

## Companionship in Mania

I stop intertwining my fingers and look up at Marco. “Tell me why I fuck people who look like my brother. Fuck. Please don’t tell me that, I don’t want to know.” I could see the bulge through his black slacks, and I am immediately made uncomfortable. I stop looking at his crotch and look at his face. Marco is likeable, so I don’t want to fuck this up. Not everything is about sex! “What’s the answer?” He wasn’t looking at me, so he didn’t know I was looking down there.

He looks up from his legal pad and licks his fingers. His lips! Licks his lips, as some people do when their lips are dry. Gosh, I promise I don’t sexualize every important person in my life. “You miss him?” Not an answer.

“Of course I miss him. He was everything.”

“How was he everything? I don’t think he was everything. You’ve made it where you are now without him. You did that yourself.”

“I guess,” I say. My fingers find themselves intertwined with one another. “I was neglected as a child and that wasn’t my fault. I was a child. I had three important people growing up and they were my siblings. One of them doesn’t talk to me, the other is dead, and the last one raped me.” I loosen my fingers. “He raised me. He was my parent, my brother, my best friend. He was everything. I confront him, the truth comes out, and I lose all three. A start over. That’s fucked up.”

Tell me something I can do to fix this, I beg. “It is fucked up, I agree,” Marco says. “I don’t think you want to fuck people who look like your brother. I think you’re a survivor of abuse who’s learning how to form relationships.”

“I want to stop fucking people who look like him. Like any of my brothers.”

“I believe you can.” Okay, I thought. I can do that.

“But that’s not the problem. It’s a problem, yes. But it is not the problem now.”

“What’s the problem?”

“The diagnosis.”

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I am usually a person for walking, but the bus stopped in front of me and I got on. I walked a flight of stairs and walked out of the building’s front door and got on the bus. I swiped my school ID card, sat down, and went on my way.

There are people of interest everywhere on the commute. I am not up for talking to any of them today. A man approaches me, nonetheless. I move my backpack from the seat next to me and he sits. He hands me his phone. Alright, I can figure this out, I think. His phone has a map displayed. I look up at him and he shrugs his shoulders. He says nothing.

“You’re trying to get here?” I point at the destination he set. He nods. “If you wait two stops, you’ll get there. Just pay attention to the dot on the map,” I point at the red dot, “that’s you. It moves as you move. After that you just have to walk like two minutes to get there.”

“How do I know when to get off?” He speaks.

“You can get off in two stops.”

“How do I get off?”

I grab the wire hanging above us on the side of the bus, “you pull this.” He reaches for the wire and pulls. “No, not yet, we are still at the first stop. We need two more.”

He looks confused. “Oh. Okay. How are you?”

“I’m doing well, how are you?”

“I’m alright. It’s cold as shit. You study here?”

“Yeah.”

“What do you study?” The bus starts moving.

“Linguistics.”

His eyes widened. “Oh no! My mother was a linguistics major and it nearly killed her.

Good luck man.”

“Thanks. Might need it.”

“You seem like a smart guy. I’m sure you’ll get by.”

“Thank you. What do you do here?”

“I’m a solar architect.”

“Very cool.”

“Not so cool in the winter, but I like the job.”

“Good.”

He hands me his phone again. “You sure I get off here?”

“Yes. Pull the cable.”

“Mind pulling it for me?” I grab the cable and pull. “Thanks. Have a nice day and keep warm in this fucking cold.” I wave goodbye and stay seated. Brief interaction. I feel better.

The bus doesn’t stop in front of my house. It stops in front of another part of campus and I walk for fifteen minutes before I arrive. I live in a quiet, historic neighborhood next to the neighborhood containing the mass student population. I get off the bus and walk through student central before crossing a busy street with no crosswalk. I can take one step and end up dead or get hurt enough to wish I were dead. I don’t desire death, though. I reach the house’s neighborhood.

First year of college was not good for relationships. I took long walks around campus to listen to the noises of other people. I needed to know I wasn’t the only one on the planet. I was in the process of turning in an application to live on campus the following year until I saw a poster

for co-operative housing. Nine houses ran by a non-profit for students to live in. The main reason I applied was to avoid feeling alone. I made the right choice. It's the end of the semester and I've felt nothing but compassion and friendship from my housemates. Now I feel alone. I walk up some steps, enter a code at the front door, and go inside the house.

