

Esteemed
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OS24



The experiences I have trudged through in the last five years are indeed the ones in the forefront of my mind. The ones that have been medicated, diagnosed, and even, dare I say, “treated.” But in order to properly comprehend, respect, and honor, these ideas, I must look backwards to where the darkness began. The darkness I learned to shelter, and nurture within myself: the darkness that budded and morphed into one with the light of life—ultimately becoming interchangeable.

I am well aware of the significance held in my childhood past; fortunately for me, the darkness in which I hope to explore had yet to develop within my untouched mind. There was, of course, the typical envy of my older brother, a multi-talented charming boy with athleticism that would prove itself essential to his success, along with his supreme social skills and above average GPA. The constant, but bearable brawls with my unpredictably anxiety-ridden, depressed, ADD mother, whom I felt more than obliged to care for, for my workaholic father and success prone brother were far too consumed with pursuing their greatness to care for her at all. There was the loneliness amongst my peers, which was remedied through long hours of Barbie playing and make-believe in the garden.

Childhood was comprised of purity manifested through imaginary games lasting for hours on end. Dirt between toes, matted locks curly hair, and sun-parched freckled cheeks were the norm, for they were evidence of days well spent playing wizards and pirates in the mountains out back. Skin always salty from either sweat or dried water of the Pacific. Life was a game; the rules were unknown. Days were never too long and never too short. Darkness did not exist, except in the sky at nightfall, peppered with stars from another universe, which lulled our innocent bodies to sleep night after night.

There were clearly moments of grief, moments that may have been painful for my small undeveloped being; but in the greater picture of my seventeen years of living, those moments are barely scratches in the matrix of my final image.

Moments such as losing the most important friendship in my life at the time. She was my childhood everything. My second family. My soul sister. My Tja. We had been tied to one another’s hips, as she lived just up the windy hill from me. Her small, disheveled cottage felt more like a home to me than my own house ever could. The smell—rich and intoxicating, like warm buttered bread and hot cups of Chai with sweet honey. The walls—dripping with memories, ideas, and innocence. I traced my delicate hands along them as I made my way to her room, where we would talk for hours after full days spent in the treehouse or playing fairies in the hammock absentmindedly. These moments constructed the light in my life. The light I so desperately clung to. Six years of lemonade stands, treasure hunts, lost boys, Peter Pan, sprinkle cookies, mushy couches, peeling sunburns, spying on adults, stealing salty olives, scraped knees, and bruised elbows... all vanished one summer at a ranch.

This was the ranch my mother and I went to escape the debilitating bubble of Los Angeles each summer. An experience of light, which I wanted to share with my other source of light, Tja. Tja and I were ecstatic on the six-hour car ride, as we giggled in the backseat of her mother’s blue Ford pickup truck. We arrived at the ranch and were greeted by two families, complete with what Tja and I thought were some of the coolest big kids ever.

Their names and faces have left me now; the moments spent with them have left my mind as well. The only thing that remains was a night at the river. We went hand-fishing for dead trout, collecting them in buckets. The boys decided to remove each fish eye for close examination. I, hoping to be slightly acknowledged by the envied older kids, popped a handful of glossy moist eyes in my mouth. As the iris spilt, cold fishy puss exploded and drenched my taste

buds. Faces of disgust watched as I put another handful in my small chapped mouth. Tja's face was no different, for she saw my desperation for acceptance. The purpose of this I do not know, but it led to the end of the acceptance Tja had for me. It was not a slow deterioration of our mutual love for one another; rather, it was an immediate negation of the history we had created together.

To this day, I do not know why or what happened; I no longer had the control over the light. It slipped through my fish-stained hands. I do, however, know it was when the darkness began to flicker against the fading light. Guilt laced with fear. I was alone. How could I have singlehandedly broken the one thing I needed most? The one thing that could never be fixed? A fallen friendship was not something I ever learned to mend. I had lost before, but I had never experienced losing someone. This is when I first remember turning my feelings of guilt inward. To myself. My being, and all that was impure about it. My voice, a piercing tone, was accompanied by an obvious lisp. My thighs felt like tree trunks beneath my pleated school uniform skirt, but I was far too innocent to act upon these feelings. Trust was thrown out the window. I was alone, incapable of holding onto love or loving others. I was broken. I could not fathom losing companionship like this again. I was too weak to save it. I was too weak to save myself. My innocence.

Post growth spurt, I lacked awareness of myself and my surroundings and I transitioned into middle school as an obscenely awkward 5'10 budding adolescent. Attempting to distract myself from developing any form of a relationship, I remained scared, and yet again, turned to the self-deprecating mindset within. But this time, I was stronger, wiser, and able to take initiative over what I feared. Womanhood sprouted beneath my 32 double A bra, hips expanded against my jeans. I literally felt my childhood slipping away, being engulfed as I developed into something I was far from ready to be—a woman.

