before hand. It was lunch and I was sitting at the smallest

table in the dining room, alone; except for Catherine. I turned my head to see Meghan glaring at me while she stabbed broccoli with her fork, since I now had to be watched at all hours of the day even at night, our bedroom door has to be left open so the night nurse can watch me from outside of the room. Which means the hallway lights shine brightly into our dark room and Meghan can no longer sleep in a bat cave.

Warren didn't even notice my existence when I walked into the dining room. He sat with others and laughed at all the jokes that were being told, but he had a look of pain and disappointment in his eyes. Probably because of what I said. I wanted to apologize, but I didn't know what to say. I turned away from everyone else and looked at my tray: two turkey slices, mashed potatoes with gravy on the side, mixed vegetables, a fruit cup, a glass of water in a glass of milk. I studied my tray, thinking of which food had the least amount of calories and how I could rearrange the food to make it seem like I ate more than I actually did. *No*, my voice screamed in my head. *Don't get those sick thoughts*. But then my eyes took notice of my thighs, looking at how much the thick, lumpy cellulite was noticeable even while wearing my leggings. *Maybe ... just a little bit less*.

I dipped the tines of my fork into the gravy then proceeded to pick up a small lump of potato. I swallowed it. Nothing but carbs and fat. I used my fork and spoon to somehow cut up my turkey slices into small pieces. "Zuri," I looked up, Catherine was stern. *No ED behaviors*. Well none that were noticeable anyways. I stopped cutting up the turkey and began to play around with my food. A bit of this and a bit of that, but nothing that was too much.

I looked at the clock and noticed how dinner was over in about five minutes. My tray looked just as full as when I first started eating. I looked over at Warren, his tray was practically clean. Just a few bites left of his mashed potatoes and vegetables, and his glass of milk was half empty. As long as I've known him being here he's never finished his tray to that point. *Ever*. He looked sick and was hunched over like he had a cramp in his stomach. Warren was trying to keep up with the conversation, but I knew he was trying to cope with his fullness.

I grabbed my own stomach. *Hunger pangs*. My head started hurting out of hunger, I felt empty. It felt... it felt good. Like I was accomplishing my job. Dr. Jethra walked in announcing it was time for post-meal group. I got up and hurried to the group room leaving my tray behind to be recorded for completion and the question of why my tray was still full.

"And what is one way we can cope with the full feeling in our stomachs after we finish eating a meal?" Dr. Jethra was happy and smiling, enthusiastic about what the rest of the day could hold. I sat by myself, away from the group to be isolated but close enough to still be considered an active and participating member of the group. Warren kept glancing in my direction thinking I wouldn't notice. Everytime I thought I saw him looking at me I turned my head to face him only for him to act as if he was never distracted. I hunched over and clenched

by stomach, “ Zuri are you alright?” Dr. Jethra sounded concerned enough to involve the whole group. I looked up, “ I’m fine”. I didn’t remember hunger pangs being this painful.

Dr. Jethra continued with the meeting, I kept my head down trying to avoid any glares or eye contact from anyone. I studied my fingers once again, they were still fat, picking at that one meal wasn’t going to be enough. I clenched my hands into fists, *why was my body so stupid ?* I started tapping my feet and wiggling my legs really fast in hopes to burn a few calories, but then Catherine sat down right next to me and whispered to me, “ No ED behaviors please”. I swear that’s all she could say. Don’t do this or don’t do that, eat more, no running up and down the hallways. She needs to focus on those who are underweight instead of those that are morbidly obese like me.

I was about to storm out of the room when someone grabbed my hand. I already knew who it was from the tight ripped skinny jeans, Warren. I looked up at him and he had a neutral look on his face. “ Come on,” he pulled on my arm for me to stand up.

“ For what?”

“ Weren’t you listening ? Dr. Jethra gave us some dumb activity to do and you were the only person left.”

I looked around to see the room completely empty except for Dr. Jethra writing on her notepad, Catherine, Warren and I. I stood up, Warren didn’t look like he wanted to be with me, but like he said, I was the only one left. We walked out of the room and into the hallway, Catherine not too far behind us. “ So, what’s the activity?”

It took Warren a few moments to answer, like he was still thinking about earlier. He was zoned out, “ Warren?”

“Huh?” He came back to the moment but his eyes were still cloudy.

“ What’s the activity?”

“ Oh. We’re supposed to go into our rooms and pick out a random object and give it to our partner and they’re supposed to make a recovery story out of it.”

“ A recovery story?”

“ Yeah like when we leave this place, it can kind of be a reminder of where we came from and what’s next to come.”

We stopped walking and Warren leaned on a wall. He was pale and out of breath, “ Are you sure you’re okay Warren?”

He waved me off, “ I’m fine just been a bit queasy since lunch. Haven’t eaten that much in years.” He walked into his room and closed the door behind him. Something was wrong, but I’m sure he didn’t trust me anymore to tell me.

I already had something in mind of the assignment. Something that could mean a lot more once it got to every single person here at Blue Meadows. I’ve wanted to leave since I first got here, now it was my chance. I quickly ran into my room and took my small book bag filling it with things. Toothbrush, soap, some clothes, and I put my jacket on and took the last thing I had from Tessa with me. I wasn’t coming back here. Much less going back home. Coming here, I had passed Tessa’s boyfriend’s house, that was only a couple of blocks from here. His name was Dylan and he said if I ever needed anything, life or death he’d help. Now was his time to live up to his promise.

I looked out the window and saw the sun was setting, I had to hurry up and get outside before all of the doors where locked for the night. I picked up my water bottle from my night stand and I was about to rush to Warren’s room when Catherine stopped me in my tracks. She stood in the doorway with her arms crossed, “ That’s all for the project?” She knew something was up

“ Yeah, and Warren has to go to the garden for the assignment.”

“ Well I have to come with you,” she stepped out into the hallway.