There are light colors on the walls, a good thing. Light colors keep me up. I walk into the kitchen and prop myself on the counter. I wait. At some point another person will walk into the kitchen and we will ask each other how we're doing. At that point I can tell them I am not doing so well. That will make me feel better. I make food while I wait. There is always someone here, but sometimes it takes us a while to notice each other's sounds. I make noise while I prepare food. Olivia walks in.

"Hey," she says.

"Hey, how's it going?"

"It's going alright, I'm in the middle of writing a ten-page proposal."

"Oh gosh, so many pages."

"Not too bad. How are you?"

"Doing well," I say. Not a lie. I felt well when she asked me.

"Good, I'm glad." I get bored of being in the kitchen and I leave.

I am apart from the house, but I still live here. I room in the cottage out back. It is separate and cozy, but it is away from everyone and I have no roommate. The walk is a couple of seconds long and I keep myself together. Three interactions was not enough to last me and I'm disappointed. I enter the cottage and throw myself onto the floor. I want to scream and cry, but I don't. My body can't manage and fights against me. I want to cry more than anything. There is something wrong in my head and I am afraid to face it.

I am not a sad person, I think. Still, I begin to think of the worst things in my life and in the life of others. I feel a tear run down my face. I smile.

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“You seek familiar people. People who resemble the people who raised you. Not just parents or brothers, but yearlong best friends and relationships. I fuck people who treat me like my family treated me. My parents are not bad people. Yes, they neglected me, and they chose favorites, but when they were there it was nice. They didn’t know I needed more attention than what they gave me. Doesn’t make it their fault. Maybe it does. Anyway, I subconsciously or consciously, it appears, seek relationships I know will result in neglect and loneliness.” Marco shifts positions on his seat.

“I think you’re right.”

“Right. What do I do about it?”

“What do you think we should do?”

“I think we should play chess.”

“What?”

“I had a therapist for two years before this. I hated him. I didn’t hate him; he was a decent man. I don’t hate you. He had a lot of board games. He was a good guy, cared a lot about me. We played chess together sometimes. It was his way of getting me to talk more. I don’t have a problem with that anymore. Talking.” I set my backpack on the floor. “I think that helped our relationship. I know I will only see you a couple of more times, but maybe that will help us progress.”

Marco looks at me with something resembling pity. Our friendship will end this semester.

“I don’t have a chess board.”

“I know. I do.” I grab my backpack and pull a cardboard board and our pieces.

“We can play then.”

“Alright. Let’s do this.” We set up the pieces and Marco beats the hell out of me. I’m bitter about it but I respect him for his skill.

I feel hopeful after I leave Marco’s office. There is nothing wrong with me and I am the same person I have been for the last couple of months. There is something very wrong, I feel it inside me. I go home and sit in the commons – the living area. Luna is there and I sit next to her.

“Have any secrets today?”

“My mother smuggled two-thousand dollars’ worth of weed from Colorado. You have any secrets?” she asks.

“That’s a lot of weed. I support her.”

“I know, it’s a fuck ton. I told her she has customers here if she needs them. Secrets?”

“I have some.”

“Are you okay?”

“I’m okay, how are you?”

“Have you been crying?”

“Yes.”

“Do you want to talk about it?”

I wait and hold my breathe. “Yes.”

“Want to talk about it in my room?”

“Yes.” We walk to Luna’s room and I sit on her loveseat while she sits on her desk chair.

Therapy session in a co-op room. I tell Luna my secrets.

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The secret. Not a secret. Hidden. “I’m trying to get more comfortable with being bipolar. I am bipolar. It sucks. I thought I was really good for the last eight months. But around two months ago things started to change. I tried to convince myself I was still happy and good, but maybe I wasn’t those things anyway. I was. I got a lot out of those manic months. I made a lot of friends and connections. Had a lot of great experiences. I was so happy. But I thought I developed an emotional intelligence that allowed me to move on from my traumas and destructive tendencies. I did develop that partially. I think I am better equipped to cope with being bipolar than I was three years ago. The idea of being bipolar has been around since I was in middle school. For fucks sake, none of my family was surprised when I told them over the phone.” I make eye contact with Marco. “I’m bipolar. That’s fine.”

