

My Own (Painfully) Human Mind

I work through long, sleepless nights; dreading the onslaught of demons who always seem to be lurking, as if waiting for me to close my eyes that they might take me unawares. Fear defines me as I count down the hours until bedtime. My thoughts, always attuned to the most tragic of things, zero in on the worst possibility. My thoughts betray my fear and those demons go mad with hunger when they smell fear.

Progress is slow but inevitable. It comes unannounced when I find myself telling doctors I haven't hallucinated in weeks. And I half celebrate, half dread our formal schedule change to every two weeks because I'm cynical like that; because progress means an inevitable set back. I take two steps forward and one step back but forget I've still made a profit. I concentrate with an acute, unreasonable mind on that one step back. It comes in the form of psychosis or maybe a particularly embarrassing delusion. I hole myself up in my apartment and forget all about the victory of my biweekly appointment schedule or the fact I haven't called my mom in the middle of the night in two months.

My cynicism breeds pessimism and I'm thankful for loving friends and family, for astute doctors who remind me of my own triumphs in the face of my gravest enemy: my own (painfully) human mind.

I sit here watching the news like any good citizen. Hearing about the atrocities I know I'll remember and the happier news, the fluff pieces, I'll forget the minute they break for commercial. And so it goes with my illness. I go to my biweekly appointment and report the gravest of news, only the terrible things my own (painfully) human mind has produced; and not the fact I walked a mile by myself to go to a coffee shop because I have a crush on one of the baristas and it's been four years since feelings of that sort have even entered my mind.

Pessimism can be a driving force and my doctor thinks he hasn't been attentive enough. He blames himself while I blame the inevitability of that one step back. But he *has* been attentive, I *have* made progress. Two steps forward and one step back and we both forget this amounts to one step forward. Because we only focus on the bad and not the good and it's little wonder seeing as how my bad is always more grievous than those of my kin.

My mom is good at giving us perspective. She tells him about how peaceful her sleep has been; uninterrupted by the late night phone calls she dreads but still dutifully answers. She gives us a more complete truth, it's been months since she and my dad have had to get in the car to come pick me up in the black of night. She tells me how strong I am, how far I've come, and in those moments I feel as though a certain truth has been revealed. My news-watching-brain is always looking for the worst to report, the most dramatic, the most dire. And I make a promise to myself that I'll finally see the truth of my life and I'll report the good things with the bad. My news-watching-brain forgets the victories, dismisses them as no more than fluff pieces. My news-watching-brain forgets how

essential these victories are. I make goals for myself, some I fail at and in some I succeed. I can't call Comcast to get a credit on my bill for the outage last month but I *do* manage to stick to my routine for a full week and that's a much greater victory.

Progress happens slowly, but can come in great bounds, and growth is minute but comes as inevitably as the next psychotic episode. I work hard on my grounding techniques, I stick to my routines, I try to remain as mindful as possible, and I've started succeeding more often than not. It comes down to perspective, it comes down to seeing more than just the muck as you make your way through the damp, muddy wasteland the mentally ill so often find themselves in. Like an athlete, like an artist the lives of the mentally ill are ones of progress, plateau, and more progress. It's just a matter of perspective. Do you notice the one step back? or the two steps forward?