“ Not really, we’ll manage. Besides it’s right outside.”

“ By the exit for the campus. And you know I’m supposed to be watching you.”

I didn’t know how to tell time by just looking at the sun, but by looking out the window I didn’t have a lot of time. I just needed a distraction. I looked over to my right and saw Donna sitting on the floor. She looked like she wasn’t 100%.

“ I’m going to go get my jacket, stay here.” Catherine walked over to the nurses station, getting her jacket without taking her eyes off me.

“Come on lets-“

All of our eyes turned towards a loud bang. It was Donna’s head hitting the floor as she started to have a seizure. Catherine rushed over to Donna giving me a chance to leave. It wasn’t the best of circumstances, but I took it heading to Warren’s room.

He was already standing in his doorway waiting, far enough from the nurses station to not see what was happening. “ Hey, do you mind going and getting your jacket?”

“Why are you so perky?” His arched brow showed the little freckles on top of his eyelids.

“Because I just realized that my item is in the garden outside.”

“ Which garden?”

“ The one by the staff parking lot” *The one closest to the campus exit.*

Warren stared at me up and down. He knew something was up, he just didn’t know what it was.
“Fine”.

He quickly got on his jacket and came back out into the hallway, following me out the backdoors and near the parking lot.

I got out of the building as fast as possible, not stopping for anything.

“ Hey , could you slow down?” Warren yelled. I could hear that he was out of breath, huffing and puffing, but I didn’t stop.

My speed walk eventually turned into a run, I ran as fast as I could. Past the garden and main drive through for Blue Meadows. Everything passed by in a blur, an isolated recovery house covered by a lush urban forest soon turned into public roads with stop lights and convenience stores dotting the sides. I stopped to turn back. The sun was almost done setting. It’s purple hues gave me the feeling of an Ancient Roman victor, I was free. I couldn’t see Blue Meadows which meant they certainly couldn’t see me. All I saw was Warren, resting with his hands on his knees hunched forward.

“ Warren are you okay?” He didn’t respond, he *ran* after me. He was still just learning how to properly walk again. My heart was beating too fast for me to simply think. I started walking over to him, “ Warren !” He looked up at me. His face was pale as a ghost and his eyes looked drained of his soul. Then he just collapsed.

Reality Hurts

I had killed him. I had killed Warren. His body was lifeless and cold on the street, limbs stiff but his eyes were still open. I didn't know what to do. Nobody did as a crowd began to form around us. My knees were pierced by the small rocks that covered the deteriorating sidewalk as I fell to the ground. It seemed like it took seconds for paramedics to come, starting CPR on Warren's chest. I jumped when I thought I heard what was bones breaking, it probably was as the paramedic had to properly reach his heart to mechanically pump blood throughout his body.

I don't remember entering the ambulance. Only being in there and Warren being shocked with an AED machine. I watched as the machine showed a flatlined pulse after the first shock. One of the paramedics kept on performing CPR, but his face looked hopeless.

"Excuse me miss," another paramedic came over to me with a tablet in his hands. "Can you tell me more about your friend?"

My vision was blurry from all the tears, I choked out a few words, "He's dead."

"No he's not, we're doing our best to save him right now."

I hadn't even noticed the doors to the ambulance was open and they were pulling out the stretcher with Warren's body. Two paramedics had switched performing CPR and now a woman was now straddled over Warren still maneuvering on his chest. I was too in shock and didn't attempt to follow them into the Emergency Room. One of the paramedics stayed behind with me.

Some say that fear is so intense that your brain needs to recover for a few moments. I guess that's what my brain did as I fell forward right into the paramedic standing right in front of me.

Warren has been asleep for three hours. One of the doctors told me I was only out of it for five minutes, though it felt like hours. I stared at Warren lying in bed, he was pale and breathing softly with an oxygen mask on his face. The heart monitor was steady, but I felt like it could go at any second due to the amount of wires I saw surrounding him. *This was my fault.* It was the only thing I could think about.

I shouldn't have brought him with me.

I shouldn't have ran.

I should have stopped when he told me to stop.

I turned away from Warren and faced the window. Tears started to warm my face, I covered my face with my hand to muffle the sounds of my sniffles and sobbing. "God, I should have stopped," I wiped my face with my sweater sleeve. "Why am I so stubborn?"

I thought I had heard Warren moan. *Its too good to be true.* But then it happened again and whipped my head around to see Warren turing to sit up, struggling as he tried to push himself up with his arms. Only to fall back and end up lying down again.

I rushed over to Warren and hugged him. Warren smiled and gave a weak chuckle, “ The universe loves stubborn people.”

Tears flowed from my eyes and I tried to laugh, “ What does that even mean?”

“ I have no clue-” He took a sharp deep breath. Squeezing his eyes shut, I could hear the heart monitor going off beat.

I squeezed his hand harder, “ Warren?”

“Hm?” He slowly opened his eyes, the dull sparkle in that was once there is completely gone. He was becoming even weaker, and there was nothing I could do.

I just sat there with him. At this point, he had become unconscious again and I didn't know whether it was from being tired or too weak to stay awake. I held his hand, it was getting cold. I watched the monitor and prayed that it stayed steady. I listened to the nearly silent sound of the IV dripping into a small tube right before it went into Warren's body. I just want him to wake up.

Soon enough a nurse walked in and right behind her were Catherine, Devin, and two other staff members from Blue Meadows. *Shit*

“ So Warren will be okay. We'll just keep him here the next few days to make sure his heart rate and blood pressure are stable enough to head back to Blue Meadows.” The doctor shook everyone's hand, including mine. Warren was attempting to stay wake but dozed off every now and then.

I wasn't even aloud to say goodbye to Warren, Catherine immediately pulled me out of the room and into the hallway; guiding me to the hospital exit. I could hear Warren calling for me, but even I didn't want to turn back to face the harm I had caused.

