

A day in the life of four year old me consisted of normal play with an abnormal mind. Playing in the flowers would amount to worrying about whether or not my parents may wilt one day too. Making dirt sand castles would have me uncertain if our house could be broken down just as quickly. What if elevators collapse? What if the car falls into water? What if the bubbles in my bathtub drown me. Four years old.

A day in the life of six consisted of connections. Dance class connected me to my soul. Blankie connected me to safety. New friends connected me to the idea that maybe some people could be trusted. My window connected me to the fear of shadows and bumps in the night. The beach connected me to the waves that could steal. The outlets that could shock. The sun that could burn. Hold-a me daddy.

Eight. School wasn't that scary anymore. I could list all my friends first names and last. Don't bring toys, don't talk out of turn, stay seated, listen to the speaker. In a dusty corner of the room sat a chair for the rule breakers. My teacher had me demonstrate how to do it for everyone. I cried. That chair wasn't for me. I was only trying my best. *Remember, it wasn't real. Just for practice.* The teacher tried. I only cried harder. I let her down.

Ten. The dance teachers would whisper about me behind my back, and so would the moms. But ten year old me was plainly oblivious. Maybe they will move me to the front line next year. To my shock they wouldn't. Back corner for another year. I held my head high and practiced every night. I'll get there some day, I won't stop till I do. Then May of that year, I'm late for class due to a carpool mix up. My teacher pulls me aside away from the class and yells at me for an hour. I cannot catch my breath nor keep up with my tears. I let her down. My mom pulls me out of dance before the final performance. I let down the team.

Twelve. Things are new now, middle school and no more dance. My mom and I found a circus school downtown that teaches dance and so much more. If I couldn't work to the front line anymore, I will work till I get into the advanced show. I don't have many friends since everything is so new so I only focus on training. I work till I know I will make it. I audition and don't. I cry for a month.

Thirteen. I can barely contain my excitement when I make it in. I perform with confidence although rumors begin to spread. *Maybe I perform with too much confidence?* I begin to look down at my feet when I walk instead of making friends. I can't let another team down. My performance confidence brings the eyes of the administration and I began my journey of being a "terribly real thing, in a terribly false world". Alice.

Fourteen. I fall down a hole of constant panic. The voices in my head are no longer voices but the tensing in my joints and the shaking of my breath. Tears after tears I drown myself with everyone watching. For once, letting everyone down is the least of my worries. I just want to escape from the earthquake in my soul. Instead, I fall into Wonderland and use my performance confidence to mask the pieces of my heart in the bottom of my stomach. Some days I am not me. I am too broken. I am just Alice. A curious girl in the midst of her innocent childhood. One of which I never had. The doubt around me swarms near like the characters aiming to win the Caucus race. *Alice, you've been gone for too long.* My soul screams to awaken but I stay silent because I am better than that. Don't let yourself down, you can't give up now.

Fifteen. I return home. Leaving the war grounds weaved named my brain vacant. *I knew who I was this morning, but I've changed several times since then.* God is speaking but I don't know it yet. He is quiet but I am scared. Out loud I stay hidden but inside I scream in hopes to mask this new feeling. Some call it hope, but is it still hope when you're afraid? Broken trust forms ice in my veins and tears the keys from my heart. The tension in my body snaps and the ice cracks violently. Maybe home isn't for me anymore.

Sixteen. My mind is lost in time and my body is bruised from the fight. How did it ever come to this? For once, I wish I could go back to when my biggest fear was the bubbles in the bath pulling me under. But I know it won't ever be that simple again. My shield becomes so thick it blocks both the evil and good without caring about the difference. Home isn't home at all anymore, just a distant memory of something I used to love. There's no quick fix to the hatred boiling inside when everything on the outside cheers it on with grins from ear to ear. I've been here so long, who am I without it?

Seventeen. We left home and took off from the shore in the direction of the closest star. The storms held grudges for the time we had spent away from sea, but the clouds looked lighter over sea than on shore. I held on tight ready for the turbulence ahead but the waves spoke lightly, thanking me for coming home. Confused by their grace, I opened my eyes. For the first time, I could see the color held in the seas around me. Every star smiled down from above. The sea supported me from below, with every calming splash, allowing me to know I could reach any star. Just ask.

Months of internal agony and years of external fading. How do I come to speak these words when everything inside was promised sudden destruction. I should've been destroyed. I should've fell to the floor of all that I was and wept. Eternity I was supposed to stay there. But God. But God looked at my shattered soul and bruised heart. He slammed the doors that could let in the rats and the windows that allowed the hawks who preyed on my soul. In my silence of prayer, he yelled *Enough*. Enough was spoken.