This fear encapsulated me. Crippling my ability to learn, explore, give, and grow. Friendships, or as I saw them, acquaintances, came and went, magnifying the inconsistencies in my life. Home was far from a safe haven to shelter my fear. Rage fueled fights with my then hated mother, ranging from dinner to ethical choices. She was the essence of the capability of how womanhood was able to poison the mind. She embodied the future that I so feared; so, I feared her. I hated her. Pure detest ran through my veins, pumping through my body, fueled by my skewed perception of what she represented. This anger was accented by my success-hungry father. Work craved, unsatisfied by his growing success. Present yet vacant at all times. Listening moderately, responding in a language of silence and sighs. My overly occupied golden brother walked right through me, towards the next trophy or perfect score. I was alone.

I had no control, only the fear of what was to come. This fear morphed into something within my control: preventing the physical changes that began to define me as a woman. I knew I couldn't handle this control on my own. And this is how I created an indefinable presence I later named "Eddy."

Eddy is a man who lives within me, controlling every step, every breath, and every bite I take. His appearance I am not sure of, but his personality is crystal clear. It oozes through my pores uninvited, covering every inch of my being without care. He can be the best of friends or the worst of enemies. He is the most selfishly selfless creature I have ever grown to know. I love him. He loves me, but never shows it. Without him, I am worthless, and with him, I am irrelevant. I will never win the game we play, but I will never quit trying.

It seems as though Eddy has always existed within my being, whether it was conscious or not. He spoke to me at elementary school birthday parties when the cake would come out

glowing with candles drenched in buttercream icing. “I don’t like cake,” I would say, pleasing no one but Eddy in this claim, for he was all that mattered. He visited me at middle school dinner dates, “Water is fine, I have already eaten,” he would say, exerting his thoughts through my vocal cords. His presence often went unnoticed, for his appearances were extremely scarce. These appearances slowly transitioned into overnight stays to weekly ventures to monthlong *rendez vous* and, finally, to years of a full-fledged committed relationship. A relationship, more toxic than I have ever known could exist.

Eddy is a man in need of my constant excessive care. All that I do must be for him. I remove my emotions, my well-being, and my health to provide for the one thing that would never leave me. The one thing I can always depend on. The one thing I can never fail at or mess up. The one thing that would love me no matter what. The one thing that will never allow me to fully be who I truly am, for that fear of being my authentic, raw genuine, self he knew was far too immense of a responsibility for me to handle alone.

In return for all of these gifts he gave me, I reciprocate through nourishing him. Nourishment, for Eddy, involves pain. It involves self-deprecating negativity that pumps horrid thoughts through my veins. These veins must be visible through the skin that lies over my bones. Eddy feeds on my hunger; he binds to it, digests it, and loves it. Bones must be pressed harshly against my skin for the world to see and for him to feel. If I fulfill these things he will never leave me. He will never leave me to loneliness dripping with self-reflection. Leave me to get to know myself, the one person I couldn’t stand to be around.

As the end of eighth grade rolled around, Eddy and I were in full force. We were unstoppable. We successfully stopped my menstrual cycle, a major accomplishment in our eyes. I had complete and utter control over my space, my solitude, and so I thought, Eddy. I would spend hours upon hours pent up in my bedroom sketching, finding further safety within creating. Creating sketches I could hold on to, tangible evidence of distraction from the realness of what I was doing to myself: deprivation of necessary nourishment. My already lacking social life soon became non-existent, for Eddy was the only friend I needed, and the only friend who would put up with me. I loved him. And in turn, he controlled me.

My relationship with Eddy remained consistent and predictable until one night when Eddy found yet another way to control me. Clothed in a baggy sweatshirt and my sweaty track uniform, I slid into a booth opposite my mother for dinner at a dimly lit restaurant. Small talk and awkward silences sliced the tension in the air as I proceeded to push my food around the plate, avoiding any eye contact with my mother. And in that moment, it all shifted. The director of a modeling agency—tall, graceful, and thin—asked if I modeled. Both my mother and I chuckled; I internally was cracking up for the idea of me being anything more than an awkward teenager was beyond hilarious. Later that week, we met with the agency and they signed me on the spot.

As I stepped out of the office, I had never been more confused in my life. How was it possible for a room filled with industry adults tell me I was “it” when I couldn’t even get the attention of a single fourteen year-old boy? Did I actually have control? Or was it all a morphed illusion created by Eddy? From that moment on, Eddy was no longer my playmate, or my friend; he was a permanent part of my existence, growing stronger each and every day.