Even Murderers Bleed

Once I entered Blue Meadows, I didn't even have to speak. My therapist and psychiatrist, the nurses, and all the residents knew what I had done. Whether it was true or not, rumors and stories spread like wildfire.

" She killed him,"

" I heard he's in a coma,"

" She forced him to run with her,"

" I think they're kicking her out,"

It wasn't normal to have a meeting this late into the night, especially emergency meetings, they'd wait until at least 5 am. But apparently this was an extremely special case.

" Leaving campus without permission, leaving campus unsupervised, leaving campus after hours, endangering personal welfare, endangering welfare of other residents, and non violent resistance against staff."

The computer's light left Devin's face as she turned the screen and looked towards me. Catherine was in there, as well as April and the head nurse.

" Do you know how many rules you've broken, the lives you endangered?" Devin didn't sound furious, just concern and stern.

I stayed quiet. All I could think about was Warren and making sure he was okay. I knew that I had hurt him, I already hated myself deep down to my soul and I didn't need anyone rubbing it in my face anymore. I knew what I had done.

" You do realize Warren's parents can take legal action against you and Blue Meadows for his injuries. Warren could have died."

A tear fell down my face and my eyes were burning. " I know".
Besides my snuffles loud and obnoxious, it was pure silence.

" Amy, the nurse will take you to the exam room to be checked out. Afterwards you'll go to your room for the night. We'll speak more about this in the morning." said Devin

I stood up slowly and immediately fell to the ground. I saw stars and the room was spinning.

" Get a wheelchair Amy," said Catherine

I didn't realize how tired I was, or how much energy I exerted until just now. My head hurt from hunger and probably dehydration. I felt like I was going to black out. And I wanted to, to wake up and all of this be a dream. When everything went dark, I hoped and prayed that it stayed that way. And that Warren would be the one waking me up from off the couch in the living room. No one else, no other way.

The exam room was cold when I woke up. I could tell an IV was in my arm from the slow constant dripping sound made into the transfer tube. I was alone in the exam room, dressed in a hospital gown and socks. The light was dim and I could barely make out the time on the clock on the wall. It looked like 10:30 am. Either way, I had been here for a while. I sat up holding on to the side rail of the bed, looking down I notice my clothes in a neat pile on a chair, and that the restraints were open. I couldn't remember, but I didn't recall feeling aggravated and restrained at some point in time.

Slowly I got on to my feet. Feeling a cold breeze from the back, I quickly clutched my gown closed. I started walking to the door, when I was pulled back by something. I looked back to see the IV pole and a long tube leading to my left arm, it was still attached to me. Turning back to grasp the IV pole, I headed towards the door, slowly turning the cold metal knob. The sunlight blinded me when I first opened the door, quickly closing it shut with just a small crack to allow my eyes to adjust. Opening the door I notice that I'm in the dead end hallway of the nurses' wing. Where they keep patients secluded and closely monitored with only one exit to the rest of the building. But with no one watching me, I head out into the hallway.

Tightly clutching the back of my gown I cautiously walk down the hall to make sure I don't flash any of the residents or nurses. Walking past the reception desk for all the nurses and doctors, I see a digital clock, 10:42. My estimate was close, yet it was so late in the morning I wondered why no one came to wake me up. Eventually I came to my room, I walked up the ramp that was right next to the stairs and turned the knob on my door, it was open. I looked back to make sure I didn't miss the IV pole while I was reaching for it. It was gone. All my fist grabbed was air.

" I've met Warren you know, he's a good kid," I turned around no one was there. I was all alone.

" Hello ?"

No one answered back.

" You really are doing it wrong you know," the same voice, this time it was coming from inside my room.

" Come on Zaza, I know you know what you're doing." Zaza. Only one person would ever call me that. Only one person who ever knew.

Tessa.

She was there, sitting on my bed.

"How?" I stuttered

She smiled

" You're dead."

"Obviously not, I'm sitting right here in front of you." She patted the space next to her, gesturing me to come and sit with her. I don't remember leaving the doorway, but immediately I was there, right next to her with a cup of hot chocolate in my hands. She was already sipping hers, I watched as the steam rolled out of the mug. It was decorated with whipped cream and cinnamon, our favorite.

" Why aren't you drinking your melted chocolate soup ?", Tessa asked.

Melted chocolate soup, haven't heard that since we were kids.

" I just don't want to -"

" Gain weight, I know I made sure it was 0 calories."

" That exists?"

" Only for us, right here, right now."

If the hot chocolate was cold enough, I probably would have gotten brain freeze from how fast I drank it. I looked up towards Tessa and smiled, she glanced towards my mug. Once again it was full, covered in whipped cream and cinnamon.

" You do know why I'm here right?" Tessa asked as she got up to close the door.

" No"

" To help you of course."

Great. My sister has come back from the dead to fatten me up.

" That 101 lb goal is really achievable, you just need to believe you can do it."

My eyes bulged out of my head. *What ?*

" You didn't think I came here to bother you did you?"

" I didn't know what you were here for."

" Come, I want to show you something."

The cup of hot chocolate in my hand dissapeared, I looked for it but it was no where to be found. I followed Tessa into the bathroom, to see a big full body mirror in place of where the bathtub was.

" Why did you stop, come in"

I quickly shook my head. " I don't want to see my reflection."

Tessa took my hand and looked me in the eye with a soft confident gleam, " This is a reflection you'll want to see."

She pulls me into the room, and sets me right infront of the mirror. At first, I see nothing. Just a giant embezzled peice of glass. Showing me the old moldy tiles that were behind it. Then I saw me. But it wasn't *me*. It was the me I wanted to be.

" Tessa, I -"

" You're shocked? Flabbergasted?" she started at the mirror with me, setting her chin on my shoulder.

" Prefect?"

