

“Manics in the Four Seasons”

I woke up to stare at the stark white ceiling and took a look at my dark brown skin, contrasted against the white sheets.

Today, I was getting out. Two years, four months and nineteen days I have spent in Sturgess Psychiatric Hospital for Ladies. There were some boys here too, not that many, five. I fooled around with all of them - a couple of the orderlies too. Despite my repeated viewings of *Girl, Interrupted* when I was a teen, none of the boys here are as cute as Jared Leto.

I rolled over to see Amber still asleep. I forgot why she was in here. Arson? Abuse issues? Alcohol? Witchcraft? Racism? We do not really talk much. I would wave at her or give a slight nod, which she countered with rolling her big blue eyes and flipping her blonde hair. I would sometimes ask if she wanted to join the book club we had, never did. She apparently did not like to read. (I could never understand people who despised reading.) But I knew that Amber was not getting out for a long time. Probably why she had the attitude.

There was a knock at the door, it was Andrew, the orderly. He was the second one I had, in the broom closet. Talked about his girlfriend and cried after. It was pathetic, even more pathetic on my part, I fucked him for a second time. He didn't cry that time, just hung his head in shame when I was done going down on him. It completely ruined the moment, one that was not that remarkable to begin with. He was stocky, round baby face, had a stammer that developed when he had to speak to people. “Hey, it's time for your ch-ch-checkout. You have to leave by 10:30.” He could have only been addressing me, but kept his eyes to floor when he had to speak.

“Was I really that lousy of a lay?” I asked.

He jerked up and looked up at me, his hands wringing, “What?! No! It's just that I have a g-g-g-girlfriend. And no one is supposed to know about - about what we did!”

I just chuckled, “Come on Andy, I'm just messing with you. I'll start getting ready.” Andrew left, his bloated red face, blanketed with beads of sweat. I might actually miss that fuckface.

After the door closed, I collapsed back down on the bed and stared at the ceiling again. The last day at Sturgess meant, getting up, tidying the bed, collecting personal affects, meeting the head psychiatrist, some pamphlets with life advice: diet, exercise, therapy, contact information so they can keep up with us crazies, safety precautions, then release. I just needed to get it over with. *Just get it over with.* I have said that to myself everyday since the day I got here.

“You're finally getting out.” Amber had rolled over to face me, she had been facing the wall in the fetal position. She smiled, but did not actually say it with empathy. “It's about time.”

“It is.” I had finally gotten up now, a victory struggling out of bunched up sheets, preparing to brush my teeth and shower.

“You gonna give the guys another go-around before you are out of here for good? Or they could have you all at once? What’s that called - gangbang, bukkake? Dr. Johnson would love that. Something to add to your file.”

This was longest she had ever spoken to me. So, she was probably in here for slut-shaming. Yes, my dalliances with the Sturgess’s opposite sex was really no secret to most of the patients or staff. I wasn’t the only one who got off, I was just caught the most. And I’m not in here for a sex addiction - that is what some of the people here thought, but it’s not. I did not reply to Amber’s suggestion and just went to the bathroom.

We are not supervised when we are in the bathroom, but they take precautions. No mirrors here, there is one in the main hallway, which everyone here shares. And yes, there are fights over the mirrors. Broken up by orderlies. I have never been in one.

I have gotten into other fights, but not over the mirror.

Three fights in two years, not too bad. Some girls here get more than that in one week. My first opponent: a schizophrenic named Claire who scratched my face when she found out I gave Julian The Manic Depressive, a blowjob. Claire was convinced that they were married and she accused me of being a floozy, harlot and some other old-timey insults.

The second challenger? A three-hundred pound bulimic who really was not good at being bulimic. She thought I had stolen her croissant.

A fucking croissant.

A fucking croissant.

A fucking croissant.

She charged at me like a NFL linebacker and pinned me to the ground. But then the running took a toll on her and she was out of breath and needed to take a break. I seized the opportunity and punched her in the head. The staff separated us, but I lunged again.

