

Go Ask Alice

Her eyes stared back at me like a looking glass to another dimension. The more I tried not to stare, the deeper I fell into the rabbit hole. All she wanted was help, that's what she kept asking for, what I kept hearing, and somehow it was her eyes advocating on her behalf, expressing her pain and frustration more than the words emanating from her mouth.

Alice's mental illness is undeniably mirrored in her eyes. The look is reminiscent of my cousin who started hearing voices in his early twenties and was recently arrested at Disney World for public disturbance. The public is not alone in feeling disturbed. My cousin's life was forever disrupted, his thoughts disconnected, his reality distorted. Rihanna might say his mind is in *Disturbia*. On the condition of his release, they tried injecting him with antipsychotic drugs, but he fled, uncomfortable with the way they made him feel. Wonderland was his reality—like Neo, he refused to take the blue pill.

I am not a doctor; I don't play one on T.V. In fact, the thought of dissecting anything makes me woozy, and yet I am struck by the shortcomings of medicine when it comes to mental health. "I can't be off my meds," Alice entreated. Our hands were tied in red-taped bureaucracy. Call after call, our urging for a psychiatrist in the area to take her on as a patient was emphatically declined. The stigma clung to her like nasty old bubblegum on her shoe. She was a liability, a risk that no one felt compelled to shoulder. Even Atlas couldn't prevent the sky from falling around her.

When the system fails one of us, it fails us all. I had a psychiatrist say of her client, a clinically diagnosed sociopath, "That man scares me." I stared at the long, gold chain around his neck that he wore like a trophy, and wondered if he had used it to strangle his victims. Given his history, it wasn't an outlandish possibility. We have reason to be scared. A man was stabbed in the town I lived by a woman he had taken in off the street. The papers said she was a schizophrenic who had been off her meds. Is this meant to make us feel better or worse?

Alice told me she sees reflections of herself in the myriad of faces around her. She feels apart and outside of, like the poles of magnets constantly rearranging themselves, pushing and pulling her and sending her deeper and deeper into the rabbit hole. As someone who has worked in the medical field and feel disillusioned by the system's inability to help those in need, I have to remember that stories have the power to transform if we are ready to listen. For those impassioned and ready to hear the story of what's beyond our current reality, go ask Alice.