I was thin, skinny, perfect. At the top of the mirror, there was a number.

" 98?"

" That was the number I was at when I became perfect, 98 lb. Maybe you could do even better than me."

The number changed to 85. *85 pounds*.

" I can't get there, I'm in a place were people are watching my every move around the clock."

" Yes you can, they can't shove food down your throat."

" They can tube me"

" Who says they'll keep doing it if your resist?"

I looked beautiful. The perfect thigh gap, my inner thighs were clear or blemishes and red rashes. My delicate arms, I could easily make a ring with my pointer finger and thumb around my upper arm and still there's space left. My stomach, caved, no fat, no bloat, my hipbones soft and out for the world to see. My ribs, prominante, showing off my dainty skeletal cage. And my face, not a mark or plumb of fat. My cheek bones, decorated my facial masterpeice. My tears signified it all.

" I love her"

" You love you Zaza."

Tessa turned me around to face her, " And all you have to do -"

I woke up.

Catherine was hovering above me when I opened my eyes, " Come on, I've let you sleep late enough."

I immediately looked towards my left arm for any signs that an IV was there, nothing. No redness or bruising, not even residue left over from the tape used to hold the IV in place.

" What are you looking at Zuri?"

" Nothing."

I was still in my old clothes from last night, before I even got out of bed I was forced to drink a bottle of blue *Gatorade*. " For your electrolyte intake," said Catherine.

She had taken off the nutrition label so I wouldn't see its contents, but I already knew one bottle was at least 150 calories. This should be enough to last me through the day. I chugged the Gatorade as fast as I could. Quickly tasting the bitterness of the cool blue drink. Catherine's eyes bulged as I finished the bottle, before she could say anything I rushed into the bathroom to get myself cleaned up. I could tell today was going to be a long day.

All eyes were on me as I sat down at the table. I had slept through the morning, just waking up in time for lunch. Verbally, the room was silent. Only the tree branches scraping the windows and the rush of wind made any sound. But the loud focus of everyone's stares made it as loud as a death metal concert. And I was part of the main act. I repeatedly dipped my spoon into my bowl of oatmeal, carefully watching the goop slip off of my spoon and back into the bowl in an attempt of avoiding eye contact.

" So how does it feel to be the Blue Meadow's murderer?" asked Meghan.

And so it begins.

" Meghan, that is highly inappropriate." rebuttled Catherine

" It doesn't matter. Besides, Warren isn't dead." added Gretchen

" Zuriah is still a murderer. And who knows, maybe she'll force someone else to run at full speed next."

I got up and left the table, hitting my shin against the chair. Catherine started calling after me, but she didn't follow. I needed just a small break from the bitch of a roommate I had. I closed the door, alone , I fell unto my bed letting out a sound I didn't even know I could make. But I was crying, I was crying hard. I didn't want to be here anymore, nobody wanted me to be. And the only person that possibly could is in a hospital because of me. Everything is my fault, and everything is because of me.

The next few moments, I was on autopilot. I knew where Meghan kept her stash, and she stash was now mine. I found a clean one, still shiny and unused. The metal was cold, but becoming warm through my fingertips. I turned of the room light and shut myself into the bathroom, grabbing towels and placing them on the sink. I was soon left alone with my body, mind, and a blade that wanted to be stained with my blood.

I tried to imagine the mirror that was in place of my bathtub in my dream. I tried imagining the body I wanted, that I was so close to getting. I looked at my current body in the mirror. My ribs visible, my hipbones beginning to protrude , my fingers somewhat thin. But my thighs still monstrous and fat, barely showing signs of a gap. I washed the red off my arms with cold water, only for new pools to start and that needed to be flushed away. After putting pressure on my arm the pools turned into puddles, the puddles into trickles, and the trickles into small droplets. I went into my drawer and put on a thick, black long sleeve shirt, I head back out into society, with numb arms, and a broken soul thats far beyond repair.

In Pieces

It was down time in the schedule. Everyone was in the living room including me and I was the center of attention. I didn't care, I hung my head down staring at the floor noticing the ever growing pain in my neck from the position I was in. I didn't care. Like my arms, my neck went numb, the puffiness from crying turned my face numb. I was no longer a human, or even alive, just a sack of breathing flesh. Trying to make it one minute at a time.

Card games were being played. Uno and spades, I was never a thought for a partner or referee. The tv was on, Spongebob singing the *campfire song song*. Catherine stayed next to me trying to get me to color in a flower coloring page with some crayons. I just shook my head no and continued to be a statue, non existent. Soon it was time for group, the tv was turned off and the cards put away. And I had to act alive.

"Zuri, why don't you tell us what's been on your mind?" I didn't notice group had started much less that it was my turn. Everyone was staring at me, I just shrugged my shoulders.

"She's thinking about who to kill next," Meghan sneared.

A few laughed. I was already dead, nothing more to lose, *right*?

"Meghan, that was inappropriate and offensive. You know she already feels guilty and didn't wish any harm." Dr. Jethra tried defending me, she was the only one who has my entire stay here.

"Well she hurt us when she said she was here for no reason and that her promblem wasn't really a problem"

"Now Meghan-"

"I'm sorry." I croaked

Everyone silenced. "I'm sorry about saying I wasn't sick enough to, I'm sorry for what happened to Warren, I'm sorry for breathing I'm -"

No tears

"I'm sorry for existing" . Tears

I got up and ran to my room, I already knew Catherine was three steps behind. I furiously twisted my doorknob over and over to acknowledge the fact that it's locked. I started kicking and punching it, clawing at something anything that I could, wailing to get into my only safe space. I felt a breeze on my arms, my sleeves had rolled down and I was exposed, I didn't care. I started clawing at my face, then my neck, then my chest. Pulling out any hair I could grab while screaming at the top of my lungs. This was it, this was the end of Zuriah Medshovick. I just needed to find a knife ... something pierced my arm, quick and painful. Then I stopped screaming, I felt weak and tired. Then I saw black.

Take Me With You

Both of my dads were there when I opened my eyes. It was freezing in the room and I grabbed for the blanket that was over me... blanket? What blanket? And why were my dads here. The light was bright in my face when I tried to open my eyes all the way, when I did I realized I was no longer in my room at Blue Meadows. I was in a hospital room. A psych ward to be specific. I could see the restraints attached to the bed, but not attached to me. Not yet.

One of my dads, Ben, caught my eye and noticed I was awake. He kissed me on the forehead and began to stroke my hair, "how are you doing sweetie?" I licked my lips preparing for a response, my throat was hoarse.

"Fine", I lied. Nothing was fine

My other dad, Jacob took notice. "do you know why you're here?"

I shook my head no.

"You said some stuff at the group that the staff felt was a threat to your safety, then you had a breakdown. They were doing to let you go through it but then saw the fresh cuts on your wrists." *My arms*. I looked down and saw them bandaged with a thin cloth.

"But how did I get here?" I don't remember willingly going.

"They had to sedate you sweetheart, then they called us and we both came as soon as possible." said Ben.

I was getting anxious. I wanted to leave this place, I wanted to go home.

"Dad, take me out of this place. Out the hospital, out of Blue Meadows. I just want to go home"

“ We can’t Zuri, you’re high risk and we can have CPS called if we do.” said Ben

“ It’s like putting your life at risk” said Jacob as he caressed my face.

But I’m a murderer. A fat, ugly murderer. I deserve to die and I can’t do that in here.

“ Well come back tomorrow Zuri, we have to go”

“ No stay, please I need you”. No tears

They both kissed me on my forehead. “ We love you sweetie,” Ben smiled.

I wanted them to take me with them, instead all I get is ... tomorrow.

Two Weeks In

It’s been two weeks and they’ve finally let me go on good behavior. Back to Blue Meadows, back to hatred and guilt. The urge to die hasn’t completely left my body nor do I feel anymore alive than when I first came here. Sitting at the table for breakfast it seemed like I was the Blue Meadows ghost. No one looked in my direction or even paid mind to my existence. I wanted attention. I wanted to say hi or receive a friendly smile. All I had were occasional glares and the lumpy-white surface of my bowl of oatmeal,

My food went cold. My oatmeal with orange slices, sunflower seeds, had went cold; my milk was warm. I didn’t have the motivation to eat, nor did I feel like I was existing, I felt dead. A zombie just walking around undercover as a living human. I wasn’t really me. My soul had died and went to go be with my sister. Wherever that was, and my body was left behind. Numb and cold.

“Zuri, you need to eat.” I was broken out of my thought when Catherine whispered to me. It had been days since I had eaten a full meal. Much less several meals a day, I was at risk of getting tubed. I didn’t care.

I turned to see the front door, looking through the window I saw an ambulance pull up. Either someone was coming or somebody was leaving. I couldn’t care less. I got up and ran, tears starting to stream down my face. I ran down into the basement and started bawling. I didn’t want to be here anymore, I curled myself up into a ball. I wanted to disappear. I hear footsteps and whispers coming from upstairs. I didn’t uncurl myself to see who it was, I just concentrated on the freezing cold floor on my body. The footsteps and whispers got louder, people were

coming. To find me ? To force me to eat? Was I going to comply or fight back? Was I-, someone touched my shoulder, a radiating warmth was felt on my back.

“Hey”, the voice was weak and cracked.

I shrugged my shoulder trying to get the sensation to go away, but the person’s hand was still there.

“ Please Zuri, look at me.” My eyes grew wide. I knew that voice. That cocky, caring, cracked voice. It was Warren.

I turned around to look at him. His eyes were teary and he had a slight smile. His face looked fuller from being in the hospital.

“ You’re back,” I croaked.

“ Yeah I am.”

“But I practically killed you” I was moments away from full on sobbing. I had literally killed the one person who cared for me here. He ran after me because he cared, his heart stopped because he cared, he was in the hospital because he cared. I took advantage of his kindness and it almost cost him his life. Warren extended his hand and helped me off the ground. I looked at Warren in the eyes, his eyes were gentle and kind. A soft blue that reminded me of puppies. I looked around him and saw that we were being watched by an audience of patients. Some were in shock, others simply glared at me, reminding me of what I had done with their looks. I let go of Warren’s hand and backed up, “ You should stay away from me before you get hurt.” A nurse had come down stairs to find the missing Blue Meadows population,

“ Everyone, it’s time for group, ” the nurse said firmly. I took that as my chance, I pushed through the crowd and headed towards the group room. Walking, just in case Warren decided to follow me, and sat in the group room in the darkest, quietest corner. Hoping my dark skin would help me blend into the darkness behind me so that I would go unnoticed.

“Change,” Dr. Jethra said. “It is inevitable but it is always adaptable”

Everyone was silent listening to Dr. Jethra. Warren had tried to sit next to me but everytime he did I moved. We moved as many as five times, only to end up in our original seats. We were both called out by Jennifer for playing musical chairs during the group session, Warren took the blame.

“ Can anybody tell me about a change in their life that has happened recently?”

“ I was admitted into Blue Meadows,” Donna said in monotone.

“ That’s right, and how have you been feeling these last few days?”

“Tired and homesick.”

Dr. Jethra nodded signaling that she was listening and wrote something down in her notepad, “ Anyone else would like to share?”

Warren raised his hand, “ Yes Warren?” Dr. Jethra was enthusiastic about her next volunteer.

“ I’m back here in Blue Meadows after a while-”

“ Wanna tell everyone where you came from and why you got there in the first place?” asked Meghan.

“ Shut up,” I growled. I could see her staring straight at me.

“ It was an accident,” Warren said. He was trying to defend me, “ I was looking out for a friend and I got carried away.”

