

PARANOID, TENSE, SWEATY, DISASTER

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When you write about PTSD, it is best to generalize. If you get too specific, people might not understand, and that could hurt your cause. You're trying to prove that mental illness isn't some heavily bearded white guy with an arsenal and an agenda, but it's difficult to do that when you can barely leave the house. It's ironic, because what you and most of your buddies are scared of outside is fucking guys with beards and agendas, or suits and agendas, or maybe buzz cuts and arsenals.

When you were 18 you were invincible. You left everything behind to try something new, be somebody. It was all so thrilling, so patriotic—you setting out into the world to make something of yourself, be a part of something higher. By 19 you had been promoted and people liked you even though you made mistakes—forgot names and missed deadlines, showed up to work hungover or still drunk. You figured being 19 was about messing up anyway, so you made big, beautiful, firework mistakes. You didn't learn a goddamn thing from it. It was pretty to watch though, your blizzard of fuck-ups swirling around your virgin, baby face. You fell in love; you couldn't have been more unstoppable. You were glowing and walking on sunshine and all that shit. You were all you could be—and isn't that what you signed up for?

Like all good things, that time came to an end. An explosion more brilliant than the rest. A fire you didn't even see coming. There it was, blazing through your life. First loves turn into first heartbreaks and cause scars...vulnerabilities. They leave marks that others can read on your face as plain as day. Guess yours maybe read "Easy Target." You found yourself with a bullseye on your back. Maybe it was painted while you were sleeping. It felt like a dream, a bad one, the heavy kind that you have to pull yourself out of over and over. The kind you can't shake off, that makes you want to curl up and cry when you finally climb out of it.

I don't know if you ever got out of it. Guess that's what this illness is, this affliction. They say therapy helps, but you've never been

sure how talking a thing into existence will dull the pain of it. You keep trying though—even quit drinking—but nothing helps. You can't turn the noise off, keep hearing that hot breath graze your ears and feel it travel directly down your spine. That voice, those words, they are everywhere. The medicine they give you to make things silent sends shock waves through your body, while electrical zaps remind you that you survived it. Surviving it reminds you that you used to be happy. Every single day is unbearable now, here in the present, in the post trauma.

When you write about PTSD, make sure to describe every minutiae. You want people to understand how it roots in you, like that superfluous ivy on the East Coast that eats up everything good that used to live there. How it replaces you with murky, tangled, spiky memories. Remember, when you write about PTSD, no one will care unless your trauma is accompanied by some tragic battle story. When you talk about it, make sure to say that your buddy died, even if no one has died besides your nana. They don't care that no one had to literally die for it to be traumatic. Don't mention the part where you'd rather die than have the memories of surviving it. Don't leave out details, but don't make them true. They don't want the truth. They want your damage on a plate and they want it juicy, want to devour your pain for dessert while you sit empty, all trace of you gobbled up by it and them. You are for consumption now.

When you meet up with friends from back then, recognize how broken each of you is. Then don't speak of it. The only way to continue is to keep it quiet in your chest. Don't let it seep out and drown you. When you write about PTSD don't write about it at all. Write about how much you used to trust in everything. Tell them how good you used to feel in your own body, how the pain never came until after that bad dream. Remember when you used to stay up all night trying to catch the stars. Try not to think about how scared you are of the night sky now. Your thoughts can't catch you in the light.

When you were young you found so much beauty in the world. Keep looking for it. Write about moving forward. Better yet, stop writing about it. Tell yourself that you're better. Eat vegan and switch to tea so your heart beats at a normal pace. You're better now. Take PTSD off your list of personality traits. Write a blog post about healing. Tell people you've moved on. Stop writing about it.