The third and final contender? A young nurse, second week on the job who snuck outside to smoke a cigarette in the bitter cold when she caught me with Spencer a paranoid addict, fucking doggy-style. He was high on OxyContin and I was drunk on desperation. She panicked and frustrated, flipped, dropped her cigarette separated up, put me up against the brick wall and slapped me. I shoved her into the snow then proceeded to hit her with a snowball in the face and crotch for cockblocking us. She got fired because it was her second time fighting with a patient and I got solitary confinement for three days. Spencer got his hopes up for a threesome that could never come.

But that was some time ago, I had not hit or fucked anyone in Sturgess for at least nine months. The nurses and doctors said they believed I was making real progress, but sometimes I did not feel like I was, just celibate. I was going to leave Sturgess and come back to a family that never visited, who dropped me off and never looked back. And now, they were going to scoop me in their arms and say I was back from my visit referring to my time away at Sturgess as ‘charity work’ to put on a front for all their friends. Truth is, I really did not want to leave

Sturgess. It was the first time since the day I was born that I had ever experienced stability or peace. I was fearful about what was going to happen to me when I finally checked out.

I jumped in the shower, thinking of ways to stay: stab a pyro with scissors, bite an orderly on the ear, scribble pseudo-psychotic nothings or feces on the white walls. There was no point of that, mother would not be happy about her little debutante poking the eyes out of manics after fucking them.

She would never make the attempt to pick me up to make up for her lack of visitation to upstate New York to check in the Sturgess Psychiatric Hospital for Ladies, people will talk, but everyone of her friends knew why I was here. Carl, our driver would make the trip. However, I knew that when I returned to the city, she would have a small party for me with all of her high society friends, high on coke, Percocet and delusion. She would thank all of the people who put up with my shit or as my mother would say, 'an assortment of predicaments'. Hypothetically, if she took the trip herself, she would emerge wearing a fur coat and 'home baked cookies' that were really made by a neighbor's maid.

I guess you are probably wondering how I even got into Sturgess, I am actually wondering that too. It's because I am a skinny, homewrecking, croissant-thieving floozy. I do not have a sex addiction, I don't think I have an anger problem. Also, I am 22 what the hell else do 22 year olds think about besides fantasizing about money, getting hype and fucking?

Before coming to Sturgess, I was the young debutante in a high class, ritzy neighborhood. I lived in an Upper East Side penthouse. My family has a lot of money. I went to the best schools, an expensive private school, the best food (thanks to a personal chef), a chauffeur, the charity galas, the jet-setting trips, the absentee parents who funneled money to me to spend it, my own apartment at 16 and endless opportunities of fellow trustifarians offering me lines and lines of coke.

High-achieving parents pressure their children to be high achievers, and I was no exception. So I was pressured to attend an elite, expensive private school. And I got in to most of the ones I applied to, but I decided to stay in state and just take a town car to classes. Mom and Dad sent the check, including a little extra gift for the university's president and I was on my way. I did okay academically but, other than that - every fucking moment was absolutely miserable. I went to a psychiatrist who diagnosed me with adjustment depression:

"What the fuck is adjustment depression?"

The doctor, in her calming voice explained, "It is an anxiety and sense of depression that comes with the failure to adapt with a changing event."

"So basically I am a stubborn bastard?"

"To put it harshly, yes."

She did not even give me any medication; her suggestion to change my surroundings, like attend another university or go backpacking through Europe. That was the suggestion at Sturgess too. Change my surroundings, which had been ingrained and the same for the past 20 years. That shit was not going to happen overnight. When I returned from the first visit, I was going to ask mom or one of her Park Avenue Lackeys for any painkillers that they doctor shop for. High-achievers are supposed to be healthy and should not get caught shopping for OxyContin at the bottom of their Birkin's bags. Snuck a few pills and chased them down with my favorite Argentinian red wine.

So, I began to skip classes, then failed them, partied too much, got groped by frat boys under the influence of pot and misogyny, girls teased me (does that ever stop though?), fucked a married professor, constantly got pressures from a father who had no other interest in me, the university president seeing if we would make another donation to keep me in school. I failed out of every class and should have been kicked out.

The first year was over, and I failed, but I was too much of a coward to tell the family, so I made a call to tell them to send over money for my second apartment which I argued for to be closer to campus and not have to reveal my university dismissal. I also gave the president a bonus to not make a phone call home. He pocketed the money and then said I could not re-enroll due to my poor standing.

