

OFFLINE

Terezie Hladilová

January 10th 2020

Yesterday I met Dr. Karbinski again. My mum made me, to be more specific. She thinks I've never gotten over my dad leaving us and she also claims I'm addicted to being online. I never denied that I didn't get over my parents' divorce. What I did deny was the whole internet thing. I finally almost convinced her that I don't have any problem with social media but then she found me sleeping with my phone. In the bathroom. With toilet paper in the other hand. For the third time. This week.

Dr. Karbinski has always said there are only three solutions to everything. First, you can get some pills; they say they'll teach you how to smile again. I've been pretty successful in refusing so far. I once read one blog claiming that the more you smile, the quicker you gain wrinkles. My mom thinks I'm a very sad kiddo. The truth is I don't want my forehead to look like hers anytime soon. *Lesson number 1: Wanna be beautiful? Smiling is the enemy.*

The second solution is to meditate a lot. I tried that a couple of times. Since Youtube is my best friend, I could easily find some guided meditation videos. That would be fine if it didn't have this furtive, yet giant catch. After letting go of all the hate, envy and pain you've been carrying for too long, you feel so empty that you get hungry. And then you eat the whole chocolate cake your kind but very talkative granny Paula baked for your birthday, some lasagne as well as the tray it was baked in, a couple of eggs, three lollipops, cheesecake, all the chip crumbs you find in the couch and then you finish it with a diet coke. If nothing, make sure it has zero calories. *Lesson number 2: Meditation makes you fat.*

The third solution and my least favorite one is to write a diary. The only right way for me to express my feelings is to tweet about them. My tweets *I'm hungry* or *I hate Jessica Karbinski* have reached almost nine hundred likes up to this day.

Anyways, since I decided not to have wrinkles before the age of thirty or to become obese, here I am writing the stupid diary that I now hope Dr. Karbinski won't check once in a while.

January 13th 2020

Last week my mother told me I'm gonna visit my father in the countryside. He bought a farm there twelve years ago. I remember the day so well 'cause it's the same day he officially left us. I've always hoped he'd come back eventually. I was wrong. *Lesson number 3: Hope dies last but when it does, it takes you along.*

7:20 a.m.

I hate waking up in the mornings. Tweeted. It immediately got over fifty likes. *Lesson number 4: Who needs real friends when you got Twitter followers?*

7:52 a.m.

I have no need to search for hairstyles on Tumblr today, I don't care how I look in front of my father. He's a coward in my eyes and I don't care what he thinks of me.

8:20 a.m.

I'm sitting in a car, with messy hair purely for the purpose of my protest, trying to fall asleep and praying to God I could wake up in my own bed realizing that this all was just a bad dream.

11:30 a.m.

My prayers were apparently left unheard. The minute I saw the man who calls himself my dad I realized why I love the electronic world so much. He said Hi and when I found out there is no little cross in the upper right corner of the tab to shut down this whole situation, I started to worship the creator of the Internet. *Lesson number 5: You can't just cancel every situation you don't like.* "Is everything okay, Missy?" he asked me too confidently. It was weird hearing his voice again. I felt the anxiety slowly sinking into my chest. I nodded doubtfully.

1:15 p.m.

After almost two hours of hiding under my old purple blanket I decided to finally get out of the bed and take a walk around the area. The nature here is breath-taking. You leave the house and it only takes about four minutes to run into a forest. I've almost forgotten how it felt, to breathe the fresh air, to hear the birds chirping and it was surprisingly calming. I heard footsteps behind me. At first, I was a little scared, but then it became clear to me. Of course, it was him. I did not turn, did not try to slow down, but to my amazement I did not try to speed up. It didn't take him long to catch up. He walked calmly, but his pace had always been faster than mine. He just wandered beside me for a while. I didn't look at him. I didn't have the guts to look into his eyes, no, not yet. "Where are you headed, Princess?" he asked. I had no idea where I'm heading. I didn't answer, so we just walked silently for a moment, listening to the crickets in the grass that hasn't been trimmed since the last time I was here. The scenery was so beautiful, I paused for a moment, just watched, and then slowly pulled the phone out of my pocket. I started taking pictures of everything around and imagined how great it'll look on Instagram and how many likes I would get. My father sighed. I gave him a disgusted look, raised my eyebrows and expressed annoyance without a word.

He smiled at the ground disappointingly. And then he dared to speak, and explained to me what he meant by that sigh. "You know, Missy, the Internet and this whole online world has such a special power. It makes us create a whole new galaxy inside our phones, laptops and tablets. Everything seems so simple there - whenever you want, you can find a landscape picture on Google, customize it with any filter you like, turn on the exact imitation of the sounds of nature and feel satisfied," he gave himself a little pause in the middle of talking and after a few steps he continued: "I saw some apps where you can even regulate the intensity of raindrops drumming in your left headphone and the loudness of the wind whining in your right headphone. People isolate themselves in that weird kind of bubble. This alternative world. And it's soooo easy. You just download an app, set up all the sounds, put on your brand new airpods, turn them on, connect them with your phone, select the

right volume and you're free to listen to a lifelike storm! How easy! But the thing they seem to forget is that there is one much simpler step. You can just open your window."

I couldn't say anything in return. No response. Although I hated him wholeheartedly, I couldn't say anything to him. My hatred was silent. Always. I let my thoughts flow, still keeping them locked only inside my own head, not allowing him to peek in.

5:20 p.m.

Just as it was getting dark and I was lying back in the safety of the bed, a short but strong knock on the door echoed through the room. I didn't say anything. Again. He probably understood it as consent to enter, so he walked in with a hot cup of cocoa in his hand, and shyly sat down on the mattress beside me.

"What should I say for you to stop hating me?" Immediately, a memory of a conversation with Dr. Karbinski ran through my mind. I sat there in the chair and she asked me the same thing. "I don't know," I said. "I don't really know what he would have to say." Dr. Karbinski looked at me suspiciously then, and asked again. With tears in my eyes, I confessed that the thing I want to hear most of all is that he misses me... too.

Upset, I grabbed phone in an attempt to escape.

He took it from my hand and put it aside.

"This bed has never been broken or cracked. It's just got timeworn; I suppose. I guess that something similar has happened to my soul." For the first time in a long time I managed to look directly into his eyes. "I'm sorry," he whispered. "I never stopped loving you, even though you haven't talked to me for years. I miss my baby girl." Tears ran down my face and a hint of a smile flickered through them. He hugged me. So tight that all of my crushed pieces snapped back together. "She missed you too." I replied.

[...]

February 2nd 2020

Dear diary, I don't think I need you anymore. Now I'm ready to explore the real world once more.

Lesson number 29: It doesn't feel too bad, being offline again.