Warren had gotten up and walked over to me , squatting in front of me so we were eye level, “ I just hope my friend forgives me”

He’s really trying to- “ Me forgive you?” I was confused as ever. Warren was acting like the situation was reversed.

“ Yes. I put you in danger and myself”

“But I’m the one that ran away. I’m the one that lead you to chase me, I-”

“ Instead I should have told a nurse rather than running after you.”

“Warren, please sit down” Dr. Jethra advised.

Warren listened and went back to his seat, Meghan still glaring at me from her seat right next to Warren.

Dr. Jethra cleared her throat, “ Would anyone else like to share a change they endured?”

Meghan raised her hand quick, as if trying to catch a fly hovering above her, “ I’d like to go Dr. Jethra,” Meghan glared at me as if she was trying to search my soul.

“ One change I’ve experienced is dealing with the near loss of a friend, Warren Wiseburg,” she stared right at me, putting on a show as she did, crocodile tears and all. “ And knowing his murderer is still here at Blue Meadows-”

I didn’t even notice myself get up, the next thing I knew I was shoving Meghan to the ground. My head was spinning from getting up too fast and then I fell back on my butt. The nurse rushed up to Meghan, she was unconscious. My eyes bulged out of my head, my hands shook as I brought them up in front of me. Warren took my hands and looked at me in the eyes, “ Come with me” he mouthed. I followed.

Safe Haven

Warren shut his room door behind us. I went and sat on his bed, still shaking from what just happened.

“ Look at me Zuri,” He took his hand and lifted up my face so our eyes met. “ You’re going to be okay.”

Tears welled up in my eyes, “ You almost died because of me, Meghan ... s-she’s unconscious because of what I did. I’m a monster!”

“ No you are not. You are scared and confused just like the rest of us, trying to make sense of being in this place and naturally trying to find a way out”

Both of his hands were not on my face, his thumbs stroking my cheeks. “ But I almost-”

“ That wasn’t your fault. I shouldn’t have been running because of my anorexia, I collapsed because of my anorexia, I almost died *because* of my anorexia. None of it has anything to do with you. Just like how you almost fainted just now, that was because of your eating disorder.”

How, how could this guy still even want to be in the same room as me? He made me seem so innocent, as if I’d done nothing wrong. As if I were the only pure snowflake on a pile of blood covered snow. I came closer to me, our noses close enough to touch, he smelled of oranges and body wash, his blue eyes turning red from pain and suffering induced crying.

“ I’m sorry Warren, I-”

“ Don’t-” a tear ran down his face, “ I’ve had a lot of time to think about things while I was in the hospital. Me running, why I ran and realizing how dangerous it was. But then I realized something. I’d do it all again if it meant keeping you safe. “

I wasn’t ready for what came next. Warren came even closer, to the point where our lips touched. His lips were warm and soft, he began to kiss me as if this was his last chance. So did I, I kissed back. Placing my hands on his shoulders I began rubbing his right arm. Taking in every embrace and feeling of warmth I could get. One of his hands moved to my waist and I put my hand on top of his. But then I pushed him away.

“ I’m sorry, did I go too far?” Warren’s face was red as a tomato

“ No, I just ... I just need some air” I lied. I was breathing better than I ever had in my entire life.

“ Alright, I guess we should get back.” Warren started walking towards the door.

“ Wait. I’m not ready” That wasn’t a lie

Warren chuckled, “ I guess we can stay a few more minutes”

Don't Eat

I’ve always liked pizza. The pepperoni and cheese, the crispy crust, but it’s never liked me back. Warren caressed my back, touching it faintly. Delicately with the tips of his finger. Somehow it reminded me of the way Tessa would hug me. Ever so tightly, I thought my eyes would bulge out of my head. Then there she was, “Tessa?”

“*Who’s Tessa*”? It was Warren’s voice. I could hear him but all I saw was Tessa in front of me. She stood there in the clothes that put her in before she was cremated. A white dress, almost as if she was getting married to her grave. The worms and parasites as her guests. Her eyes were sunken and her ribs jutted out of the tight clothing, making her seem more skeletal than human.

“ What are you doing, Zuri?”

I felt embarrassed, my sister here while I was messing around with Warren. “ What are you doing here?”

“Zuri who are you talking to?” asked Warren.

“ You’ve gained almost five pounds in the last two weeks. You’re failing”

I never fail, not at anything. “ But I’ve been restricting more”

“Exercise”

“Zuri, are you okay?” Warren pleaded

“I’m trying” I pleaded

“Try harder, your getting fat. Like a pig. Blowing up to the size of a parade float all because you can’t stop at three bites.”

I looked down at my stomach, my eyes widened. It was growing , swelling like a balloon. My thighs followed, getting bigger with every breath I took. I started stretching my skin, trying to create a puncture that would let the air out of the ever swelling balloons.

“This is your future, Zuri. Fat and unlovable, so heavy you can’t even get out of bed. I’m trying to help you.”

I scratched harder and faster, no air was escaping. Only blood and ripped off skin.

“Listen to her Zuri, listen to the voice in your head telling you to stop. All you have to do is-”

My room door bust open.

Warren sat in the nurse’s room with me. Holding my hand as they put bandages over my thighs and stomach. I was due for an emergency meeting with my psychiatrist and therapist. I wasn’t going. I had rights to refuse.

“ What happened Zuri?”

I stared at the floor, my mouth hung open. I could feel pain, a crick in my neck and back from the way I was sitting. I didn’t care.

“Who’s Tessa?”

Too many questions, I thought. Not enough answers. How could I exercise without anybody noticing? How could I count my calories without making it seem like I’m openly doing it?

I could feel the bandages being wrapped around my thighs in motion, every fabric sheath going around my limb, snug, but not tight enough to cut off circulation. Devin and April walked into the room, Warren put up a fight. Wanting to stay with me and hold my hand. But soon enough he complied.

