

This can't be happening.

I look around the room and see nothing but sterile white. The bed, the floor, the walls, even the paintings look sterile in this overly lit place. I hear the doctor speaking to me in the background, but it just sounds like a high-pitched whine.

This can't be happening.

I am young and healthy. Well, I thought I was healthy. Sure, I don't always take care of myself the way I should, but what college student does? I pull the occasional all-nighter, sometimes for studying and sometimes for partying. Sometimes I eat pizza a little more than I'd like to admit, but it's free and beggars can't be choosers. At least I can stomach broccoli, and I even kind of like zucchini. I eat avocado and drink smoothies all the time, and I go to the gym with my friends. I was going to be something, be someone, but now...

This *can't* be happening.

The high-pitched whine in my ears starts to die down and the doctor in front of me snaps back into focus. He's looking at me with those pitying eyes, those ones that say I have a life full of drugs and hospital stays ahead of me.

He starts to ask me about my family history. I tell him that I think this happened to an uncle, but I'm not sure. My parents stopped talking to him before I was born, but I'm not sure why... there was some sort of falling out.

This all started because of Sarah. I told her something felt off, but I thought it was just a cold or stress. She told me to go to the doctor and get checked out, but I didn't. Later she came to check on me. She said I was acting weird and that she needed to make sure I was ok. That's when she found me on the floor. That's when she called 911.

*This can't be happening.*

There it was again- that light. The light multiplied and became a bunch of floating orbs taking over my vision. I wanted to reach out and grab them. The doctor said they'd have to adjust my dose. Apparently, it's one big guessing game.

A nurse knocks on the door and my mom comes flying in. She's crying. I told her not to come all this way. She folds me into a sobbing hug, and I start to tear up too. After one short but reassuring squeeze, she pulls away.

This can't be happening...

I know she's worried about me, even more so than usual. She starts talking to the doctor, speaking a mile a minute- something about our phone call the other day. To be honest, I don't even remember that call.

How is this happening...

She starts telling him the story of a crazy person. That can't have been me, right? No way. She's telling the story of a paranoid person. I know my roommates well, we've been friends since grade school. Why is she saying I thought they were going to kill me? This sounds like the story of a total stranger. Then she mentions the orbs of light, my orbs of light, but she's calling them angels. No... I was calling them angels.

This can't, be, *happening*.

Reality comes crashing down on me and the gravity of my situation hits me all over again. I see the doctor speaking again, and realize I should be listening.

But this is happening...

There it is again, that word... Schizophrenia. Split mind. Sometimes I'm fine. Sometimes I'm not. It's like a cancer, sometimes I'm in remission and I can do all the things a normal person should be able to do. Other times... I'm not. My reality is changed, it's different than the collective reality of everyone else around me, but in those moments, I don't know it.

*Why did this happen to me?*

The doctor says it's an illness. An illness... before this moment, I never would have thought of it that way. But the more I listen, the more I see the truth behind those words. Schizophrenia is an illness. I'll be in and out of doctors' offices for the rest of my life. Antipsychotics, antidepressants, medicine to manage the side effects, it seems like this doctor is throwing everything in the pharmacy at me.

*I have an illness.*

Sometimes, if it gets really bad, the doctor says I might get stuck in a hospital again. Just like cancer, I'll have my good days and my bad. Except this is not my body attacking me. No, this is my mind attacking me, rejecting reality, and revolting against everything I know.

I am sick.

Just like that, the doctor leaves and it's time to go home. With prescriptions and discharge papers in one hand, my mom holding the other, I walk out of the hospital and into the sun. As we start walking down the street, the orbs of light following, I look ahead and can't help but wonder... which reality is awaiting me?

This is happening... to me.