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In the Dark

by Allison Renner

The scary thing with depression is how it sneaks up on you. You think you're fine until one day, the only thing you want is to take a shower in the dark. And since want implies desire, a concept that has been so foreign lately, you give in. You gather a towel and close the door, thinking, This will help me. This will solve all my problems. You turn on the water, boiling hot to wash away whatever it is that's plaguing you. That's the worst part, it seems – the lack of knowing what makes you feel this way. Life is going on at its normal pace, everything is fine – and maybe that's just it: the monotony, the predictability in a life you think should have excitement and adventure, conflict and resolution. Instead you march along, day after day, going to work, going to school, going to dinner with friends who don't notice you're different unless you're drunk.

“The way you slur my name!” one exclaims, and they all poke each other because they noticed it too. You shrug and take another drink because, sure the hangover will be a bitch tomorrow, but right now you feel good. And self-medicating is the easiest solution you can think of.

Back in the dark, steam rolls out of the stall and condenses on the mirror. It's chilly, your skin is covered in goosebumps, so you step into the tub. The water scalds your skin, which you imagine is turning the color of lobster shells, but you can't see. You like it that way; it's much easier to look at yourself in the dark. You think that maybe you'll start taking all of your showers this way, and then your brain clicks in. It wonders what you'll do tomorrow, and you can't find an answer.

Why? it questions. Always logical, it's pushing you to find something to fill your time. Make your own adventures, bring your own spice. But

your heart butts in. Yes, why? Why live an empty tomorrow? What a waste of time, space, energy you don't have to expend. You want to take control over both, demanding they shut up, explaining the logistics of the brain to the foolish heart. But you know it's worthless – the heart won't listen, it never does. And it's right, tomorrow requires energy you don't have. You can't seem to get worked up over anything, and so you take a deep breath and step back under the stream of burning water.

It's growing cool now; the hot water heater in this dilapidated apartment never did allow a relaxing shower. You hear your heart yell from deep within you, and you listen. The splash of the stream against tiles might distort the voice some, but you're pretty sure you're following orders as you plug the tub and lay down in lukewarm water, face first. You initially keep your eyes open, but it's only cracked white porcelain, so you close them tight. You find yourself holding your breath out of habit. The water is up to your ears now, you feel it sloshing about, and the whole thing is so uncomfortable you think you should stop. No desire backs your decision, so you grit your teeth and try to ignore the surroundings. You focus on your body, try to meditate or elevate yourself, but instead you think only of the water on your brain, up your nostrils, burning your eyes. Frustrated, you take a breath, and water flows into your mouth, too. You cough spasmodically and try to sit up, but something within you forces you back down. You try to lay patiently, even though patience never was your virtue.

The rickety locks on the front door click open, and you silently curse yourself. It might have been hours before your roommate found you in the dark bathroom, but you had left the stereo playing in the living room, the Christmas lights plugged up around the windows. She knows you're home; she'll come looking for you.

Like an adulterer begging to be caught, your body betrays you with another cough. You try to stifle yourself, but hear her footsteps drawing near, hear her tentatively calling your name. The bathroom light flicks on, you can see the relative lightness even behind your closed lids. You hope there is enough water in your lungs for the intended effect to not be ruined, but your lucid thinking tells you otherwise.

She's grabbing your hair now, pulling your face out of the water, and you're surprised to feel the sharp pain all over your scalp – you're

surprised to feel any pain at all. Then she's pulled you to a sitting position, and she's hugging you to her. The cold porcelain against your bare breasts shocks your system, as does the sight of mascara running down her cheeks. She's squeezing you tight, running her hand over your wet hair, saying your name over and over through the hiccups of her tears. And you're just as shocked to feel dampness on your cheeks – certainly from your own eyes, as it's too warm to be bath water. You let yourself go limp in her arms, reassured for the moment, even though your brain is already strenuously working for an acceptable answer to the question that will surely be asked once you are dry and warm again.

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