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A MATTER OF WANT

By Megan
Kimber

Course: WRT 308, Style

Instructor: Jeffrey Simmons

Author's Note: When I wrote this piece, I was flustered because I tend to prefer writing in the first person, but I enjoyed the challenge of something new. I was able to create this uncomfortable disconnect through third person that I believe enhances the state of mind of the characters and the situation they are dealing with.

Editors' Note: A piece that will speak to a multitude of young women, Megan Kimber's narrative sends readers on a tumultuous ride through the mind of a girl grappling with the universal struggle for self-love, social acceptance, and life purpose.

Two months, three days, and four hours she'd been trapped in that Hellhole. It was only 28 days since the last time she was released, but a quick decision to slit her wrists an hour after the paperwork was signed ended her up right back where she had started 28 days earlier. She lifted up her shirt to assess the damage. There were no mirrors in that place. How's a girl to live?

"What are you doing?" It was her Mom. Always yelling. "Don't tell me I'm going to have to get rid of all the mirrors again."

"Stop. I'm just looking." Every bone was visible, every muscle, but it still didn't look quite right. "There are no rules against looking."

Marissa let go of her shirt, letting it flow over her delicate frame, glared at her mother, and proceeded up the polished wood stairs. What was wrong with that woman? Always judging. Never praising. To think of all the things Marissa had done for Her.

She began rummaging through the bathroom, her bathroom. Home at last. What an amazing feeling. Where could it have gone? Marissa dug deeper. Ripping at towels, frantically tearing at cabinet doors. Where is it?

"It's not here." It was Her again.

"What do you mean?" Marissa's eyes were now intense with fury.

"That is in the rules." Her mother thumbed through the paperwork from the clinic, grinning. "Oh, here it is, 'No scales, or weighing devices of any sort. The patient will be weighed once a week for eight weeks at out-patient care services during the patients' weekly therapy session.'" She rolled the thick stack of papers in her long fingers, "It's not here."

The joy Marissa had been feeling about being back home quickly faded. She remembered why she hated it now. Why she'd tried to off herself. Too bad she'd failed. The woman was relentless. She didn't really care about Marissa, She only sent her away because people were starting to ask questions. She hated people questioning Her judgment. She was never wrong.

Marissa dragged her massive bag across the hardwood floor, dropping it in the doorway of her bedroom. "Cloe," Marissa approached the small grey cat at the foot of her bed. It scurried off before she could reach it. "Even my cat hates me," she grumbled, a bit defeated. She attempted to reach for the door to close it, to get a little peace. It was gone. She spun around eyeing the doorframe. It was gone. Just gone.

Then She appeared, "After what happened last time I figured we shouldn't take any chances." Then She was gone.

What was that supposed to mean? How was Marissa going to live? No scale. No door. No privacy. She sat in the middle of her empty room and contemplated her options. Then she noticed something on her mattress wrapped in shiny pink paper. She was happy for a moment. A gift for her from her Aunt Stacy. Pink paper was flying everywhere. Then stillness. A tin of homemade cookies. "Way to use your brain," Marissa mumbled, "What a great gift for a recovering anorexic."

Soon evening came, and the empty house was full again. Sulking by herself in the half-lit living room, Marissa was greeted by the ghosts of a past life.

"It's so great to have you back home, Sweetie," Her Dad's voice was laced with sincerity.

"You look better." Her sister looked Marissa up and down, a tinge of jealousy filling her eyes.

"No. Just fatter," Marissa blurted out, staring blankly at the television in the shadows of the living room floor, "Or is that what you meant?"

Her sister sighed, rolled her eyes, and exited the room. Marissa knew she was just jealous. Her fat ass could never pull off a pair

off skinny jeans or a designer dress. She just wanted Marissa to get fat like her so she wouldn't look so bad. But that wasn't going to happen anytime soon. Marissa had tried to help, tried to teach her the ways of an anorexic. Nora just couldn't keep her mouth shut. Couldn't kick the addiction, is how Marissa saw it. That's all food was to Marissa. An addiction. Unnecessary fat taking over her body.

