

Erin Harnum

Appointment Reminder—Repeat Weekly

I saw my therapist at the grocery store last week. I was in the candy aisle puzzled over whether to pick the Kit Kats or the gummy worms for today's binge episode. I made my decision and dropped it into my basket with the other fattening foods I chose. I looked up, content with my choosing's and there she was looking at me, pushing a cart full of green, non-fat, organic foods. She lifted her hand and softly waved at me and kept walking without waiting for my response. She had told me about this in the beginning, "*If I ever see you in public, I'll probably act like I don't know you because I don't want to break any confidentiality we have*" I never thought it'd actually happen. I stood there holding my basket of candy feeling completely naked.

I hated the thought of someone knowing everything about me. Not just everything I want them to know, really everything. The fear is overwhelming of being in a position in life where it has become dangerous not to talk to someone every week. Every time I go into her office, I am a little more broken. She patches me up and sends me on my way, I only last a week.

My therapist is listed on her website as a *specialist in the counselling of PTSD, ADHD, Anger Management, Behavioral Issues, and Medically Diagnosed Depression and Anxiety*, I wonder how many patients she sees, how many tick these boxes. I sit in her serene blue painted waiting room surrounded by people who are mostly older than me. The chairs are nice, comfortable to sit in. There are tissues everywhere, a lot of people cry at therapy. Everyone is always reading a magazine or scrolling through their phone, pretending their problems don't exist while they wait to talk about them. The only sounds are the white noise machines keeping the bunch sitting in the waiting room from hearing those whose turn it is spilling their deepest secrets.

When it's my turn to trauma dump on a licensed professional, she comes and gets me from the waiting pool and brings me to her room. She has not one but two white sound machines to turn on; one in the hallway and one in her room. I sit on her couch and sink into it; I'm protected by a sound barrier with the company of someone who is basically paid to be nice to me. "How are you?" she sits down across from me with a pen and journal. Oh, how I would love to look at that

journal. I can't imagine what she deems important enough to jot down during our conversations. Probably something along the lines of, *make sure to check phone this weekend in case she texts, how can she keep getting worse??, I'm running out of ways to give her hope*. "How are you?" she repeats, she is patient with me. "I'm fine" I respond. She glares at me a bit. During our last appointment she told me to stop saying the word "fine" because it means "feelings inside not expressed". A lot of the time "fine" is the way I feel because I am unable to express the feelings inside. I also don't want to walk into her office every week and answer that question with "bad" I don't feel like that is any better than me saying "fine" every time, either way its repetitive.

Throughout our appointments we grapple with topics like why I can't sleep at night, but I can sleep all day and why I can't seem remember anything I experience. I have explained to her that my body feels like a distant memory, like I'm on low battery and my charging cord is broken. I've told her that panic attacks feel like I'm trapped in a box that's filling up with water or that someone is strangling me until I release my last shallow breath. I've told her that my anxiety is so bad sometimes I have to sit in my bed for days tossing and turning, grappling with the fear of the world that exists outside my windows. That my depression is so deep that the saddest things make me happy because I feel some sort of emotion. In short, she calms me down. We talk about how I can combat these feelings and then we schedule a time for next week. I walk out of the room and join the group of people still awaiting their hour of freedom as if I didn't just give my therapist a dozen reasons why I shouldn't be a functioning member of society.

I drive home from these appointments in total silence. I drive home pretending I don't know I'm going to break down into a debilitating cry because it hurts to have my inside emotions on the outside. Therapy is an all-day activity; I imagine a life where it's not. My whole life has become a lot of pretending. Pretending that I am a well-functioning person with achievable goals and a to-do list; as if I would be okay if my day dedicated to therapy was nonexistent.

I stood in the grocery store aisle holding my basket and watched her walk away. She saw me pretending to be a functioning person. Pretending that I wasn't going to eat all of that candy in one sitting. Pretending that I was okay. When she looked at me, I was vulnerable, she knew

everything about me. No white noise, no comfortable couch, just a person who knows way too much about me pretending not to see me pretending.