

Marisol Garcia
"Lost"
#341916

Guilty. Fifteen suspended after six. Parasite. I hope God forgives you, because I never will. My dreams and memories haunted by the words of others. They hammered the nails into the crypt that I have existed in for the past three years. Guilt and shame are my constant companions in the emotional fortress that I have built and live in to survive the physical place I now call home: prison.

I recall no definite memories of my initial journey, just a stream of pictures and certain sounds. The tears on my husband's ebony cheeks as the police led me out of our home in handcuffs. The chipped black and white tiles in the police holding room as I stood listening to the hollow ringing of the phone. The dark interior of the judicial marshal's truck scattered with orange peels and empty milk cartons as I am taken to New Haven lockup. Curiosity brimming in the eyes of the women who litter the cells all around me as we sit waiting for a ride to York Correctional Institution for Women in Niantic.

Like Melville's whale the dark cavernous white monster transports me and numerous others in pairs. The harsh fluorescent light highlights the peeling paint in the holding room I know now is termed the "fish tank", because you just stand there circling around as the guards' process the return inmates and then you: fresh bait. A flash of the camera bulb blinds me. Now I can be identified in this sea of maroon and blue. Standing naked in a shower stall as frigid needles of water pummel my lower back. Attempting to cover my nakedness with crossed arms a guard stares at me harshly. I am given no privacy. Fluorescent streaks of light highlight my sagging breasts, the miles of stretch marks that run from my belly pouch to my hips; varicose veins railroad the top of my cellulose thighs. I am sprayed with Quell, decontaminated before I am released into the

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pandemic of incarceration. The warmth of embarrassment as I stand facing the wall, bent over exposing myself waiting for the snap of latex gloves that probe me deeper and further than any intimate partner ever has. I and others are rounded up and herded to various destinations in the cover of night. Finally the invasions of self, physical and otherwise, are finished and I am allowed to seek escape in sleep. Ironically my journey doesn't end in the final dregs of slumber; it barely begins.

My first year passes in a blur of faces and images. No color. No depth. No feeling. It eats away at me. I ought to scream for help, but I can't seem to formulate the words or the energy. Devoid of life. Numbness sets in like psychological gangrene. Although there are flickers of life: a tear, a twinkle in my eye, a ghost of a smile.

As I push a food cart up the walkway, sweat obscures my vision. Pausing to wipe my face, I catch a glimpse of myself in the scratched mirrored surface. I let out a short bark of laughter. Gone is the polished professional. Where I once wore tailored slacks, a crisp white oxford shirt, and black heels, rushing from one meeting to another here I now stand in black and white checkered pants, dingy smock shirt, and a plastic hairnet: the poster child for manual labor.

"Hurry, up. We're in a facility lockdown."

Startled, I let the moment pass and continue pushing the cart.

Overwhelmed by the emotions of others and my own, I begin my second year silently screaming. Screaming in pain. Shouting in frustration. Howling in misery. Shrieking in agony. Hoping that someone hears my mute cry for help. I allow my daily

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struggle for sanity and my humanity to eat away at the remaining foundation of self that I struggle to repair until I reached rock bottom I could afford to lose myself no more.

Watching the leaves swirl, I reach out to touch them. Instead my hand encounters cold double paned plexi-glass. Sighing I settle back against the beige cinder block wall in my cell and wait. Nothing can affect me as I have no contact with the world.

WHOOSH. A paper is slid under my door.

Mail has arrived. *My time sheet.* I open the stapled paper and scan the contents. Crumpling it, I bow my head. Tears slip down my cheeks, hit my maroon T-shirt and leave damp streaks.

Just in the moment when I thought my life had no value, I look up and see an inmate wearing a white T-shirt pushing another inmate in a wheelchair with a leash clutched in her hand walking a yellow lab. Wondering if I was having a delusion, I stare in disbelief. *What the hell is a dog doing here? How can she walk around in a white T-shirt without getting into trouble?* I begin to knock on the window to get their attention. They stop, looking for the source of the knocking. Finally noticing me in the window, they all wave including the dog.

I finally reach out to the lifelines that my environment provides me. I slowly begin to regain my footing in life, confidence in myself, and appreciate my worth as well as those of others. I finally begin to live again....

"Hey, Chris, are you ready for your walk today?" I ask upon entering Chris's hospice room.

"I'll be ready in a moment," Chris responds putting on her head scarf.

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Standing at the door with Clipper, my blond lab, we wait as Chris gets ready. Chris and I have had the same routine for the past couple of months. Walking down the walkway to the garden to enjoy what was left of summer, saying goodbye to friends. Chris had been diagnosed with an aggressive form of cancer earlier in the year, which had limited her activities and movement. When she ended up in hospice, she asked if I would be her only volunteer. She had been my mentor when I first joined the program a year ago. She showed me the ropes and helped me through my first death, now here I was helping her in her final journey.

Jenny, the hospice coordinator, asked the audience, "Please show your support as we call up our volunteers for their sweatshirts marking their first year of service and hear their reasons for continued participation."

As my name is called I struggle with what to say. Normally never at a loss for words I now seem robbed of speech. Hugging several of my fellow volunteers I feel the love and support we share for our patients and each other. Turning to address the audience tears begin to fill my eyes. "Please give me a moment," I ask trying to compose myself. Wiping my eyes I continue, "Many of us join hospice to give something back. What we find is that we get back much more than we give. It allows us all a chance to regain our self worth; the ability to reconnect with parts of ourselves that we thought had long since died. It gives us the chance to reclaim our humanity."

I have continued through my third year hopeful, waiting for the chance to live my life outside of prison. The daily grind of existing here still robs me of my hope, but I

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struggle to remain constant, refusing to succumb to the dark forces of numbness that would sink me into an abyss of despair. I struggle with my hopes and dreams for the future with bleakness of today. I never want to lose myself again. The price is too great, and it is one I cannot afford to pay.

"Garcia, get dressed. You've got legal mail."

I quickly dress and rush to meet the lieutenant at the CO's office. Signing off on my receipt I head back to my room. I pull the documents out of the envelope expecting my parole notification. Instead it is a denial of my sentence modification. Letting out a sigh, I turn to the calendar and mark off another day. "Maybe next time," I mutter.