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Application for Honors

Role Play

The night I was arrested is hazy, more of a constructed storyline than a memory in my mind. What I actually do remember of the night consists primarily of tactile sensations. They slap a wristband on you when you're booked in. It is smooth like powdered sugar on a kitchen countertop. It has a metal washer as a fastener. It means you belong to them.

I can easily recall just how tightly the cold handcuffs were clamped on my wrists, how the metal pressed my wrists into my lower back, yet I don't know what the face of my arresting officer looked like. I don't have a memory of the digital red numbers that undoubtedly flashed on the breathalyzer (roadside or station) nor miserably failing the field sobriety test, as I undoubtedly did. The taste of warm saline in my open mouth as I wailed like a two-year-old in tantrum in the holding cell comes readily to mind. I don't remember getting a mug shot taken; I can't even fathom how bedraggled and distraught I must've looked in it. Yet I have a vivid recollection of the numbed slap of my skull against the painted-white concrete walls as I punished myself for my potentially (but not literally) fatal error. I'm not quite sure how long it took for them to remove me from the holding cell and the company of other inmates, experiencing fewer indications of insanity, but that point when they moved me to the central waiting area is where my visual, linear memory starts to return.

Tactile sensations still dominate: the frigid layer of goosebumps that spread over my legs is much easier to recall than the faces of the guards at the desk who mocked my

lack of control. They were quiet, complacent in their position, unmemorable. They checked people in with as few words as possible, standardized questions. They mostly avoided interaction with the confined unless it required domination and reprimand. The guards at the jail do not see the inmates as human. I'd imagine the guards at jails must adopt this mentality to properly operate the facility without issue. They are lesser versions of themselves, copies created from paper slightly awry and deviant from the norm as a result, thus subject to being confinement, herding.

I'd imagine the first day of Philip Zimbardo's Stanford Prison experiment was relatively quiet—it was uneventful, anyway. Those assigned the role of guard were outfitted with army-khakis and mirrored sunglasses, given wooden batons (for use in intimidation only). The prisoners, in contrast, were clothed in cheap, abrasive smocks. They were denied underwear. The guards addressed the inmates by their given “identity numbers.” Small chains jingled around the prisoners' ankles, reminding them of their place in the simulated correctional facility.

A riot broke out on the second day. I'd imagine the thoughts of the prisoners in cell 1 must've been anything but quiet. They blockaded their cell door with their beds, refusing to come out or to do anything the guards told them to do. Confinement is like that: stripped of external stimuli, one turns inward. The thoughts amplify as they circle around the skull, gaining deafening strength at each pass. One is bound to listen to them eventually.

For the twelve “psychologically healthy,” Stanford students randomly assigned the role of prisoner in the experiment, that “eventually” was less than 48 hours after the

commencement of the project. The riot was subdued with fire extinguishers. Hour 36 of the experiment brought about the first true meltdown:

“[Prisoner] #8612 then began to act “crazy,” to scream, to curse, to go into a rage that seemed out of control. It took quite a while before we became convinced that he was really suffering and that we had to release him.”

Whether it was the guards’ enjoyment of their newfound power or simply the fact that this situation was set up as an “experiment,” in which the pain could not be real, the guards quickly became sadistic. Prisoners were not permitted to use the bathroom. A mattress was a gift to be earned; a concrete slab would suffice for the subhuman.

It took six days for the experiment to be shut down.

I’ve spent a total of five nights in the slammer (jail, not prison)—one day short of the true submission seen in the Sanford Prison Experiment, perhaps two considering the time was non-sequential. The first night, the night of my arrest, was mercifully short, a 6-hour night in the drunk tank. The alcohol sloshing around in my blood left most of the major details of the night not in my mind but records of events preserved only in police reports, the memories of rent-a-cop desk workers, speculation.

I had fallen into a pattern of recklessness. I knew this was no experiment. I’d been sleeping in my car with the keys in the ignition when I’d been picked up. Earlier in the night, I’d been at a farm down route 17, trying to take the edge off of loneliness by keeping inappropriate company with recent acquaintances and alcohol. I had three drinks, mixed by the person there I’d known the longest, the owner of the farm, the man closet to the cooler. Liquor and Coke, indeterminable amounts. I had planned on

sleeping in the spare bedroom of the farmhouse. I do not know why I decided to leave. I am grateful that, even in my inebriated state of dysfunction, I realized I couldn't drive and needed to pull over.