"There you are." A deep voice boomed through the French doors and Marissa jumped up in excitement. It was him. Justin. The one person who never judged her. Her boyfriend of two years. He had flowers. Daisies. She loved daisies. She hugged him so tight he couldn't breathe. "I've missed you so much. You look amazing." He brought her into the light.

"Fat." Marissa stated, burying her face in the flowers.

He didn't respond. It wasn't worth it. He knew this game. He did the only thing he could, hugged her again. Marissa breathed deep. She loves that smell. His smell. It's safe, comfortable. They spent the rest of the evening wrapped in each other's arms watching TV.

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Dinner was horrendous. Marissa couldn't move or breathe without someone asking, "Are you okay?" It was like she was some sort of freak show. Everyone stared at her as she fumbled with her fork, shuffling chunks of meat around her plate. She hated that. It made it worse. It made it harder.

"Please stop staring. I'm fine. Stop watching."

Everyone stared at their plates, except Her. She just kept on watching. Kept on waiting for Marissa to hide her food in a napkin, or feed it to the dog like before. Waiting.

"I said stop staring."

"What? Ignore you like before? Pretend not to see you shove your dinner into a napkin?" It was that condescending tone again. "Is that what you want?"

Marissa didn't bother answering, she knew it would get her nowhere. She set down her fork, and while staring directly into her Mother's eyes, placed her plate on the floor for the dog to lick, finally removing herself from the dining room. Nora and her Father were speechless. Justin sprung up from his chair and chased Marissa into the foyer.

"Com'on baby. Don't be like this. I'll make you another plate and we'll eat in your room. Just the two of us." He was brushing her hair from her face.

"I can't right now. I need to be alone."

"Baby..."

"I love you, but please go home. I can't deal with this right now. I'll see you tomorrow." Marissa kissed Justin lightly on the lips. She had missed those lips. She opened the front door for him to mope his way through.

Back in her doorless room Marissa thought of what her friends in the clinic were probably doing right now. 8:00 pm. They were probably watching a movie. They loved to watch movies. Marissa had seen more movies in the last two months than she had in her entire life. Gracey could recite entire movie scripts. Gracey Kay Lawrence. Marissa remembered how adorable she thought that name was the first time she heard it. It made her smile. She closed her eyes and tried to imagine herself back there, sitting in between the five foot, 60 pound Gracey, and the six foot beauty queen, Kristy. She missed them. She never thought she would, but they got her. They understood her better than any of her friends in the "real world." She tried to get to sleep but the light from the hallway was glaring in her face without her door there to dim it. Eventually Marissa grew tired enough. The light no longer bothered her, and she was out.



Marissa awoke to the sound of Nora's awful alarm. That horrible buzzing. "Shut it off." She screamed, holding a pillow over her head. How could Nora sleep through such a terrible sound? Marissa dragged herself from bed, opened her sisters door across the hall, shuffled across the room, and slammed the alarm clock into the wall. "Wake the fuck up," Marissa yelled in Nora's face as she emerged from her slumber in a confused 6:00 am haze. Marissa walked to the bathroom and jumped in the shower.

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"What the hell do you think you're doing?" Nora pounded on the door.

"I'll be out in half an hour. Get over it." Marissa hated that girl. How were they even related?

"You come back from Psychoville and think you're Queen of the Goddamn house. Get out. I need to get ready."

"So do I. Shut the fuck up." Marissa liked that word.

Fuck. It never failed her. It could be used in almost any sentence to replace almost any word. She thought that was pretty impressive.

Nora shouted back, "Fuck you," then retreated to her room to wait. Marissa was back and she didn't like it. The Princess. Popular, pretty, and perfect. Nora wanted her back in the loony bin.

"Let's go. Hurry it up, Fat Ass." An hour had passed and Marissa was pleased to have her make-up on her face and her car keys in hand. They weren't allowed make-up there either. Marissa went through withdrawal. Not even lip gloss. Her lips had never been so dry. "We're going to be late." Nora hustled down the steps, out of breath from all the running.

