

the escape

THERE WAS A SUBTLE KNOCK ON MY DOOR. It was supposed to be a routine Saturday morning, so that random tapping set off alarms in my ever-anxious and growing teenage cerebrum. But this was no typical Saturday nor setting.

“Want to go to the mall?” asked Adam, both breathy and nonchalant, through the newly ajar door. Adam was almost twenty, and that fact alone made him an attractive target for my barely ready-for-the-world sixteen-year-old self. How he clearly didn’t care about anyone or anything else was also a significant draw. Not to mention the fact that he was constantly pushing boundaries further and further than he was supposed to. Especially in a place like this.

“What? Now? I don’t think we’re allowed to go anywhere.” The words glided off of my tongue through the stark-white room that matched my stark-white existence. My mind had already decided that I was going to go.

“It’s Saturday. You know nothing ever happens here on Saturdays,” Adam said. “No one will even know that we are gone. We’ll be back before your parents come, for sure.”

Adam was right. Nothing ever happened on Saturdays. Even though there was an urgency to wake us up at six a.m. and get us showered, dressed, and “appropriate” for the day. Nothing else was going to happen.

During the week, they inundated us with appointments and learn-to-be-a-wheelchair-person classes (or perhaps that’s just what I called them?) and doctors alike that kept time moving in its obvious forward fashion. However, the weekends were quite different. There were no doctors, no appointments, and nothing to distract me from the fact that I was living in a hospital.

Although well-thought-out in nature, my apartment-like hospital room was nothing more than that—a patient room with a mini-fridge and a pullout couch that was never comfortable enough for anyone to sleep on. A fancy lampshade that reminded me of some sort of Oz character, bold yet begging for any visitor not to see the truth behind the curtain. *What is that common saying? Something about a curtain or cloak over your eyes?* I imagine that it is meant as a reference to hide the truth and somehow soften the reality of the person behind those eyes. That saying is what I think of when I look at the lampshade.

I had made this room my home for about a week or so, but I could say with complete confidence that it was an enormous upgrade from my previous hospital digs. They had promoted me to what the staff referred to as the “East Side” because my body was healing enough to reveal some sort of light at the end of a long and underground tunnel that any claustrophobic person would absolutely refuse to drive through.

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The “West Side” was the side of the hospital that you lived in when you first got there. You were hooked up to machines like a puppet that had completely lost its way. Over there, you shared a room with another patient that you shamefully hoped was worse off than you and had little family to bother you. Okay, you don't *really* wish anyone was worse off, but it's so hard not to compare your injuries and malfunctions with those so closely confined with you. There was a standard blue-colored worn, cotton curtain that attempted to divide your life from that of the person laying two feet away from you. It rarely worked at all.

Lucky for me, my lungs had healed, and I was gaining more strength, so I had found my way to the more sophisticated and progressive portion of the hospital. Sophisticated because there were actually things, like the lampshade, to make it feel like home. *Home, really?* They were still waking me up at six a.m. on a Saturday morning to help me get ready for my day of—*what?*

But now was my chance. Adam had asked me to get out of there, and I was going to accept his request, just not too enthusiastically. I didn't want him to think that I was a dork or anything. But before I had the chance to even overthink it, we were out the door.

My room was next to the elevator, across the floor from the nurse's station. Hearing the nurses gabbing in the distance, I knew we were safe to board. As the elevator door drew its ever-delayed close, I thought of all of those things one shouldn't be thinking when trying to be daring. *What were we going to do when we got outside? How were we going to get to the mall? Should I tell Adam that I've never been able to push up that hill next to the hospital in class yet? Were people at the mall going to stare at us?*

People at the mall *were* going to stare at us.