I pieced together fragments of knowledge from various sources; the towing receipt, court summons and word of mouth. I discovered the three drinks I had taken and downed without inquiring after the content were mixed with 95% Everclear, not some 35% rail vodka as I had assumed. I had driven about half a mile from the farm had been asleep about two hours when I got picked up. My BAC had actually been going *up* during that time, the alcohol recently consumed still processing. It rose .02, from .19 to .21, in the mere twenty minutes it took to get from roadside to station. A proportional analysis of this data would have put my BAC at .12 at the time I drove, well above the legal limit but below the .15 threshold that, under Virginia law, imposes mandatory jail time. This discovery didn't change the illegality of the situation, but it did make me feel minimally less reckless simply because I was minimally less impaired. At the time of my arrest, however, I thought myself a lushly idiot and berated myself accordingly.

Most people in the drunk tank don't actually go insane with remorse and self-inflicted injuries when they get arrested. It seems I broke that pattern—I'm sure my incredibly high BAC may have played a small role in that. I let slip that I'd been on anti-depressants at one point in my life, and that combined with my head-slapping was enough to label me a suicide risk. The guards removed me from the holding cell and sat me in the waiting room of the jail, on a stiff foam chair covered in plastic-like upholstery.

“Sit here so we can watch you,” one of them said. “You’ll have a psychiatric evaluation around five AM.”

I sat quietly for a while, in an upright-seated position with my feet flat on the floor. I alternated between picking at my cuticles and scratching my arms, licking up the saline as it trickled over my lips. I had been wearing glasses the night of my arrest, and they’d taken them from me along with my earrings and any other personal property I theoretically could’ve used to inflict damage on myself or another arrestee. The waiting room looked like a watercolor painted by a four year old, the shapes indistinct and the colors all blending together in muted shades of grey. I remained stock still until the 58 degrees of the jail started to seep into my bared arms, shoulders, prickled legs. I shivered, intermittently at first and then near-uncontrollably. I closed my eyes and shifted into a horizontal position across several of the chairs, trying to warm myself with my own limbs, curling into a sideways ball or pulling my knees into my chest.

“Sit up!”

I bolted upright and snarled. “Why?”

“We have to be able to see you. We have to make sure you’re okay.”

“You can’t see me lying down?”

“Come on, Snider, you’ve been basically cooperative so far. Don’t make us give you a non-compliance charge too.”

“But I just want to SLEEP,” I slurred. “I want to be WARM. I can’t stop shivering.”

They gave in and provided me with one of the short-sleeve khaki shirts to cover my shoulders. They still didn’t let me sleep.

0500 rolled around and I was ushered to my psychiatric evaluation in a small room down the hall from the waiting room. The psychiatrist was a heavy-set African American woman who asked all of the usual questions for someone with an admitted history of depression:

“Does anyone else in your family have a history of depression? Who?”

“My mom, a few of my uncles.” There were more. I could have elaborated.

“Have you ever tried to commit suicide?”

“Not actually. I mean, I’ve been close, but no.”

“When was the last time you went to a psychiatrist?”

“Two years ago. When I was on medication.”

“Are you seeing anyone now?”

“No.”

She asked a few more behavior-oriented questions, nodded, then instructed me to make an appointment with a therapist as soon as I was released. I had earned the definition “mentally stable” (relatively), but I also exhibited several risk behaviors, she said.

“Antidepressants might not be necessary, but you and your psychologist can determine that together,” she said.

She was confident in her behavioral analysis. I knew I wasn’t going to see my psychologist, but I returned her nod. I was escorted from the office, determined to keep my mouth shut and myself out of trouble for the remaining portion of my stay. I wanted

to be quiet, to melt into the chairs and remain unnoticed. I calmed my body's visceral reactions to the temperature. I was afraid that otherwise they wouldn't let me go.

Both the guards and prisoners adapted surprisingly quickly to their respective roles in the Stanford Prison Experiment. After the riot, the guards concocted strategies to better control the prisoners. The roll-call counts became rituals of humiliation, involving forced exercise and corporeal punishment. They often forced the prisoners to strip naked, to clean the latrines with their bare hands.

Not one of the twelve prisoners requested to end the experiment early, even when informed that they would no longer receive compensation for participating. They had internalized their roles as invalids, convinced themselves they were powerless past reaction. A "replacement prisoner," was introduced into the Stanford Prison Experiment in an attempt to garner a rebellious attitude from the prisoners. He was instructed to stage a protest, a hunger strike, seeking an early release. Instead of rallying behind this new inmate, the prisoners isolated him as a troublemaker, seemingly perturbed by his disturbance.

Keeping quiet keeps you out of trouble. The mentality of the prisoner is one of submissive appeasement—remain unnoticed and you bare no risk of pissing off a guard and receiving the reprimand. It is better to collectively suffer in silence than to risk oneself demanding rights for the group. There is no use fighting. You have lost.

I was released shortly after 0800. The wristband slit and my belongings collected, I stepped out into the civilian world. My limbs welcomed the humid air that draped

loosely over my frozen pores. I walked across the parking lot, took a deep breath and opened the door to my dad's blue Toyota Sienna. He turned the key in the ignition.

"I'm glad I didn't kill anyone," I said.

"I'm glad too. I'm happy you're okay."

"I'm not sure I'm in agreement about that."

I suppose I was happy. My dad was picking me up and he didn't hate me. I wasn't dead, nor was anyone dead as a result of my stupidity. I was lucky. Had I actually hit or killed anyone, I would have been a suicide risk without the "risk." I would have stumbled out into oncoming traffic, or hit my head harder against the cell wall until my skull splintered and my brain bled out. My common sense may be non-existent, but my senses of guilt and self-depreciation have always been spotlessly intact.

"Let's go get your car from the towing lot," he suggested. I nodded, and handed him the towing notice with the address on it.

"So I'm going to drive my car back even though my license is under administrative suspension?"

"I'll follow you home. We'll drive carefully."

"Okay." I settled back in the seat and crossed my arms, pinching the skin on my right forearm with my stubby nails. "I'm sorry. So, so, so sorry."

I must've apologized in every possible phrasing of that sentiment that I know by the time we merged onto 95.

"Stop," he said. "You made a mistake."

"A fucking huge one."

"Sure. A huge mistake, then."

“I’m a terrible person...awful, awful. I could’ve killed someone. I probably should’ve fucking crashed into a tree and died. It’s what I deserve.”

My dad was quiet, letting me vent. I suggested several other ways I could have and should and could have died that night before he interrupted me.

“You are not a terrible person. As I said, you made a mistake. There are so many people who’ve made the same mistake and just haven’t gotten caught.”

“Yeah...”

“I’ve driven when I shouldn’t have. I just got lucky. I’m sure you know several other people who can say the same thing.”

A mild comprehension of the reality of human fallacy slowly slipped into the replace the overwhelming sense of guilt wrecking my nervous system. It’s funny how we all worry over each other’s safety while we’re all out making the same mistakes. We as a species are inherently both pattered and diverse. We can instantly connect with one another, we can be curious yet skeptical of the other’s motivations. We are affected by sets of circumstances, our psychology always at the mercy of our sociology. Yet individuals placed in the same situation can behave in vastly different ways—I’m not going to get all String Theory here or anything, but it’s important to consider the infinite number of infinities present in each moment. It is important because, within this plethora of possibility, human behavior tends to fall into patterns. We become the roles we assign ourselves. We act them out daily, embedding the persona in our nervous system and the label in our thoughts until it becomes natural, until it becomes our self. I had been acting out this pattern of recklessness, and would continue to do so if I couldn’t see myself as anything but a product of this pattern.

A healthy sense of indignation settled in my gut. Maybe it was nausea.

“At least I can still make it to my psychology class,” I offered.

“Are you sure you want to go?”

“It’s at least one responsible thing I can do.”

We retrieved my car from the towing lot, made it back to my apartment without me getting arrested a second time. My dad bought me breakfast to soak up the remaining alcohol from my churning stomach. He drove me to psychology class where I could ironically study the workings of my brain that caused me to act so self-destructively, and the result of my head trauma. Thanks to the amount of alcohol I’d imbibed the night prior, I ended up experiencing withdrawal symptoms and spewing the entire contents of my stomach into the public restroom, purging myself of alcohol and Starbucks breakfast sandwich in one swift heave. It hurt, but I felt cleaner.

My arraignment wasn’t until September, and until then I was virtually a free member of society. My license was returned to me, unrestricted, after a seven day mandatory suspension. I retained free reign over the road for the three months between my arrest and arraignment. I drove as much as possible, mainly to give myself time to think. I had read the court precedents online; I knew what I was in for. It was funny, really, because my parents didn’t seem to quite believe that I would be going to jail.

“It’s a *mandatory* ten-day sentence,” I said, referring to the legal repercussion of such a high BAC while driving.

“But you’re such a good student. There are mitigating circumstances.”

“Not legally.”

My case was then further continued to October 14, a date that would suit the schedules of the prosecutor, arresting officer and my defense attorney. My lawyer, Mark Gardener told me he'd shoot for a plea bargain, but there wasn't much he could do—my BAC was on record. He at least seemed to have a realistic outlook. My parents kept asking the same questions over and over, phrased different ways, trying to see if any syntactic formation would produce a loophole in the legal system. Gardener looked concerned and fatherly; he shrugged his arms and winced a little when he talked.

“The threshold is .20 for BAC in Virginia—that's the difference between serving five and ten days. I'm near positive I can get them to throw out the higher BAC from the station because the roadside is more accurate to when you had actually driven.” He talked gently purposefully, gesticular but slowly so. “You also have a good record. No prior charges, good academic standing. The judge should grant you a restricted license for school.”

“That lesser charge carries at least a mandatory five-day jail sentence, but I hope to be able to talk them out of that with your record,” he said.

“Or, if you are sentenced to serve time, we can appeal the case until it won't conflict with your classes.” He was reassuring in his doubt.

The court day came, and I dressed in my nicest business outfit. I didn't see either the judge or the prosecutor until the plea agreement had been reached, merely stood in the courtroom to be respectful and have the judge inform me what I already knew in more

accusatory terms. My participation was merely a formality—I had no real action in the case or power over the decision.

What I did have control over was the timing. To avoid being taken immediately from the courtroom to Rappahannock Regional, I walked through the clerk's office and filed an appeal I intended solely as a postponement, as discussed "just in case," with Gardener. I planned to withdraw it and serve my time over Thanksgiving break, the first break from classes long enough to fulfill my legal obligation to the court without missing any serious obligations for coursework.

I waited just about as late in the day as possible, a little after three on the Tuesday before Thanksgiving. The escorting officer was nice enough to allow me to walk to his car side-by-side before he stood behind my back and put the cuffs on.

"You don't look like a criminal," he said, guiding me into the back of the car.

The ride to the jail was short, no more than ten minutes and likely closer to five. We may have made some more small talk. I do not remember what was said. I do not think it was much. He opened the car door and led me up to the entrance, buzzed for the guards to let us in. It took several minutes for them to unlock the door.

"I really didn't want to have to keep you in handcuffs this long," he said. The door clicked open and we walked in.

Jails are designed to be as sterile as possible, built of material designed to conduct cold. The boxes vary in size and shape, but not in content. Seatless metal toilet. Glossy cream walls. Repetition in the traceless pattern in the floor and the punctures in the ceiling. You are locked in, of course. You can peer out through a slit in the door, privy

to a rectangular section of the world around you. You will be released when the guard, who you may or may not be able to see, flips the switch, or pushes the button, you aren't sure which. It all comes down to control and you have none.

Zimbardo suggested several tactics to his guards for controlling the prisoners prior to the experiment:

“You can create in the prisoners feelings of boredom, a sense of fear to some degree,” he said. “A notion of arbitrariness that their life is totally controlled by us, by the system, you, me...they'll have no privacy.”

Prisoners experience the physical and the psychological overtaken simultaneously. A total loss of control over sleeping and eating patterns, wardrobe, leisure activities, surroundings, both people and place. Dignity, in most cases. The guards walk by to do rounds, peer in at an inmate using the restroom. There is no concealment, only good timing. It is a combination of circumstances certain to produce a pattern of madness.

After spending seven hours in the 10x10 metal box better known as cell 109, ass fusing to the frigid metal bench, I knew that there were 17, 899 holes in the ceiling and had begin to think, a second time, that I was borderline insane. Still, I had four women to keep me company and take my mind off things. One of them had been beaten by her brother and I swore she had a concussion. Another, Beth, a drugged out redhead with cropped hair, mentioned that she'd previously been in here for three months—she'd also mentioned that she started talking to walls and answering for them too.

Eventually, I was taken to the back to “delouse” myself. This required me to shower, using a knit comb to work a latherless fluid through my tangled hair. It was at this point, stripping down, that the woman behind the plexi-glass window directing my shower informed me I wouldn’t be permitted to keep my grey long johns. I had worn them in at the advise of Gardener, who knew it would be freezing and told me those would be permitted underneath the uniform. He had not mentioned that they had to be all white. Oh, the things we overlook at the expense of others. As I was stripped of my shamefully grey attire, a slow cold started to slip underneath my skin.

I was terrified of getting wet but, despite the sterility of the shower room, the water spouting from the faucet head was mercifully hot; I was hesitant to cut it off. Still, I knew that I was only allowed ten minutes in the shower and didn’t want to walk out of the stall dripping. I robed into the official uniform, suspiciously sniffing the white granny underwear provided and wondering how two pairs were going to last my four day stay. I slipped my off-white (okay, *grey*) sports bra underneath my shirt, prayed they didn’t check, and knocked on the plexi-glass window to indicate I was finished.

“All set?”

I nodded, shifting slightly and revealing my contraband bra strap beneath the strangely low, open v-neck cut of the shirt.

“Let me see that bra. Is that grey? That looks grey to me.”

“I...I don’t know. I’ve always thought it was white.”

“Let me see it again?” she asked, scrutinizing the shoulder blade where the strap rested. “No, no, you’re right. It’s white—my eyes must be tired.”

That was the nicest treatment I received from the jail personnel throughout my stay in Rappahannock Regional.

You are grateful for a softened glance. You are grateful for that one honest forewarning, a whispered preventative communication. You are mostly grateful when people look the other way.

Despite the celebrity of the Stanford Prison Experiment, it is largely unknown that a few of the guards showed signs of compassion and even attempted to help the prisoners. The fact that four of the twelve guards exhibited extremely sadistic tendencies and totalitarian fists means these efforts were likely negotiated within the system. Only an outsider coming in could call the experiment to a halt, as Zimbardo's then girlfriend Christina Maslach's arrival on scene eventually did with the Stanford Prison Experiment. On the inside, small allowances are crucial; being able to wrap up in an unapproved blanket, getting an extra bathroom break. An inch of fabric is a true victory when it's one that keeps the warmth from evacuating one's chest.

After the delousing procedure, they decided to put me in a different cell by myself. Cell 109 paled into comparison to cell 131; a 4x5 concrete box the devoured another four hours of my life. My wet hair dripped like liquid nitrogen down my neck under my new khaki attire. At first, so sure I'd be booked and taken back soon, I simply rested my forehead on the tiny window and watched. I eventually realized that wasn't going to happen, and sang to pass the time, cycling through every song I knew all of the words to and even some I didn't. Taking a cue from Beth, I started naming the objects:

the toilet paper roll became “Barbra,” the sprinkler head (more fondly) became “Mr. Sprinkles.”

Around 0130, the bald guard with what looked like a pack of hot dogs attached to the back of his head barked at me:

“Snider!”

As I abruptly sprung up and pressed my face to the plexiglass, he turned to another one of the guards and laughed.

“She thought I sprung her door!”

I noticed a rampant red stain in the middle of my newest cell. A similar one had been present in the other one, though much smaller than the one in cell 131. *Blood*, I decided, and laid down on the metal, urine-stenched bench.

I wasn’t removed from the cell until close to 0300. I’d gotten there just before 1600. Law requires that inmates remain in holding no longer than twelve hours; they’d really pushed it with me. The jail guards were the most sexist, racist, cold-hearted creatures I’ve ever come into contact with—much more so than the inmates. They processed all 25 men before even beginning to book any of the five women. While we all shivered into icicles with only our anger and jumping jacks to keep us warm, they laughed at inmates and provoked incidents.

“What is his name? Ramirez? Raa-MEER-Ezzz,” one chucked.

Natavia, an African American girl in my original holding cell, had an even more chilling interaction. She was taken into isolation when we realized that they were

booking all of the women before starting with the women—she'd shouted at a guard to “do his job.”

He came to the cell, grabbed her by the arm, and escorted her out.

“This is our home and this is your Hell,” he'd told her.

Disorientation, depersonalization, and basic division of prisoners from a sense of community, from the group of individuals functioning within civilian society, is key to achieving the surrender of their wills'. Within the Stanford Prison Experiment, Zimbardo set up a number of specific conditions that he hoped would produce these effects, such as the aforementioned numerical identities, the uncomfortably bland attire.. A prisoner is one functioning part of a collective. Self-autonomy and individual motivation do not exist. The will of the group dictates action, or inaction. Almost always silence.

You assume the group identity of the title. You are a prisoner and prisoner only. No longer able to shift between roles and identities at your own will—comfortable in your niche as “the agreeable one,” within your group of friends one moment and among your peers at that job in the Career Center. You are plucked from these communities and placed in one that disrupts your schedule, your pattern. You're stripped of yourself so you can fit into their system. You shed one skin and don another, this one much more shallow and complacent. Your new skin fuses with the skin of those around you, and the collective becomes a translucent mound, heavy and difficult to motivate.

Every inmate at Rappahannock Regional Jail must undergo a 24-hour surveillance period in an isolation cell. Each inmate is matched with a pod based on that inmates threat level and mental instability. I finally made it to my “isolation” cell just after 0330, only to find an older woman with bruised arms already passed out on the concrete slab that served as a bed. Stafford has a 99% conviction rate, and thus Rappahannock Regional is overflowing with inmates. The walls of these cells are a stark white, and the metal sink/toilets are smeared with hard water stains. The floor is painted bright yellow, perhaps in some half-hearted attempt to bring some cheer into that sterile place, though more likely an attempt to keep the occupants awake to really fuck with them.

Upon entering the cell, I was given a pad comparable to a yoga mat, two non-fitted sheets and (thankfully) two scratchy wool blankets that I wrapped around my quivering body. I mistakenly decided to use the bathroom for the first time. The toilet sounded like a screaming banshee sucking my soul out through my ass.

Needless to say, I woke up my cellmate.

“My name’s Laurie,” she said, exposing the gap where her two front teeth should’ve been.

“I’m Olivia. I...didn’t know the toilet would be so loud.”

She shook her head. “I wasn’t sleeping much really.”

She had bruises on her arms, a knot on her forehead.

“I don’t usually drink,” she started. “My mom had just died and we were all gathered together for a funeral. I kind of hit the drink real hard. Well, I’m sort of the black sheep of the family, but we were all sort of getting along. And then my brother started yelling at me for not being around more for mom and he hit me. I did bite him,

but just to get him to let go. And *I* called the cops, but he locked me outside, and without my shoes and I was crying and banging on the door when they showed up so I guess they listened to him 'cause I seemed like the crazy one then."

"Sounds a lot like how I acted when I got arrested."

"And I can't get ahold of any of my family members because my husbands and daughters only have cell phones so they don't even know where I am. I know my brother won't bail me out."

I wouldn't say I was shocked so much as disgusted. My eyes were too tired to express the appropriate look of concern. I said something about the system being fucked and mentioned the girl with the concussion in my holding cell. I mumbled goodnight and rolled over, throwing the wool blankets over my head in search of sleep and warmth. I was grateful now for the ability to stretch out, even if I wasn't able to immediately fall into slumber, and for those two scratchy wool blankets draped over my exhausted body, shielding my face from the dim glow of the cell.

I slept about two hours before being woken up for breakfast at 0515. They shoved a plastic tray of shitfood through the slit in the door, asking if I wanted to clean my cell. Both Laurie and I chose sleep over cleanliness and politely declined, uninformed that this would mean we wouldn't be allowed phone privileges later in the day. Bright lights came on after breakfast, so I again threw those wool blankets over my head and continued to sleep the day away. The personnel repeated the food service procedure as 1130, and also woke me once for "classification" and to give me a tuberculosis test. I stuck my arm through the slit in the door to receive the shot, denied the ability to see who was stabbing my arm with the needle. They would not check the results of this TB test

until the night before I was released. I passed out after the test and continued to sleep in increments throughout the day.

You starting losing reality then. The semi-conscious, chest-breathing body seeking to rest the mind in every exhalation but unable to keep it from dream weaving possibilities about the place, about what it will do to you. Still, you crave the sleep because the speculation of the subconscious is unfulfilled, still in the realm of non-reality. Facing that really pushes you from mental fascination with the role and its implications to an acceptance and performance of that role.

Laurie and I were woken up at the end of day two to be moved to population along with a few recent classified additions, my cellmate Megan included. They patted us down and searched our jail-issued totes (what would we have been able to sneak in?) before leading us to our new residences, just in time for dinner.

Jail food is absolutely terrible. The “shitfood” I got in isolation—cornflakes with milk and a fairly stale biscuit—was little preparation for how awful the rest of the meals would be. The inmate handbook took care to note that, “The Food Service Program is not used as a disciplinary measure,,” but I the hunger would argue otherwise. On the third day, Thanksgiving, I finally gave in and ate most of what was served. I later threw up.

They’d served us a rolled up piece of turkey deli meat atop a pile of stuffing that looked suspiciously like dog shit. I ate it anyway, the gnawing in my stomach begging me to fill it with something, *anything*. The meal worked its way through most of my digestive tract, leaving me with only bile to regurgitate. It started at midnight and continued for about an hour. I wondered to myself if this bodily reaction was from the

food itself or merely the result of withdrawal from real food. Either way, I finally understood why Ramen from the commissary was considered a delicacy.

Everyone in the holding and isolation cells had been angry. Everyone in population was just sad. Megan was an “alleged” (not convicted) DWI but with the stipulation of “hit and run schoolbus,” affixed to it. She was strangely calm in her resignation. She’d worked at the Courthouse in Alexandria; she knew the potential consequences of her charge. Ten years maximum, without any aggravating circumstances. She was bailed out the morning after our transportation by none other than her old boss. Her parents refused to speak to her.

“I’m not particularly offended, I just don’t see why they’re doing this. I’m going to get convicted—I’ll have enough time to think then. I want enjoy the little free time I have left.”

Megan may have been in some sort of denial, but she still possessed resistance, confidence in her ability to cope. She still had a sense of an individual self, and a community outside these walls.