Pulling up to the school Marissa smiled, checking herself out one last time in the rear view mirror before hopping out of her blue Beatle, "Home sweet home." Nora felt ill at the thought of Marissa's return.

There were twenty minutes before class and everyone had congregated in the cafeteria as usual. Marissa sped in the opposite direction from her sister. Everyone stared. But she didn't mind their stares. They weren't judgmental. They were jealous. At least that's what they used to be. Marissa caught sight of her friends. She trotted over excitedly only to realize everyone was ignoring her. They all looked at her in disgust and whispered. She thought it was because she was now too fat. She wasn't pretty enough anymore. Marissa didn't want to be a loser like Nora.

"Hey, Baby." A pleasant face. Marissa jumped into Justin's arms.

"What's going on with everyone?" She thought she might cry. Why were they ignoring her? They were her friends.

"Babe, you've been gone for a while. Give them a little time. They'll come around."

The bell rang and class was back in session. It had been so long. Marissa wondered if she even remembered how to learn. As the day continued no one said anything to her. Just dirty looks. It was so depressing. So draining. By the end of the day she was even happy to see Nora's chubby red cheeks. At least Nora didn't pretend to be a friend and then abandon her the second something went wrong. Aren't friends supposed to support you? Help you?

Sitting at her desk in her door-less dimly lit room, Marissa contemplated, re-configured. What had gone wrong?

"Dinner." The woman's voice echoed up the stairwell. "I'm not hungry. Please let me be. I had an apple." Marissa's voice trailed in the distance. So faint. So silent. It was a lie. It was only a bite of an apple.

"I can't let you do that." Now She was standing in the door-less doorway. "You need to eat." She actually sounded human. Almost concerned.

"I promise I will tomorrow. I'm just really worn out right now." That was a lie too, because with any luck there wouldn't be a tomorrow.

"You've run me dry, Marissa Elaine Duque." Marissa thought of how heinous that name sounded all together, and wrinkled her nose. "I can't push anymore. Do what you want. I'm done trying." She walked away. No argument. No condescending tone. Just walked away.

Marissa stared into the empty space in bewilderment. Did that really just happen? The night was moving slowly. Dragging. Marissa listened to the laughter of her family without interrupting their good time. That's all she was. An interruption. An annoying voice grating on the minds of those around her. Her room grew dark. She didn't turn on the light, she let blackness swallow her. Curled up in a ball on her bed, she shook compulsively. She couldn't stop. A handful of Welbutrin might stop it. Her depression pills. She had done it before. It never hurt her, just knocked her out for a while.

"Call 911," Nora ran to Marissa, who had seized herself onto the floor, convulsing uncontrollably. She could feel the drugs taking over. It had never done this before. What was happening? Then her world went black.

Sunlight burned through her eyelids. Slowly she blinked until dark shadows before her became recognizable figures. Mom, Dad, Nora, Justin. Marissa recognized this place. A place she had been far too many times before. The pale wallpaper, stark white blinds, and uncomfortably starched sheets screamed "hospital", and she wasn't about to get herself stuck here again. She began to work herself into an upright position with her weak arms and wanted nothing more than to race for the door as she became even more aware of her surroundings. The figures in front of her noticed her discomfort and confusion as Marissa's breathing grew frantic and her eyes darted

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from one to the next to next and back again.

"Don't try to speak, you have a tube in your throat. They had to pump your stomach." Her Mom's eyes were red and puffy. She had been crying. She had cried over Marissa?

Marissa nodded in compliance, "Don't you ever..." Justin's voice trailed off as he buried his face in the hospital sheets on her shoulder.

Marissa didn't know what to think. She didn't want this again. She didn't want the clinic. No mirrors. No scales. No make-up. She didn't want that. What went wrong? She'd taken that many pills before and never ended up on her death bed. Why now?

"I guess we both got our wish. You're going back to the clinic." Even Nora looked upset.

No, no this wasn't what she had wished. Justin crying on her shoulder. Mom, Dad, Nora red-eyed and judging, again. Not what she wanted. The clinic. But what did she want?