That next fall when I was supposed to be my sophomore year, I tried to sneak into the library. There were no windows to scale so I went through the front door, shuffling behind a bunch of artsy kids sporting harem pants and rainbow-colored hair. Their IDs all gave a little green beep and let them pass. Mine gave a hard, red buzz like the sound when you get the wrong letter in Wheel of Fortune. A dowdy student worker got up and said, "Um, you could come over here and I will check your ID."

I walked over to the desk, she tried to run it through three times and even wiped it on her pants, like a declined credit card. She then manually typed my name. She looked up from her glasses like a pretentious twat and said, "You are not allowed on the premises. You need to leave before I have to call security."

To which I replied by screaming: "Don't you know who the fuck I am?! I give you all this money and this is how you treat me! Let me in here, you fat, elitist bitch! Let me in!" I attempted to kick down the metal guards when I saw her scream for campus security. Then I lunged at her and was interrupted by three security guards who grabbed me mid-air, kicking and screaming. I scratched the officers' faces, spit at them, cursed their mothers. They called the police where my mother had to come down from here afternoon brunch to come get me.

She made a hefty donation to the NYPD and to my university so they would not press charges. I was really looking at about 7 years in prison for trespassing and "police assault". After finding out about me dropping out, I got a couple of stern lectures from my father over the phone since he was in London on business. My mother was about to start on hers, but forgot that she and Susan had a reservation at the Russian Tea Room and left me by myself.

She did make an appointment with our family therapist, who expressed her disappointment, she told my mother that I needed some time away at Sturgess. Mother sat me down that night before she was hosting a get-together for the mayor's wife. She was zipping up a vintage Halston gown when she called me in. She stared at me through the custom made mirror and carried on with her routine. No affectation just straight to the point.

"Tonight, when the party begins, you need to wear what Zelda laid out for you on your bed. It's Chanel. The Schwartz jewels are laid out for you too, please don't get mad at the diamonds and curse their mothers." I must mention, we are one of those black families with a black maid, I always hoping we'd get a white one. Mother was exasperated from me, the stress of buying a co-op so she calmed herself with the six Vicodin or Percocet she popped daily.

She continued, "When everyone comes over, you are going to make the rounds, say hello to everyone. Then I will say that you decided to head over to a friend's house, make some joke about being afraid that old people here were fighting to suck the young life right out of you. There will be a towncar, you will exit out the back where Carl is going to drive you to Sturgess. I have called the staff, they know you are 'gracing them with your presence' ". She actually used the air quotes.

"Sturgess, the crazy house?"

"It's not the crazy house, it will help you get better - recover from this. Whatever the hell this is. I thought it was a phase, you just showin out, but Dr. Taylor thinks you may have had a nervous breakdown. And your father and I need you to get it sorted out now before you cause us any more trouble."

I don't think I had a nervous breakdown, just a stupid temper tantrum, but all the parent's Park Avenue Lackeys found out about my my little incident so I was being shuffled away. Forgotten about until I was deemed fit to stand charity galas, art galleries and Aspen ski trips. I didn't get angry, I was used to them shipping me off so they didn't have to deal with me was routine in my household. Boarding schools, trips to Dubai, UK college visits. I was never that bad of a kid - never arrested before this, only tried pot once, got decent grades - they just never wanted to be bothered and I did not want to be either so I gave no protestations. But I had heard that Sturgess was much like A Clockwork Orange aversion therapy.

So the party began, I said hello put on some fake high-society laughs and left with Carl, who wished me a lot of luck and I made my way upstate with one large Louis Vuitton suitcase and low expectations.

"Hey, you need to hurry up so Johns can evaluate you."

"Alright, I'm coming." I made the bed and threw on some jeans and a mustard hoodie, my designer clothes that Zelda packed were looked down upon by the staff and other girls, so I

had to exchange them for regular clothes she found at a nearby thrift store two weeks into my visit. I had made the switch from Givenchy to Goodwill chic.

Dr. Johnson, the short, quiet little round man who got to know me over the two years. He loved my family's charity work but did a 180 when I told him the real motivation behind it all.

No, I never fucked him.