Marco leans forward from his chair. “Being bipolar is not something that is wrong with you, June. It is a part of you, and it is part of you you may learn how to love. There are also plenty of things you can do to cope with being bipolar. A lot of people take medication to help them feel more stable. Do you think your trauma causes you more difficulty than being bipolar?”

“Bipolar disorder and trauma are not friends. They will fight and they will fight on their battleground – me. It is common for survivors to seek abusive relationships. It is easier when you feel high on life and are capable of doing anything. Capable of sleeping with anyone without having any consequences. Fucking people who look like your brother. Fuck, they are best friends! Partners. They are working against me.”

“You are not the battleground.”

“They are inside me.”

“They are a part of you, yes.”



“Yes, they are a part of me.” I clasp my hands together. “They are part of me. I am June and there are these chemicals in my brain that are making me feel invaded, violated, and alone.”

“It is hard to be dealing with these things by yourself. But you, not anyone else, you took some steps to making sure you have a support system. You’re only building onto that.”

“Right. I’m building a support system.” I try not to give Marco a hard time although I know he can handle it. “I’m afraid. I know I’m transitioning into a depressive state. It’s familiar. I know I can handle it. Goal: juggle bipolar disorder, trauma, and happiness.”

“I believe you can do that.” Marco closes his legal pad. “Where do you want to go from here.”

“This is the last session. I’m moving forward.”

“Okay, June. It was a pleasure working with you.”

“Thank you. Have a good day.”

“You too.” I stood and left.

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Living in a co-operative did not introduce me to parties, but it did reinforce my enjoyment of them. my house does not throw many parties, or any at all, but plenty of the other eight do. I get a Facebook notification for *Punk Before You Flunk*, a party being thrown at a friend’s co-op to sing and dance along with some bands before facing and failing finals. Drinks and good company.

There are three goals I set before going to a party: get high, get drunk, consensually make out with a stranger. They aren’t difficult goals to achieve. I get ready in the cottage and then wait inside the house until ten.

“Where you headed?” Luna asks.

“Going to a party at Mercedes’ house.”

“You have a date?” Annie said. Annie and Luna had been going out for a while. I liked Annie.

“Maybe. I hope not. Making out with a stranger would be my ideal scenario. Can’t do that with a date. Or maybe I can.” Luna gives me an okay sign and resumes talking to Annie. I go into the kitchen and sit on the countertop. Sam and Victoria are in the kitchen baking.

“Hello. How are y’all?”

“Doing well,” Sam answers.

“Alright, thanks. How are you?”

“Great. Gonna party tonight.”

“Staying home tonight,” Victoria says.

“I hope you have a great time,” I say.

“Are you high?” Luna asks as she walks into the kitchen.

“Haha, no. Not yet.”

“You sure?” I can’t wipe the smile of my face as I try to convince Luna I’m not high.

“I’m sure.”

“Sure.” I manage to control my smiling and laughter after she leaves. I wait until Mercedes tells me it’s okay to head over. I say goodbye to everyone and grab an umbrella. I walk over. The rain starts to pour halfway there and I prop the umbrella open. I text Mercedes when I arrive, and she waves at me from the second floor. I walk up the stairs and I hug my friend.

“It’s so good to see you!”

“Dude, yes. I’ve missed you so much. I’m on hallway duty for half an hour and then we can head down.” It was early and there weren’t a lot of people downstairs yet. I sat on the floor with Mercedes.

“What have you been up to? How are you doing? How are you and your boyfriend doing?”

“We’re good! He didn’t want to come tonight because he’s upset or something, I don’t know. You are my chosen plus one.” I didn’t have to pay to get into the party. “I’m doing well over all. Ready to get over this semester. How are you?”

“I think good.” I’m in the last bits of mania. “Not great though. I’m great now.”

“We gonna get down tonight?”

“Oh yeah.”

“Checklist?”

“Same three.”