“I’ll join the military when I get out,” she continued. “It’s really my only option at this point. They can help me get my life together.”

Perhaps I was wrong.

Once you’ve joined this community, you’re forever labeled a criminal. You put it graduate school applications, job applications. Your reputation is shot to shit and you have to explain to everyone why you can’t drive to see them anymore. Even when you

leave confinement, you have this label adhered to you, this new classification that sticks harder than any abhorred middle-school nickname ever did. It is a role you cannot shake.

My second cellmate was unbelievably shorter and younger than myself: Patricia Hodshire, 18 years old and 4'11". She had been arrested on multiple counts of grand larceny spanning several local counties, an accomplice by picking up her boyfriend and his friend from errands they would run. She had a three-year-old named Bug who seemed to overflow from her eyes and lips as she mourned not acting on her suspicions sooner.

"I knew Clark and Cody were up to something. I didn't know the area well, but they were always on roadsides when I picked them up."

"Why didn't you leave?"

"I tried to. Clark choked me and Bug was around and I didn't want Clark to hurt him too." Patricia was speaking through leaking eyes. "I was planning on leaving tonight after I dropped them off," she said quietly. "Bug is my world. I don't go out, I don't party, I just take care of him. I've been Mama for the last three years and I don't know anything different. I just want to be able to see him and him to see me to know I'm alright."

How much truth anything one hears in jail has is debatable, but I felt an overwhelming sense of sincerity from this girl. She'd been naïve and trusted someone—she knew she'd had fault in the matter, but she hadn't known everything. She felt she'd been betrayed.

After finding out the specifics of the night of my arrest, I'd also been livid with my "friend." *He knew what was in those drinks*, I thought, *he shouldn't have let me drive home*. He definitely shouldn't have told the one person who allegedly tried to go after me that "She'll be fine, don't worry about her." Fuck going to jail, I could have died! But that still doesn't excuse my astounding negligence when it comes to monitoring my alcohol consumption. That still doesn't excuse my decision to drive. I took my assumed role of recklessness from mental awareness to patterned action. The intent and circumstance no longer matter.

Whatever your perception of self was prior to this, it is altered now. What you have done, you have always to remember and analyze and decide what sort of character it gives you. Whatever the role you wished to play, your behavior within variable sets of circumstances predicts and predisposes your behavior to a pattern. The pattern repeats and your behavior becomes you.

A critique of the Stanford Prison Experiment is that guidelines for running the prison were too loosely presented to the guards. Given stricter rules, they may not have behaved so sadistically. Still, what does that say about the human tendency to gravitate toward oppression of the other when given the opportunity? The Germans have a word, *Schadenfreude*, that essentially means deriving pleasure from another's pain. It's been done for centuries; public hangings, slavery, beheading of wives at a suspicion or whimsy. Despite our deep-rooted need and natural inclination for community, we are all fascinated by the downfall of our neighbor in that we are removed from it. It is something we are witnessing, that is not happening to us but to someone that *could* be us.

Still, that distance is necessary because it allows us not to care about that other, allows us to blame them for their patterned behaviors that lead to the demise we are now witnessing. It makes it bearable.

The jail guards didn't allow the prisoners to stand or walk around even when we were permitted in the common area. We sat, playing cards or shooting the shit, at game-topped tables—a sort of summer camp for misfits. The male guard made sure to yell at each individual who made a mistake, even the newbies like myself who didn't know the rules. Only one person is allowed at the ice station at a time. You must stay back behind this white line. Oh, and use the intermate system.

This guard had come up with a clever community-building concept: the “intermate system,” of learning the ropes.

“You know how, when you were on the outside, you guys used the internet to find out information? Here, you use the intermate system. If you don't know something, ask an inmate.”

Patricia attempted to use the intermate system the following mealtime, asking me where she might procure a cup.

“Speak for yourself!” the same guard snapped at her. “You can't expect other people to take care of you in here.” He smirked as he shouted, a tight-lipped, one-sided twitch. He played these games to pass the time, to keep his sense of self within his circumstances.

Patricia took to me fairly quickly, partially because I was her cellmate and either had to listen to her cry or listen to her talk. She, distraught, somehow seemed to me so

much more level-headed than I. She worried about her family, her baby; she had her priorities in order. I hate to admit that I was anything but miserable in jail, but the time spent talking to Patricia passed so quickly that I found myself relaxed and comfortable. My thoughts were quiet when I was listening to her speak.

“Will you write me when you get out?”

“Sure. I want to know how you’re doing. I’ll write down my address and you can send me a letter when you get post.”

