

My Tower of Terror

A braided short story about BPD

By: Maiya Nishime

When I was younger, Disneyland was my favorite place in the world. I adored everything about it from the sweet Mickey Mouse shaped churros to the spinning tea cups in Wonderland. However, there was one part of the park which I absolutely dreaded: The Tower of Terror. Anxiety swept over me each time I merely thought about it. Just seeing the ride for the first time was enough to bring me to tears. I had managed to avoid my sister's peer pressure for several years with the excuse that I was simply not tall enough to meet the height requirement for the ride; but that particular year, I had unfortunately grown three inches, finally reaching the cutoff. My sister dragged me to the ride despite my tremendous efforts to resist her. As I waited in line, all I could hear was the distant screaming of people dropping down from the top of the skyscraper. What if I die? I thought. What if the ride breaks and somehow we keep falling until we hit the ground? What if my seatbelt malfunctions and I hit the top of the cage on the comedown?

"Don't worry Eve, it'll be fun," my older sister assured me. "Just close your eyes and hold on as tight as you can." The wait was an hour long, so I watched anxiously to make sure that every person who came off the ride was in one piece. To my surprise, almost everyone emerging from the tower looked delighted and eagerly hopped back in line the moment they got off. How did people enjoy this? Was everyone crazy? How could they endure going on it *multiple times*? Was once not terrifying enough? I supposed I would soon find out.



Every morning I woke up, praying that the good face would be awake today. That the bad face was tired and would hide away in its dark place forever. Unfortunately, it was the luck of the draw. I slowly crept downstairs, as the sound of *Bella's Lullaby* played softly in the background. She wasn't on call today, so that meant the odds were in my favor; and if she was playing the piano, that meant the good face was most likely on. The smell of fresh chocolate chip pancakes and steamed coconut coffee engulfed the kitchen air. Among the table lay a plethora of berries, syrups, and various other breakfast toppings.

"Good morning sweetheart," said the good face. "Did you sleep well?" I nodded adamantly. "You look so beautiful, you know you got those genes from me," she chuckled. I loved the good face. She was calm. I could joke around with her and she would return my energy, taking everything lightheartedly. The good face loved movie marathons on the weekends. She enjoyed going on long walks around our neighborhood or having weekly picnic dates in our front yard with the family. The good face would cradle me if I was having a nightmare about the voodoo man who often haunted my dreams. She would assure me that everything would be alright so long as I was with her. I felt the safest and happiest with the good face, and knew that she loved me unconditionally.



Forty five minutes had gone by and we were nearing the front of the line. We had entered the tall, dark building and my heart was pounding through my chest. I didn't believe in God, but I prayed to him anyway, pleading that he would watch over me during these next fifteen minutes. My family and I entered a crowded, rusty box where we took our seats and buckled in. A short clip of the *Twilight Zone* played on a large screen at the front side of the box. The narrator's voice was intensely deep and frightening, similar to the voodoo man from the Disney movie, *The Princess in the Frog*, which I had watched earlier that year. Tears streamed down my face as the box started rising to the top. I held my breath, clutching on to my sister's fingers as tightly as I could and waited nervously for my anticipated doom. It felt like a lifetime had gone by as we crept higher and higher. I didn't want the incline to stop, overwhelmed by the fear of the imminent drop that would soon occur.



I could tell the bad face was on by the simple sound of its keys –*clack click clack click*–clashing against one another in the distance. The rhythm was so distinct that I could recognize it immediately even from a mile away. I panicked as I heard it enter the house and ran immediately to my room. I counted to myself slowly, praying that my dad bought the cat litter and fixed the cabinet like she had asked. However, I knew he was probably still asleep, as I had fetched him seven beers from the garage refrigerator the night before.

“Everyone get downstairs now!” she screamed. My siblings and I lined up in front of her like soldiers waiting for their sergeant's next command, and watched as she roared with fierce anger at my father who was too tired to even notice.

“Why is this light on?! Do you guys think I made of fucking money? Noelle, clean your room. Akemi, vacuum the floor. Eve, start the goddamn laundry! If you're upset, blame it on your useless father. Or even better, blame it on your worthless selves for not thinking to clean before I got home!”

Without thinking, I attempted to ask how her day was. She glared at me with cruel, unforgiving eyes. I couldn't even recognize her underneath its heartless exterior. “Why do you think you can talk to me before doing your chores? Little piece of shit.” I felt my heart crack into a million pieces. It walked away unsympathetic, and proceeded to yell at my father again.

So much noise, too much yelling, I thought to myself. Please stop. Please. My heart wouldn't stop beating as I crouched down in a ball on the floor. She was so happy this morning when I saw her. What had triggered it? My older sister sat beside me, gently patting the top of my head. “It'll be okay. Ignore her,” she whispered, “Just close your eyes and it will stop eventually.”



My eyes were shut as tightly as they could be. I tried to prepare myself, but the looming plunge came unexpectedly nonetheless. I felt my stomach drop as the box plummeted towards the Earth. It felt like we were falling for eternity. I imagined that this was it, that my time was up and we would soon reach the cement floor and crumble into a million pieces. All of a sudden, we jolted up again and I was able to catch my breath for a second before the cycle restarted.



“Hi honey, I need you to send me ten-thousand for your brother’s tuition. My credit score is too high and they won’t let me use American Express. I’ll pay you back when my paycheck comes in. I promise.” *Ten-thousand?* Though I had enough in my bank account, I worried about all the expenses that would be due over the next few weeks: tuition, gas, rent, groceries. I pondered over which would be worse: being late on a couple of payments or accidentally provoking the bad face dare I say no. My decision was easy. I was frightened of one option astronomically more than the other.

Next week she would be on call, and I hated asking for money, even if it was my own, because somewhere in between the good face and the bad face, she would force out tears and claim that all she was to our family was a giant pool of money that we constantly drained. I knew that upon hearing this, a needle-sharp stab of guilt would puncture my chest. If I could avoid awakening the bad face by simply appeasing her, I would do so at all costs. I sent her the two-thousand dollars without complaint, knowing that, at least for the time being, it would give her peace of mind, and went on with my day ignoring the financial anxiety that I knew would hit me in an hour or so.



There was something thrilling about the continuous, unknown drops. Oddly, I was elated by the distinct adrenaline rush that emerged after each plunge. Although I was now enjoying the experience, I couldn’t stop myself from crying. When the ride came to a sudden stop, I felt overly relieved.

That wasn’t too bad, I thought. At least I survived. I was still terrified once it was over, yet everyone’s excitement was so encapsulating that I too began to understand the reason as to why they longed to go back. The ups and down of the ride were stressful and mortifying, but it was also exhilarating at the same time. I even felt a bit eager to face my fear once more and agreed to go for a second round. The more times I went on the ride, the more used to it I got and the easier the panic and stress beforehand was to bear.



May 8, 2022. