

THE OLD C

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I've lived in the old gray box for years upon end, it seems. We moved there when I was one, or almost one, and we've stayed there ever since. It was a good life, it still is a good life, but there was a time where I couldn't see it through the fog, through my messed up head, through the noise. There came a day I wound up in the Emergency Room of a nearby hospital. The sun was poking holes all over my body, penetrating me with a fire that I could no longer sit with alone. I had done with trying to cut it out

of me. I had also done with sleepless nights and the feeling of dread and the feeling of shame and guilt and anger and relentless nervousness. I had contemplated a noose, fashioned out of a rope I bought at the dollar store when the voices became so loud I turned desperate.

I would shove the rope in my pocket, embark on my nightly walk, and head to the tree I thought most suitable for the task assigned me. In the cold night air I would brace my neck against the rope, testing the waters, only to run home and lock myself in my room. I tried it with a coat hanger. I also tried it with a dog collar. I tried it with the same rope in my backyard, attached to the tree that I used to climb so high my parents yelled from the bottom for my return earthward. It was cool and calm up there. I could see the whole neighborhood and revel in my height above it. But this year was different. I was nineteen, soon to turn twenty. I was alone, and I knew I would always be. I knew I would forever be shut out from the life that others around me danced through with a skip in their step. I knew that I was unlovable, disgusting, a bitter torment to those that knew me through some misfortune or another. I knew the shame and the pain I caused to my family. I knew the disappointed expectations that I embodied so unabashedly. I knew that despite the accomplishments stacked atop my head I was a nothing, a zero, a meaningless bundle of cell and spindle fiber that could no longer perform its basic function as a creature of society.

I woke up in a fit one morning and threw all of my old canvases in the garbage,

GREY BOX

chucking my things about the bedroom with abandon. I tried the dog collar again, but I knew it was in vain. The only reason I didn't try the pills was because I feared going blind, or waking up from a coma all black and bruised like I heard that went sometimes. Some last minute survival instinct kicked in to me all of a sudden and I called my mom in urgency. 'I am going to the hospital!' She knew it was the right thing - it had all been leading up to this point anyways. She had had it too, with the late nights and the locked doors and the shouting matches and the threats and the walking on eggshells around her daughter, once beloved, now accursed. 'I'll meet you there, Fiona.' She spoke with agitation and barely perceptible relief into the phone. I met her in the parking lot, and we checked in with reception. Then there was a wait. During this wait, I ran away three times. The first time I came back home, determined to get better on my own, to keep going as it had always been, but my brothers pleaded with me to go back, my mother phoned me anxiously, and so I returned. Then they took my bloodwork, and it was time for another wait. I bolted again, heading for the door. I sat in my car and waited anxiously. The third time I was in a hospital gown, and the guards slowly followed. 'I can't be the sick person again! I won't do it, I refuse!' I screamed. My dad, who had to take time away from work, quietly and calmly urged me back to the hospital, where they gave me an Ativan, and where I met with the psychiatrist.

Why do you want to die?

What a question! My question for you, my lady, is why do you NOT want to die? I'm not crazy! I don't belong here! I have a plan, I can go to college. My mother is evil! She has an aura of evil about her. You have to understand. Holy water, holy water, holy water. I am the devil. You gave me the devil. I shook hands with the devil. The reason I want to die is I know that these feelings will never stop. I am in constant torment. It is unbearable. It has gone on for four-and-a-half years. I am better off dead. I can feel my tongue in my mouth and the nerve endings in my eyeballs and the death-march of time crawling all over me and it has to stop.

My body became a cage in the December of eleventh grade. Or maybe it was the summer of tenth grade. Ninth? Anyways, we were at the cabin, and my back became very sore. I kept having to crack it. Flies buzzed all over me day and night and the hot dry sun scorched my bones. When I tried to sleep my eyes felt stuck like they didn't belong in their sockets. And when I woke up I would check my teeth because I knew they were rotting, I knew they were bad teeth, I knew I was disgusting. I had never had a cavity in my life and all of a sudden I had eight and needed a root canal, because of the radiation treatment. The cancer I had in childhood was one from which there was a sure and speedy recovery. My parents and I both knew that I wasn't going to die, but we all still felt uneasy. There is no quick fix to a parent's worst nightmare. My parents were both medicated on my account. It was during this time that I began to read the text messages off my mother's phone and listen intently at her door to hear the bitter truth, to feel the hurt I knew I should feel.

'David and I will never be the same.'

'Both of us have had to be medicated.'

'Fiona is not well.'

'The stress is too much.'

And then the guilt would make sense.

