

"I'm just trying to do my jigsaw puzzle before it rains anymore"

-The Rolling Stones

Her close coworkers told her she thinks too much, and her family told her she needed to be medicated. Did she? Maybe she just needed to better implement the coping skills Dr. Richrath had been teaching her. Deep breathing. Pausing.

Either way, Justine sat looking out the rain-blurred window with nothing but her thoughts. She always had her thoughts. The drops tapped the window, a few at a time, annoying her. The grass soaked up the water and turned greener. Everything was green. She'd have to cut the grass when everything dried out. The lawn was getting tall again. She winced at the thought of having to walk up and down her yard pushing four wheels artificially moved by a man-made engine.

The phone rang. She didn't answer. She never answered unless someone was getting back to her. She picked up her phone to identify the caller. It was her sister, Amber. Amber, the star child of her small family. Amber, with her model looks and engineer temperament. Amber, everyone's favorite. Not now. She'd call her older sister back later. She knew Amber was checking on her. Checking to see how she was feeling since she had only been home from the hospital for three weeks. Justine was probably another task on a to-do list for Amber's day. Amber meant well, but how can you have a healthy relationship with someone who is everything you are not and everything you want to be? It simply cannot work.

When Justine called her back, the conversation would probably go like this:

Justine would say, "Hey, I see you called."

Amber would answer, "Hey, sis. Just calling to see how you are doing."

"I'm fine. The medication seems to be working. I don't know. I can never tell."

"Well, you sound good."

"It's an act."

Amber would start in with, "Now don't say shit like that. You know what you need to do. Put to use the tools Dr. Richrath has given you to work with. She is a cutting-edge doctor with all kinds of experience in helping people with - you know."

"Yeah, yeah, yeah. So, how are you? How's Jason and Ryan?"

"We are good. Listen, I've got to run. I'm taking Ryan to soccer practice. We were thinking about having a cookout for Father's Day a week from Sunday."

Blah, blah, blah. The perfect sister with her perfect family going to a wet, green soccer practice. How boring. How... typical. Did Amber ever have an original thought in her head, or was she a genetically superior robot who was programmed to do the right thing in every circumstance? Was she human? If so, did she ever struggle with her inherently depraved nature that, like everyone else's, was absolutely self-centered, or was hers so deranged around being good that she simply did the right thing so that everyone around her would be happy and like her? Did she ever sin? She had never been drunk. Was not once depressed. She even waited to have sex until she married Jason, her perfect husband. Where was her struggle? Where was her shame? Did her compass ever point south?

She pulled the afghan off of her lap, folded it sloppily, and laid it on the chair in the corner. She walked to the couch and sat down as she searched for the remote control. Pushing the on button, she began partaking in her favorite drug. The nonresistant, culturally acceptable, legal form of escapism drew her attention to itself. The images on the screen melted any proactive thoughts she had like butter in a warm pan. She simply stared and suddenly did not feel alone. The man on the screen was talking to her. She listened for five minutes and decided what she was watching was boring. She turned the channel.

“Oh, please love me like before

Stay, stay, stay,

Oh, don't show me the door

Let me stay, stay, stay”

A cute Latino pinup boy dressed in a white suit and turquoise collarless shirt was crooning lament to his lover. He wanted to stay with her, but she wanted to leave him. Everybody leaves. Everyone left her, and she understood why. Who would share the thoughts in her head on a consistent basis? It was just too much. The thoughts were too much for her, so how could she expect a partner to listen to them as well? She would always be alone.

She turned the channel because the song was making her think. The music was sad, a minor key of desperation in a vast open land of loneliness. The words were pleading, and she knew that feeling all too well. “I don't know why I did it. Please don't leave me. I love you,” or, “I'm sorry, Mom. I don't know why I stole the candy bar from the store. I'm so sorry. I'll be good. I'll never do it again. Please don't ground me. Please don't punish me.”

The afternoon ticked by in front of the television. Eventually she found a funny movie. She caught it at the beginning, and it took her away, away from herself. She transcended her thoughts as the movie did what all great art does - it relieved Justine's suffering. The healing power of a story catapulted her out of herself and into the conflict of another. She was comforted as she watched the protagonist face obstacles much larger than she ever would. With each conflict, the main character eventually rose above their circumstances and succeeded in getting what they wanted in the end. What did she want? If she was a character in a story, what would she want? She didn't know, and at this point of her story, anyone telling it would not know either. Was she okay with not knowing what she wanted? Is it an ambivalence we can all sit in for now?

The alarm on her phone went off. It was time for medications.

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