As castings and bookings became increasingly frequent, school became less and less of a necessity. I lived a double life. One where I would wake up, pour a splash of milk and crumbled cereal in the bottom of a bowl to leave the illusion of breakfast in the sink to please my worried mother. Packing a lunch of PB&J, which was thrown away right when I arrived to school,

making sure to leave evidence of peanut butter and jelly remains on the counter. After my morning rituals, I slipped on a concealing long floral dress, washed my face, pulled my hair back in a tight bun and attended school. School days would usually be interrupted at lunchtime, a convenient excuse for skipping another meal. I would hop in the back of my mother's car and become someone else. Someone I wasn't ready to be. Someone I feared. What *they* wanted me to be. Tank top, jeans, heels, mascara, and a bit of rouge. I was everything Eddy wanted me to be. I was a lie. My mother preached her concern about my shrinking body; I responded with a list of lies consisting of calorie-packed foods I had consumed just moments before to ease her ever growing worries of my well-being.

Backstage, I was surrounded by twenty something year-olds, who were just as small as my undeveloped body. These were the people whom I spent the weekends with. My after school playmates. I no longer existed within my fourteen year-old mind; I existed in the mind of a twenty something year-old, hungry for the next job. I soon lost sight of what I initially set out to do: stunt my growth into a woman, by preserving my innocence to be a kid forever. Yet I quickly began to stray from the purpose of my control seeking. Although I was not physically growing up mentally, I was rapidly approaching a mindset of a woman.

My mother's countless attempts to get me to drop modeling and live a life of health and simplicity only served to feed my addiction and dependency on Eddy. Teeth gritting fights would erupt at photo shoots and backstage at runway shows, as my mother desperately tried to feed my shrinking frame. This only heightened the dependency for him. I so deeply wanted to tell her—to curl up in her arms and become a part of her breath as she embraced my frail body against hers, to have my tears moisten her chest as words of truth flowed endlessly out of my mouth. If I had been strong enough to silence Eddy's voice this is what I would have said:

Hannah

Mother

Mom

Mommy

Please help me.

I love you.

I need you to hold me in your grip and nurse me back to the innocence we both know still lies within me.

I love you.

I need you to teach me how to love myself.

I need you to make him go away, make him leave me for good.

I love you.

I need to be beautiful like you.

I need it all to be true.

I love you.

I am submerged in lies.

Smothered by the darkness.

I cannot tell the truth from the make-believe anymore.

The dark from the light.

I have lost me.

I am losing you.

Feed me with the love I have neglected for so long.

Nourish me with care.
Cover me with the truth.
For I love you more than the oxygen I consume.
I love you more than when the hunger passes at night as I fall asleep.
I love you more than the first sip of water after sixteen hours of deprivation.
I love you more than the smallest thighs or the flattest stomach.
I love you like the moments I have forgotten when things were good and pure.
I love you more than him.
I never meant to hurt you mom.
I wish I were better.
I wish I were who you wanted me to be.
I wish I knew then what I know now.
I am sorry.
I miss you.
I'm sorry
I'm sorry
I love you.
Feed me.
I'm sorry.
I love you.
I'm sorry.
Feed me. I am sorry.
I love you.
I'm sorry.
I missed you.

This, unfortunately, was not how things played out. Instead, an escalation of darkness and an overwhelming empowerment of Eddy encapsulated my whimpering fragment of existence. Restricting myself from food was no longer satisfactory to Eddy. Hydration became a luxury, as I would neglect drinking all day except for 4:15 in the afternoon, when I would consume one glass, half empty. Life became about these sips of water I indulged in. My after-school snack comprised of decadent ice-cubes, broken in half to last longer. I began to imagine things. I began to see my stomach expand inches as I hydrated my body. A tangible liquid balloon lay beneath my skin. An unacceptable sight, for everyone could see it.

Hunger became interchangeable with fulfillment. Thirst became a texture in my mouth rather than a feeling of deprivation. Dizziness became my form of balance. Bruises and under eye circles were my only makeup, for they could not be concealed. These reactions were what tracked my progress, for a scale did not exist in my house, only within my mind, our mind. It contained sensations instead of numbers, hunger instead of pounds. It was never about a weight. It was about the game between Eddy and me. The game of darkness and lies. How far could we go? How far could we push ourselves? How far until we lose? Is there such thing as losing at the game we have complete control over?