Devin sat down, “ You’re missing your sister I see”

The floor radiated the light from the lightbulbs on the ceiling, casting a spell into my eyes.

“ Zuri, you have to tell us what happened”, April seemed to be in a hurry, then I noticed why. I turned my calcified neck to see the clock. It was dinner time, my next chance to make it right for Tessa, for myself. To stop the swelling permanently. So I stood up off the bed and walked towards the door.

“ Let’s eat. Shall we?”

Tessa sat next to me. She had brought her own chair. Everyone else was already eating. Laughing, chatting, enjoying themselves, trying to act normal around their food. I stared down the food. Mac ‘n cheese, chicken, broccoli, two dinner rolls, milk and some apple juice. Warren sat in front of me, gesturing to me to eat. He had already eaten a quarter of the food on his plate. I could feel Tessa’s breath on my cheek, it was cold. Frozen almost, she whispered to me, “only three bites”.

I looked at my choices and chose wisely. One bite of chicken, one bite of mac ‘n cheese. One bite of broccoli. I was finished with dinner.

“Zuri, try and eat more” Warren sounded concerned, he drank another sip of his milk, leaving a milk mustache on his face. I chuckled, I should’ve heeded him when he was at his worst. Taking notes, tips and tricks on how to get the delicate, skeletal frame he once had. Now he was out of his wheel chair, he had gained weight and was starting to eat again. He was getting fatter, he was swelling up, yet, he did nothing.

“ Don’t become like him Zuri,” Tessa whispered again. “ Don’t. Eat”

I didn’t.

End of Round One

Her voice was always with me. Always in my head. Every meal, every therapy session, every secret moment I snuck with Warren she was there. I never wanted her to leave. It was after dinner, Dr. Jethra was running late for MST, so that left Warren and I time to be alone together.

Warren took his hand and caressed my cheek. I dug my face into his palm, taking up the warmth with each passing moment.

“Your getting sicker,”

I looked up at him, “No I’m not, I’m fine”

“Zuri, look at yourself! You went down at least two pants sizes, you never complete your meals, plus I overheard nurses talking about tubing you.”

I looked at his eyes, he looked scared. I caught my reflection in his blue eyes, my cheek bones jutted out of my face and my eyes began to look sunken. I had never gotten this far. Ever. *It was perfect.*

“I’m sorry Warren, I’m just going through a really rough time right now,” I lied

Warren smiled with relief, “you need to start eating again, I know it’s tough. But you’ll make it through, I promise.”

Warren was like the poster boy for recovery. I remember when he first came in, frail and he couldn’t keep his eyes open because he lacked basic energy. Now he went from a extra small to a small, almost a medium. He goes on supervised walks around campus and is on level 3 ... I used to be on level 3. Now I’m nearing level 1. No matter, my body will be perfect when I’m done .

“Zuri, I need to tell you something-“

“Good evening everyone,” Dr. Jethra walked into the room. Everyone stopped their conversations and put down their cards to pay attention.

“Today’s group will be about body image” Dr. Jethra went back out of the room and came back with a giant mirror. It was big enough so that you could see your entire body when positioned correctly.

“Now, first I would like someone to come up and stand in front of the mirror and tell me what they see.”

Warren volunteered. He stood up and approached the mirror, standing just close enough so you could see the top of his head and his shoelaces reflecting in the mirror.

“ I see me,” Warren stated

“ Okay, Warren, now tell me what’s special about your body”

“ It allows me to walk places and digest my food”

“Good, now tell me how those things were impacted by your ED”

Warren paused for a moment, “ Before I could barely stand, much less sit up without feeling weak and dizzy. If I ate too much, which was really a normal amount of food, I’d throw up because my body couldn’t handle it. But now I can, I’m on the verge of jogging and I can eat and keep it down because my body is so normalized. I *feel* normalized.”

Warren spoke from his heart, I could tell. He started to tear up as he sat back down next to me. He looks at me sniffles, “ I’ve come too far to give up now right?”
I nodded. He has come too far, and I had such a long way to go.

Everyone had gone except for me, it was my turn to look into the mirror and tell Dr. Jethra what I saw. I stood up and immediately fell back down, black spots covered my vision and the room swirled like a flushed toilet. Warren rushed over to me, “ I’m fine.” I lied again

“Are you sure?” he asked

“ Yeah, I just got up too fast”

On my second attempt I got up slowly and walked over to the mirror. My heart was pounding hard and fast, weirdly too. I looked at the mirror and looked at my reflection. Immediately I began to swell. My stomach, arms and thighs growing like a balloon. I gasped and took a step back from the mirror. I must have looked terrified because Dr. Jethra stood up and covered the mirror with a blanket.

“ Have a seat Zuri,”

I turned around , someone’s hand was holding on to my arm guiding me. I didn’t get the chance to see who it was before I lost consciousness.

Round Two

I dreamt of Tessa. Nothing but skin and bones, we were in a field of lavender, my favorite flower. She was picking lavender then handed it to me. I looked down at the flowers as I was receiving them, when I looked back up it wasn't Tessa but Warren. He smiled and kissed me deeply and passionately, but as we kissed he began to change. His eyes sunk and his cheek bones jutted out of his face, his ribs poked out from his tight shirt and his fingers became sticks. We stopped kissing, I looked into his eyes and there was nothing there. Just a pitch black void leading into his skull.

"You have to eat. Come with me and I can help you."

His hand was out stretched and I was about to grab it until someone grabbed my hand from behind.

"Come with me and you'll be perfect forever," it was Tessa.

I was between two people I loved. Both wanted to help. I start to go to Tessa, looking back Warren begins to fade. I try and grab him but he slips through my fingers. He mouthed to me, *you're going to die*. Then he was gone. Tessa grabbed my face with both of her hands and forced me to look at her.