“I can get us some weed from a housemate.”

“I can pay for half.”

“You’re my guest. You’ll pay when I go over to your house.”

“Okay, perfect.”

We wait forty minutes before heading down to the kitchen and grabbing a few drinks. I see Mercedes and I feel overwhelming gratitude. She knows nothing about my disorders, but she enjoys me the same. I wonder what happens when she realizes there are things wrong with me. She will be there. There is nothing wrong with me. I’m still me. I’m a person.

“You have any left?” I hear Mercedes ask one of her housemates.

“Yeah, come to my room.” We walk over to her room and she hands Mercedes a bag of weed. We walk back to the kitchen to refill our cups.

There’s a window between the kitchen and the commons where two guys give out drinks. I take a sip of mine. “Any of those dudes not interest in women?” I ask Mercedes.

“Tall blonde dude has a girlfriend and the other one is available and probably looking. His name is Daniel.”

“Cool.”

“You should go for it.”

“What would I say?”

“Say ‘hey’ and then see where that goes.”

“Maybe when I have a few more drinks.” We begin to walk to her room when we run into Luna and Annie.

“Luna! Annie! Luna, I’m a little drunk already, but not too drunk.”

“Okay, June. What are y’all up to?”

“We’re about to head upstairs to my room to smoke. Y’all are more than welcome to join us if you want.” Luna nods and follows us with Annie. “We’ll go through the stairs at the back of the house.”

Mercedes and I take a look behind us. We expected a small crowd because of the rain. “There’s actually a lot of people!” she says.

“I know, it’s going to be great.” We go inside her room. I sit in her bed and Luna and Annie sit on the floor. Mercedes hands over a bag of weed and her grinder while she looks for her pipe. I grind the weed bundles to small pieces and put them in her pipe. “You take the first hit. This is your party.” I smile at her.

“It’s our party. We are going to have so much fun tonight.” She was right. She takes the pipe from my hand and lights it up.

Mercedes passes the pipe to Luna, but she gives it back. “I’m good.”

“Me too,” Annie says.

I take the pipe from Mercedes. I inhale over and over again. I can breathe and feel. “How do you feel, June?”

Mercedes looks me in the eyes. My red eyes. “I feel so good,” I say.

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“You’re really cute,” I say to Daniel. “I think you’re really cute.” The band is blasting with their song and we dance with our drinks in our hands. Mercedes grabs my hand from behind Daniel and I take a step closer to him.

“I think you’re cute too.”

“Okay!” I pull Mercedes upstairs to pee. “He said he thinks I’m cute!”

“I know! Go pee!” I let go of her hand and walk over to the restroom. It’s locked.

“Luna and her friend are in there,” some dude on hallway monitor says.

“Thank you!” Luna hears my voice and lets me in. “Luna! Annie! I love you!”

“Love you too, June,” Luna says.

“I need to pee.”

“Go pee in the stall.”

“What are y’all doing in here?”

Annie and Luna look at each other. “We’re partying,” Annie says.

“Annie, I really like you. You two are really adorable.”

“Thanks, June, I really like you too.”

“Okay, I’ll pee now.” I let myself feel the urine go out of me. “I kissed that boy. Daniel.”

“He’s a cute one,” Luna says.

“He is,” I say.

I flush and wash my hands. Luna and I look at each other through the mirror. “You take another drink and you won’t be able to tell the difference between yes and no. You understand, June? You will be past the point of consent. Be careful.”

“Okay. Thank you for taking care of me.” I go downstairs with Mercedes.

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I can feel Daniel’s tongue inside my mouth. I’m pressed against his bed and I can feel his hand on my chest. It feels right. Good. Great. I don’t know what’s happening. I exist in blurs.

“What the fuck did I tell you?” I see Luna and Annie at the doorway.

“What?” Daniel says.

“He’s passed the point of consent. June, you’re going home,” Luna says.

“Okay!” I say. I walk out of the room and Mercedes grabs my hand. The hallway monitor guy jingles keys in his hand. Time to go home.

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My idea of what is appropriate to say and what is not is gone. Mercedes took care of me until Luna and Annie got home. Olivia was watching over me as well. I’m in the commons. There is blood on my cheek. “Luna,” I say crying, “What if no one loves me?”