I soon found the answer to these questions. After my second round of fashion shows came to a close, I treated my body to a soothingly luxurious bubble bath. It had been three days without as much as a crumb of food. I had just booked a job with *Vogue*, my first to date, and Eddy would not allow the hungerstrike to end until after the shoot took place six days from that

moment. As I soaked my skin, which was tightly pressed against my pelvis, knee-caps, rib-cage, and collarbone, I felt it. I had won. I wanted to claim my prize. I wanted to stop. There was literally nothing left to lose. Except Eddy. This thought came and went just as my hunger had grown to do. I stood up, one leg still in the bath. And in the next moment, I was on the marble floor, my body trembling. My hands cold, my mind blank, my lips hard. I had blacked out. I knew it was possible, but it had never occurred to me that this, too, was within my control. I lifted myself to my feet, catching the reflection of Eddy in the mirror. I began to cry. The type of cry when tears cannot be controlled. Pure silence enveloped my small body. Just the sound of the water dripping from my long wet hair, hitting the hard cold marble. Drip. Drip. Drip.

The rest of the night was a masked illustration of time. I remember crying to my mom, telling her I didn't want to do it anymore. Telling her I was done. As if my body was regurgitating Eddy. My body and well-being had been silenced for so long. There he lay. On the tear-moistened couch. I did not let her touch me, even though all I wanted to be touched. I did not look at her; she did not look at me. I lost control. I was an animal. Grasping for air between confessions. Throwing my fists to the floor. Screaming whispers. Telling my lies. Exposing the truth.

The next few days did not exist, for sleep was the only ingredient creating my last moments with Eddy. I knew I was saying goodbye. I knew they were going to take him from me. And they did.

The only moment I recall being okay with leaving Eddy was the day before I was admitted to the hospital. I sat silent in the backseat of my father's car. He and my mother had picked me up from school and were about to take me to meet my life of treatment. The light was bright but masked by a gray gloomy fog; I had not seen daylight on my father's face for months or even really seen his face at all for that matter. It was tanned by the rays of sun he used as therapeutic vitamins. Dark hues circled and traced his drooping eyes. And in that moment, he began to cry. Words came out, forming sentences from his mouth, not comprehended by me; all I could see were his salty tears falling into space. I had to let go of Eddy to help him. I had to leave Eddy to be with him. I loved my father. I hurt my father. He was there. He loved me. I had to stop this for him.

913 hungry days and nights. 21,914 hours of lies. One million three hundred fourteen thousand eight hundred eighty one minutes of solitude. Two and a half years of wasted time. All amounted to that number. Eddy existed in those numbers. It was him. All over me. He is all I saw. All I felt. All I heard.

Eddy was sucked out, over the course of six months. Leaving me, forced to face the real world without him. Forced to see my reflection in the mirror without him staring back at me. Forced to nourish myself—my body, my mind, and not his. Forced to be alone. Without the comfort of his thoughts, I was forced to find my own comfort.

Eddy lost his meaning and value as he became more and more of an essence rather than a being. He became a detour I had taken.

Six months later, I left treatment forty pounds heavier. Soaking in fear of the real world that lay beyond the sliding doors of the hospital, I was far from "cured." Resentment for my mother, father, and brother continue to haunt me to this day. My relationships with them heal as time passes, but will never be consistently pure. Life remains unknown. I learned from the patients who had it far worse than I. Rape victims who were suicidal and hurt. Scars covered their tiny wrists, tracing the evidence of pain they could not control. Bruises from beatings taken by husbands, boyfriends, and parents. My guilt for myself grew deeper than I ever thought was

possible in these few months, as I was not even close to being as ill as these women. Walking the halls to my room, I remember passing cancer patients, decaying elderly, and the mentally ill: people with uncontrollable diseases. And there I stood, sick as well, but able to overcome it through the pure power of will. I, indeed, remained in control over getting well.

But now, despite all of this, Eddy still occasionally comes to visit me from time to time. And when he does so, the feeling returns and I am empowered and comforted by his presence. I acknowledge his disappointment in me for no longer caring for him. We sit together, in solitude, for that is all we have. Like a gust of wind, he leaves me to my thoughts, but never abandons me completely. He provokes and influences me each day. And each day I must decipher my voice from his, bit by bit.

It is hard to say whether he has won this game or I have. But it is safe to say neither of us will ever walk away losers.

Although my thoughts, feelings and ideas within my mind today are composed of darkness and lightness, acceptable and unacceptable, negative and positive, treatable and incurable, they were not always this way. The ingredients for what exists in my thoughts were once in the shadow of darkness. The shadow of an illness. The shadow of a disorder. The shadow of Eddy. A year later I continue to treat it, relapse, recover, treat, relapse, and recover. An ever-long process of which will last the remainder of my existence. Although I will never be able to meet the ultimate goal of loving myself and what I represent, I will never stop trying. I do not stand here today without disgust for my body, detest for my being, or regret for what I have lost; but, I will never stop playing the game.