"Warren means nothing, we'll be perfect together. Just you and me."

It was cold when I woke up. I heard the sounds of monitors going off. One thing I noticed was that I was in pain, my nose was in so much pain. I reached up to rub it gently when I noticed something coming out of it. A tube, they tubed me. I sat up and looked around. I was in my bedroom at blue meadows. I was hooked up to a feeding machine that was filled with a khaki-colored liquid. I didn't authorize this, I didn't agree to this. I pulled off my sheets and began walking, I was unsteady at first, but I eventually found my balance. I walked towards the door and opened it up, Warren was standing there with flowers in his hand, lavender. He smiled when he saw me.

"I brought you your favorite," he said as he handed me the lavender.

"But I never told you, did I?"

"You talk in your sleep." I chuckled and took the flowers from his hand as I gestures for him to come in.

We sat on my bed, Warren gently kissed my forehead as he sat. I traced the tube that was stuck to my face with medical tape.

"Were you there?" I asked quietly

"What do you mean?"

" Were you there when they tubed me?"

Warren lost eye contact, " I begged them not to, saying that I could get you to eat but they said it was long overdue. I'm sorry"

"Don't apologize"

"But I have to. I know you wouldn't have wanted this."

He was right. I didn't want this. Nor did I want to be here any longer. I got up and began walking towards the door.

"Where are you going?"

" To my psychiatrist so that I can sign discharge papers."

I looked back at Warren to see his eyes bulging out of his head, " You can't get discharged. They just tubed you!"

" I am a legal adult, perfectly capable of making my own decisions." I walked out of the room confidently, with my plan in tow I couldn't be denied.

Round Two and A Half

"What do you mean I can't leave?" Now my eyes were bulging out of my head. I was crying in Devin's office, trying to understand how my plan failed.

" You're too sick to leave. They just had to tube you Zuri, and I'm thinking about having you wheelchair bound."

"But I'm 18. That means I am a legal adult who is allowed to make their own decisions."

" Yes, but the policies state that you must be 18 and over, plus be mentally competent and on a distinct level of wellness which you are not."

I rolled my eyes with tears streaming down my face. At this point it seems like I'll die here.

It was time for body image group with Catherine, who was substituting for another therapist. The group was almost over but I decided to sit in on it anyways. I had to drag my feeding machine around with me, and I was too weak to lift it up so I stayed at the top of the steps that lead into the livingroom.

"Alright everyone that's it for -" Catherine had spotted me.

"Hello, Zuri. Would you like to join us?"

I nodded my head and sat down on the step. My machine clicked and started making this whirring sound. *It was feeding me.*

"Okay Zuri, we were just finishing up an activity that had to do with body image. Basically, you needed to make up a word and share what it meant and how it defines your body as a whole. Would anyone like to share their word?"

Warren raised his hand, I caught a glimpse of a twinkle in his eyes. A fiery passion that I hadn't noticed before.

"My word was hope-ited. I'm hopeful about my body, that it's going to get better and I'm excited for what it's able to do again." He was proud. Proud of his accomplishments and proud of his progress.

"Wonderful, Warren. Zuri, can you make up a word that describes you?" asked Catherine.

I had to think for a moment. My thoughts were in between the sounds of the feeding machine and Catherine's question. But then I remembered my theme of my stay, that I wasn't sick. I'm still not sick, I'm improving myself. They think I have anorexia, which I don't. It's like I'm a fake anorexic...

"I've got it Catherine. My word is fakeorexic."

Catherine looked puzzled, "Would you like to explain your word more?"

"I'm not sick, everyone keeps saying I am but I'm not. A fake anorexic, that's what I am".

Everyone looked baffled

"For Christ's sake, Zuri!" yelled Gretchen. Her face was red, "Look at you. You're tuned and you're clothes look huge on you. You're probably the sickest person here!"

I stood up quickly, "no I'm not". Then I immediately fell back down, Warren got out of his seat to catch me.

"See, she can't even stand without getting dizzy"

The room was spinning in circles. And my heart... my heart felt, *tight*. I collapsed on the floor and started to grab at my chest, my hearing was going in and out so was my vision. All I could hear was Warren screaming.

Then I saw Tessa.

Lavender, Again (Warren's POV)

I've always hated cemeteries. The eerie feeling it gives you and how it sends a chill down your spine as soon as you see it. The car ride was silent on the way to Charlow's Cemetery. I held a bouquet of lavender in my hands... It was her favorite flower. I couldn't help but cry at the service, even when I was giving my speech I was choking up.

They say that only a small handful of people actually die from their eating disorders, most of them recover to some extent. I wonder if she could have survived. The emotional, mental pain, and agony. I know she was suffering. Everyday was an even greater pain than the day before. I should have been there, been a greater friend, been a person she could tell all of her secrets to. But no, I guess I was just "that guy".

I walked with her casket on my shoulders. It was so light as if nothing was inside of it. I placed it down gently and got back my bouquet of lavender. I put it on top of the casket. Weeping as I did. Sobbing filled the air from her two dads and her family. I could only imagine.

I watched as the case was lowered into the ground. My face now irritated from wiping my eyes with my sleeve. My lavender had fallen to the side of the casket and was now in between the casket and dirt wall. I wished there was some way I could have fixed it. Everyone started to head back to their cars in order to reach the recessional on time. I stayed back and watched as dirt was poured over the casket, poured over the lavender.

All the fault and guilt had seemed to land on my shoulders. I should've had her eat more, I should have encouraged her to love herself. Anything that could have prevented this situation. I could've done more, but I didn't.

So this is our last goodbye, I think. I never thought we'd be here. But here we are. You were my best friend at Blue Meadows, you meant the world to me. Now that you're gone, I can barely stand on my own two feet. My heart is broken beyond repair, but I know that you're in a better place so that gives me at least some comfort. I love you. Zuri.