

## **Girl meets the Ward**

It's been a couple of months now, the hallways were as deserted as ever. Deafening silence roamed the asylum's corridors and the situation did not seem to get any better with time.

The leisure room brought no comfort to its occupants, but it remained a temporary form of escapade. Art in all its shapes was illustrated in this place, and its protagonists were dwelling in their own world of fantasy.

The youngest resident of this sanctuary was never a fan of crowds. He would usually take the furthest seat in the room and drown in his drawings which usually took up all of his break time as he portrayed all of his haunting fears. When his time was up, he would then pick up his medication from the pharmacy and quietly head back to his ward.

The oldest resident of this very ward was ... special. The art he bore in his heart was different as he shaped it with a knife. The love he had for his ultimate favorite thing in the world ended up being his undoing, and he paid for it in blood, so to speak. His diet, against his will, was different than his inmates' but he didn't have the right to complain. He helplessly took his pills and regained his ward after the end of his break.

In broad daylight, a serenading melody could be heard across the hallways. A hypnotizing symphony emitting from yet another hopeless resident, mixing between joy and sorrow, filled the area and mesmerized the small audience thereby present. His first love was the only thing preventing him from completely losing himself. At the end of the day, and after taking his usual prescription, he remained grateful for still remembering who he was.

A ray of sunshine at times and a heavy rain at others, in between lay a hopeful resident, who still sought seeing a better day despite the stormy weather. Being a dance machine was probably what kept him "sane" for the time being. He didn't ask for this, but he didn't have a choice either. With his mother being both his strength and weakness, he encouraged himself to receive his treatment for her.

In addition to the above, a pitch perfect once occupied the leisure room. This soulful resident used to chase away his daily fears with the weapon he cherished the most: his voice. Despite reaching notes higher than his state of mind, he couldn't help but feel diminished, unworthy, inferior. His complex only drove him to work harder, that was until it ultimately trapped him in a loop of mad obsession. Although he didn't believe that his medication had any beneficial effects, he took it in the hopes of waking up one day from this compulsive nightmare.

The leisure room might be silent, but a pressuring exception invaded the area. This playful resident went by many names, but the alien remained his winning tag. Inappropriate at times and excessive at others, he was probably the only smile left hanging in the whole institute. Despite his handicap, he took things very lightly to an entertaining level and lived in his own bubble: almost trouble-free, he called his medication “magical pills” and his ward “La la land”.

It seemed that the Yang represented by all of the previous residents was contrasted with one strong Yin, the darkest patient this asylum ever welcomed in a while. He was labeled as the “resident evil, the monster”, and was often seated silently in yet another corner of the room. With no memory of whom he was or why he was admitted, his loss of temper often forced the staff to lock him up in a strait jacket, making even the leisure time that everybody anticipated a leashing time for him. As he didn’t cooperate with his medication intake either, he was usually sedated to enable his transfer back to his own ward.

Different illnesses, similar struggles, one aim: to be cured. These fellow patients reunited in pairs in their respective wards: the youngest and oldest were inmates in Ward B, the hopeful and hopeless residents shared Ward T, and the entertaining couple occupied Ward S.

Leaving out the final inmate, his violent behavior earned him some solo time in Ward R, also known as the retreat zone. With his case worsening at first, his follow-ups regressed, his amnesia was of no help, and his initial struggle was yet to be pinpointed.

For about a year, the asylum was dominated by a male presence. However, the recent arrival of a new resident added a feminine touch to the ward: a weakling, consumed by her lifestyle and restlessness, was firstly admitted in a strait jacket herself but her condition bettered once she started taking her appointed medication and she was eventually admitted to Ward B. With a journal that never left her sight, she has always picked an isolated desk in the leisure room in front of the window with a garden view, and sat there during the whole break, writing and writing and writing until the nurse called out for medication time.

Shy at first, she usually avoided eye contact in order to spare herself the usual ice breaker: Why are you here? Were you caught? Did you fail to fight it like the rest of us? No matter how much being talkative was her strong suit before, she instantly lost the will to converse the minute she joined the institute. She wanted to be at peace, and she wanted to be alone at that.

However, her presence although passive, started affecting the other attendees. They began developing an interest in her story, and to their dismay, she was bound to keep her silence. In response, all they could do was observing her peculiarly.

The asylum's schedule was always constant: Leisure time every morning, a weekly global evaluation in the afternoons, and an individual assessment that took place at the end of every month. All of these activities made nighttime the residents' favorite, since they were allowed to finally regain their respective wards and reflect upon themselves while waiting for a better tomorrow.

During her first month of stay, she remained silent throughout all activities, leaving her assessment chart blank for 30 consecutive days, much to her inmates and the staff's disbelief.