We experienced a moment of understanding, not of resistance but of finding a way to cope within circumstance. I hoped that letters would be as helpful as my willingness to listen. I was sure the place would still leave its dampened impression on the girl.

You will become muted. You will accept their commands and reprimands. It doesn’t take long; you have nothing to do but think and internalize their words. You will take pleasure in the pattern because it becomes knowable, becomes easier. You will understand the guards have assumed their roles in the same way that you’re beginning to, through repetition and the resulting establishment of a faction of reality. You will learn from others and you will adjust. It becomes comfortable because it is known and accepted. There is comfort in distance but there is greater comfort in the bond that acceptance breeds.

After the conclusion of the Stanford Prison experiment, six days into the fourteen day project, most of the guards were upset about its early termination. They had bonded

together to resist the riot of the prisoners. Together they had created a mental schematic of how to control the prisoners, how to maintain the order that their positions required. They had overcome a problem together at the expense of another group, at once bonding them on the dual levels of communal acceptance and alienation of outsiders. They were learning things from each other. They were hesitant to lose hold of that newly established bond.

The guards in Rappahannock Regional Jail had been bonded for much longer, each adjusting and assuming their role within the guard community as the days progressed. I only had four days in the place, and some of the women around me had months, or even years. To adjust to their roles. To become engrained into the thin cotton mattresses that rest under the constant dim light. To lose themselves. I complacently bided my time that last day until lock-in, brushed my teeth with “Maximum Security” toothpaste, and restlessly awaited my release at 0800 the next morning.

As I lay down that night, I thought about reentering civilization and the land of free will. My own reckless free will had landed me here, and I promised myself that I would find a way to break the pattern and shake the role of destructive. I promised myself I would direct my will toward a positive role, would find a group of exceptions, those who work within the system of *Schadenfreude* to offer a little relief to the outsiders. I would write Patricia. I would seek comfort in the closeness instead of the distance.

I was taken from the pod the next morning around 0630, right after I finished scrubbing the floor and made up my bunk. Waiting to be released was much more

comfortable than waiting to be booked: we were allowed the same comfort of the common room chairs that my mental instability had earned me the night of my arrest. I sat with another woman and two men waiting to be released, prohibited from conversing across genders despite the fact that we were separated by nothing more than three feet of air. This close to release, though, the guards were less strict in their reprimands, only occasionally butting into our whispered conversations.

“Rappahannock Regional is *way* worse than Powhatan Penitentiary. No contest,” whispered a tall, stiff-jawed man. This inmate had been part of a transitional program, switching after a year in prison to a work-program in the jail to be released early.

“Really? *Really?* That’s so fucked up.”

The guards shifted us a knowing glances. We were this close to civilianship, removal of our khakis and visible role as prisoners, but we weren’t quite there yet, so we shut up. Keeping quiet keeps you out of trouble. Then they cut the wristbands.

We four went to retrieve our personal effects. We huddled together in the release passageway, the last compartment preventing us from release. We were in civilian clothes. We celebrated each delivery of personal effects. The metal tray flipped down.

“Wooo! First package, who’s is it? Damn, that’s a nice wallet.” I said to the shorter of the two men who claimed it.

“Make sure everything is still there, man.”

They wouldn’t let one of us out until they’d returned all of our possessions.

“They are taking *forever!* You’d think the amount of time they spent checking us out would’ve allowed them to be more prepared. I just want to go outside.” I said.

We were anxious. They handed back two more packages. Neither were mine.

The stiff-jawed man spoke to me:

“You know, once we get out of here, we should hit up that 2 for \$20s deal at Chili’s. I haven’t been out in a long time.”

“I thought it was at Applebee’s.”

“I think they’ve both got one.”

He pulled out a slip of paper from his bag of personal effects and scribbled down his name and number. The woman slipped one more package—mine—out through the metal tray and retreated to pop the door. I slipped the sheet into my pocket and heard the door click. I rushed forward, tilted the door open. The four of us stepped outside, blinking at the morning sunrays. We nodded goodbyes, acknowledging our presence on an equal plane.

We were free from the confines of jail walls, once again able to breathe unventilated air. We were free to mix. Subject to our own will, if we knew what to do with it. I did not call the stiff-jawed man for dinner. I lost the slip of paper a few days afterward, have forgotten both his name and number. I did write Patricia. She asked me to print out song lyrics so that she could sing to herself to pass the time. I wrote the lyrics out by hand, wrote to ask when her court cases in each county were, when she would learn the length of her sentence. I wrote to give her encouragement.

I maintained this correspondence with Patricia for two months at which point I received nothing more from her.