"I'm glad you are getting better, you are improving, calming, prioritizing. But I do have one reservation about you leaving us. You could have easily signed yourself out any day since you got here, but you chose to stay to escape your life back home. You cannot let this place be your future, you are lucky to be getting better, some people never do. They end up dying here."

I always appreciated his honesty.

"I think it is best that you try to distance yourself from your mother, do not lash out at her, but what is best for you is to surround yourself with people who don't compartmentalize you, ship you away. You don't like it, you need to find someone who cares, you will not find it in mindless sex. Because that is not progress. But you are a smart girl, I know you can do it. you have made great strides after your last wrestling match."

"Thanks."

The phone rang, "Your driver is here. I will walk you out." We left, the girls already coming out of their rooms. I gave most of them hugs, including the girls I fought with and apologized to them, like a real apology, not one of those, but you provoked me apologies. I was a little sad to leave Sturgess, these people were actually honest with me, sometimes too honest, but I needed that. Amber didn't want a hug, just gave a dismissive wave. It was the best I could hope for.

I was happy to see Carl, who was like a kick-ass white uncle. He always brought me treats, gave me books to read, listened to me when I vented about my parents. He reached out to hug me, his big gut still soft like a teddy bear, "Hey kid. I'm so happy to see you." His voice was breaking. I felt a couple of teardrops stain my hoodie. "We've missed you. I'm happy you are better."

I turned, gave Dr. Johnson a hug and one last wave to everyone when one of the girls yelled, "Hope to not see you here again, skinny bitch." I could barely make out the words as she had a delicate French pastry rolling around in her mouth. I think she said out of love.

I turned back around to Carl, "So, she decided she did not want to take the trip up? Not even for the last fantastic voyage."

"No, said she had to organize some event tonight for the mayor, comptroller, one of those big wigs."

She had never once visited my in the two years here, a couple of quick phone calls, but nothing in-depth. I didn't exactly - miss her?

The drive back home was quick considering the city's traffic and the penthouse was empty when I got up there. I had rarely seen it empty, it looked like the set of the Tudors, but it had not changed since the day I left. Everything granite, gold, mirrors everywhere. It was tacky,

gauche and a little vomit inducing. I put my suitcase down, entered the kitchen and dug through the shelves of organized organic greens and coconut water hoping to find an unopened, chilled carton of chocolate almond milk, my favorite. I reached in the back and there it was, Zelda never disappoints. My mother came around the corner, making me jump as she slammed down her purse on the counter.

“You need to do something productive while you are back here, to at least show that you learned something. Anything.” That usually how she spoke to me, no introductory hellos, no hugs, no signs of delight celebrating my return. Zelda was eagerly shuffling behind, ready to take her coat and welcome me home, but mother dismissed her from the room.

“Like help the homeless and young kids? Yeah, I’ll find a place to volunteer. Sounds good.”

“Not that. How is that going to help your future? No, I’ll talk to Susan, see if you can help with the gallery or the mayor’s office. Your father can pull some strings.”

“Maybe, I can just pull my own from time to time?”

She threw her head back and chuckled. “When you pull own strings, you end up in the back of police cars, screaming like a child and fucking psychos in broom closets...Yes, the staff told me you didn’t like it when the boys kept it in their pants.”

She found me out. Her daughter the maniacal, croissant stealing nympho.

I called the shelter I found online, located in the Bronx, for women and children. I decided that would be a good place to start, to get my priorities in order.

“Hello, Ora Lee Women and Children’s Shelter, committed to rebuilding lives and hearts. How can we help you?” Her voice was monotonous as though she said this at least three hundred times a day for fifteen years.

“I was interested in volunteering.”

“May I have your name?”

I gave her my name.

“No way. Are you serious? I read about your family in the paper, one of those Park Avenue, Upper East Side type bitches, giving all their spare change to charities they formed themselves. You one of them sady, chi-chi girls because you black and rich right? Shit, girl. Do you even know what the Bronx is? Have you ever taken the subway?”

“Yes, I am one of those Park Avenue bitches. And for some god forsaken reason. I went to the Bronx like one time with a white girl who was determined to fuck a black guy. I have never taken the subway. So can I volunteer?”

“Yeah, hold on one second, let me get the director.”

After some background mumbling, the director took my call. “We would love to have you.”

