

## This Is What It Feels Like

### *It runs in the family.*

No. it runs through my head until it wears circles into my brain, melding and melting and molding my mind until my thoughts are looping thoughts are looping are looping looping looping.

### *Slow down.*

I can't slow down until anxiety does. Here, here's a to-do list. Distract anxiety, so anxiety can't destroy. Distract. Stop running around. Stop eating my homework, my good thoughts, my therapy. Stop running, stop, stop. Distract, distract.

### *Take a break.*

I cannot take a break I am break I am broken. I can't let my fingers stop typing, my hands stop writing. I have too much to do in this world, too much. Resting is counterproductive and who am I if not productive?

### *Just procrastinate every now and then.*

I can't do it, I have to get going, get done, check it off the to-do list, do all the things I feel obligated to do, do all the things I feel to bad to say no to. Go, go, go, if you stop anxiety will have time to talk to you, go, go.

### *You seemed so calm.*

The pebbles beneath my feet smooth over the edges of fear but it won't leave, it bobs just above the waves. I try to drown it, but fear is too buoyant, too buoyant for my intentions. Unease lingers in the imprint my foot leaves in the sand— it puddles and slinks down through the grainy terrain until the moment he comes home.

### *You're doing it again.*

I pick and flick my frail fingernails to make a sound, to know I'm here, i'm real, i'm living, i'm alive. Focus, focus on your fingers, breath, stop looking everywhere, breathe, breathe, focus on the keratin against keratin, breathe.

### *What is under your fingernails?*

I need to scratch the thoughts out of my head. I claw at my scalp. Get out! Get out! All that comes out is blood, blood. My thoughts are not in my blood, only the DNA that holds this disorder. Get out! But they won't get out; they're laughing at me now.

### *You get sick really often.*

I'm always sick. My mind is sick, my mind has a fever. It's overheating and it won't cool down. Ibuprofen, tylenol. Headaches pound from the inside of my skull. Thump, thump, my thoughts thump and thud and come crashing down. Let them out, let them out. I don't know how.

### *You don't look sick.*

I am sick, sick of myself, sick of my mind, sick of sick. I'm afraid I'm going to get sick and now i'm sick. What if i have to puke and we're in a car or a bus or in class or in somewhere i can't get out. My thoughts supply my stomach acid, they burn me from the inside out, let me out, where's my out? I'm okay, i'm fine, i'm fine, i'm not, i think I'm lying.

*Why have you been absent so much?*

Every morning i awake and every morning the monster in my mind does too. It tells me i won't be able to get out, it tells me today's a horrible day to feel bad, it tells me things that scare me into sickness and i believe it. Every day, it seeps out of my mind and into my stomach and I have to be fine because the world will go on even if I don't.

*You don't look like you'd have anxiety.*

I'm not trying to hide it, I'm not wearing any mask, it just seeps out through the cracks in certain places. It trickles down into my stomach whenever I'm out of the house but when i'm alone, It drowns me when I'm alone but it's not my head bobbing out of the water because the anxiety takes my head first. My feet stick out and I thrash and struggle as my mind is chained to the ocean floor.

*Just stay home.*

Please don't go. If you leave, you leave me alone with my mind. I can't stay here, don't make me stay here, don't leave, come back. Anxiety won't get back in its' cage. It's tearing up my sheet of affirmations, my breathing exercises, my life, it's tearing up my life, please come home.

*Move on.*

My mind is a broken record broken record broken broken mind. Spiraling spinning twirling falling. i hurt my brother, i couldn't make everyone happy, i disobeyed God, i'm a burden, i'm not helping enough, i was manipulative, i was human. I want to forget, but if i forget, i won't be properly punished. My mind is my prison sentence. Remember, remember?

*You're spiraling again.*

I used to have nightmares about that girl that Willy Wonka turned into a blueberry. She was out of control, falling down, spiraling down, no one could save her, down, down, down, darkness. I am her. My thoughts breed self-doubt and beget self-hate until it's a spiral of thoughts and birthing pains and blueberry girls.

*The Bible says not to worry.*

They say you're too blessed to be stressed but I'm so blessed so why and I so stressed? I'm horrible, terrible, because why aren't I doing what the Bible says?

*What's wrong?*

Nothing's wrong. I'm staring at the wall because nothing is wrong but i feel wrong. Something is missing or there's too much of something. I thought i put all the right ingredients in, but it all feels wrong. It's twisting up my stomach, oh it hurts, i'm crying, i'm crying because nothing is wrong. Everything is wrong because nothing is wrong but me.

*Why are you crying?*

Nothing, nothing at all. I'm choking on this stone in my throat and my words can't quite squeeze around the edges. Sentences stop and wait—look left and right—for the rogue breath seizing my lungs. The tears leave and my head is empty. Thoughts echo in there.

*What's bothering you?*

I count the reason on my fingers, 1, 2, 3, 1, 2, 3, I count the reasons I'm crying. My thoughts scatter as I reach for them and I try to pinch them between my fingernails but they fly and run and gallop away. Why was I crying again? I need to know, I need to know what to tell my therapist, I need to remember but I can't remember and suddenly I can't remember what I was trying to remember, so I let myself be pulled under and into the river of tears falling from my blank, dead eyes.

*Just love yourself.*

Where are the instructions? I never learned how to love me because I let him do it for me. Someone is gatekeeping because I can't find the instructions. I screwed the nails in wrong and I forgot to wipe the stain off and the legs are too big and this table is atrocious and I can't love it—me and don't just tell me what, tell me how.

*Didn't you date him?*

No, I never really dated him. I just tied myself to the idea that someone would love me so I didn't have to but that came at the price of being tied to someone who wasn't tied to God.

*\*My mother's voicemail\**

Don't look at the clock, at the time, don't count how long it's been since my mom last texted, don't count the missed calls, don't look, but I've got to look. It's been too long, she normally texts back by now. All I can do is prepare for the worst. They're dead, all of them, I'm alone and I will always be alone, and maybe they aren't dead but I can't get my hopes up because the farther you climb, the longer you'll fall.