“Why would anybody not love you? I love you. We love you.”

I see my reflection on my phone screen. “What happened to my face?” There is a bruise on my forehead and a small cut on my eye lid.

“A toilet seat fell on it,” Olivia says. I touch my forehead and wince. “Apparently you also got punched in the face when you got caught in the middle of a mosh pit.” I remember. The fun!

“Okay!” I cheer up. Luna goes into the kitchen.

“We love you, June,” Annie says.

“What if nobody loves me because I’m bipolar?” More tears.

“We love you because you are bipolar,” Olivia says.

“Okay!” Luna walks back into the commons. “Luna?”

“Yeah?”

“What if no one loves me because I’m bipolar?” It is appropriate to show what feelings I have to my friends. They are my friends. My fears. I fear not finding someone who will stick around and love me. Afraid of not finding a person. Someone okay with fucking a person who was fucked by their brother. I can’t tell the difference between being happy or manic, being sad or depressed.

A person can love someone like that, yes.

“Oh, June, that was our secret.”

“We love you because you’re bipolar,” Olivia reassures me.

“Okay!” I forget what I cry about, and I stop. “Okay.” Luna walks over and crouches next to the couch I lie in.

“Drink some water.” I take a sip and fall asleep.

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A lady in slacks and a button up walks into the waiting area. “June?” I finish snacking on the trail mix they had out and respond.

“Yes, hi.” I stand and go to her.

“Hey, I’m Marian.”

“Nice to meet you.”

“You too.”

We walk to her office. “Okay, this is definitely the last session. I know I met the number of sessions students usually receive. After this I will get a new therapist and I will try to improve myself with them.”

“You know this isn’t a therapy session, right?”

“Right. It’s still a university session.”

“You know what this is for?”

“Yes. This is a session to give me resources outside the university. Therapists, psychiatrist, insurances. I don’t have any insurance. Marco said we would talk about insurances in here.”

“Right. I am your financial counselor.”

“Yes.” We go into the office and sit. We talk about insurances and money first. Then about a new therapist.

“Alright, June, let’s figure this out, yeah? We want you to be well. Before anything, I want to ask if there is anyone you would feel more comfortable with for a therapist?”

“Their sex?”

“It can be sex. Whether they follow similar religious or spiritual beliefs. If they are allies to the LGBTQ+ community. If they have more experience with therapy for trauma or things like that.”

“Okay.”



“What would you want?”

“A female therapist. Someone who knows a lot about trauma and bipolar disorder.”

“Alright, anything else?”

“An ally.”

“Okay. Anything else?” She jotted down everything on a notepad.

“That’s it.”

“Alright, June, we’re off to a good start. We’re definitely going to figure this out.” I let myself relax on my seat and I take my back pack off.

“Right,” I say. I am June and there are these chemicals in my brain that make me happy and sad. Manic and depressed. People love me, nonetheless. I’m in a transition period between mania and depression. I’m afraid. I don’t want to be sad anymore.

At some point Marian asks me a question. “What do you want, June?”

“What do you mean?”

“At the end of all of this. All the therapy sessions and psychiatrist appointments. Any appointments, really. School accommodations, medication, support groups. What do you want?”

“I have a goal.”

“What is it?”

This is the end of the semester. There’s a break and then I jump into the next set of classes. I avoid looking at Marian in the eyes. “I know what it is like to feel pain and sadness in my life. Bipolar disorder, trauma, school, relationships. I believe I can live with these things and be happy. Even when I’m not having a manic episode. I can be depressed and happy. That is the goal. Handle all these things and stay good. I can do that.”

“I believe you can,” Marian says.

The session with Marian was the last thing I needed to do to finish the semester. I walk outside and I see Mercedes and Luna waiting for me.

“You okay?” Mercedes asks.”

“I’m okay.”

We begin walking “Alright, then. You know what we do now?” Luna asks.

“I know.”

“We celebrate!” Mercedes shouts. “Off we go after a long and tiring battle with fall semester.”

“Let’s go have a fucking great time.”

Yes, I think. Let’s have a fucking great time.