“I am going to be completely honest, my mother hates the thoughts of shelters, so I wouldn’t jump at the chance for requesting a donation.” I am not really sure why I said, but too late to recant. I could hear the director grinding her teeth after I said this.

“Well, maybe I could do something about that.”

The grinding ceased and her voice got cheery again, “See you Monday.”

I decided to call the director of the shelter to see what I needed to bring for Monday and fill me in the job duties. She gave me her direct line and it rang seemingly forever until she picked up on the last ring.

“Hey, I didn’t think I would be hearing from you. How are you?”

“Great! I’m really excited to start Monday.” I cringed at my word selection of excited.

“Wait, I thought you said you were not going to do it anymore, you said you found a better opportunity.”

“What? No, I didn’t back out.”

“Well, we called and your mother said that you would be working at some art gallery or the mayor’s office, she definitely emphasized it was more notable and much better than being here, so I took it as final. Your mother is quite intimidating. But she made a donation we couldn’t turn down. I’m really sorry.”

“Me too. Best of luck to you.” I immediately hung up, cutting off the director mid-sentence.

That fucking bitch. I knew what I needed to do.

“What on Earth was so important that you keep calling me?” She finally picked up after six attempts.

“Where are you now?”

“Lunch at Four Seasons, why are you calling me? Well, I guess that’s fine, so I can tell you, you start the gallery on Monday.”

“You’re dining with Devorah, right? Why don’t you inform about the wonderful diet you’re on: champagne, Spanish red wine, and Vicodin? It has done wonders for you.”

“What is that you want?!” She was getting frustrated, I could tell she was struggling to keep her voice quiet at the restaurant.

“You fucking told the shelter that we were too good for them and said I would not go. How did you even know I was going to be there?”

“I overheard your call with the director and decided to do some damage control. Sweetheart please, our family does not need to be associated with these crackheads and their

issues, it just not fit us. Now is this why you calling? Are you about to throw one of your little tantrums because my friends know you have been to Sturgess and it's embarrassing. You just need throw them a used bone and they have at it. It's sort of delightful.”

“Thanks mom. I just needed to let you know, they may be the last time you hear from me in a long time. I actually hope this is the last time we ever speak to each other. But you have shipped me off to places all the time, so it's not like this is anything new.”

“Get to the point.”

“I'm giving up, moving out of the city, giving you back the trust fund, and leaving from all of this that I hate.”

“Do I need to take you back up to Sturgess, a week after you just left? What would my friends say? What will your father say?” She let out a dramatic sigh which traveled through the phone, like the drag of a cigarette. I could imagine her, scrunching her forehead, trying to figure out why her rebellious daughter had it out for her once again. “Where are you even going?”

“Not really sure yet, whatever the few hundred bucks I have takes me. Down South, Seattle, Jersey, Timbuktu, the back of that Dunkin Donuts that should have been shut down by the health department.”

“You need to quit joking.”

“But I'm not, so I guess this is goodbye.” Should I say that it was a licensed neuropsychologist who told me to get away from her? She would not believe, so maybe mums the word.

She came to the realization that I wasn't joking, there was a few seconds of silence and then her voice grew colder than it usually is. “If you want to throw away everything that has been given to you, that's fine. You are an adult and that is your choice, but believe me when I tell you this and I tell your father. When you fail, and you will fail, do not come crawling on your hands and knees to us, wanting money or to forgive this outrageous gesture. Stupid kids doing this all the time, traipsing around thinking they'll find world peace when they decide to get off Park Avenue, but fly first-class to Zimbabwe to help the 'cause'. You know who you are and who you came from, and if you are going to forget that, then I will too. Now if you excuse me, you have ruined my lunch.” She hung up.

That actually went better than I expected.

I walked a few blocks and withdrew eight thousand dollars from my bank account. I was getting away far away from the madness, the pain, the deceit, the hurt, the abandonment, the false hope, the bullshit, the rejection, the lectures at the Four Seasons, the angry phone calls, the bribes to keep me out of trouble, the stilted affection. I was elated at the thought.

I gave the cab driver a generous tip after he dropped me off at JFK. I walked through the Terminal 1 door, finally taking the doctors' advice.

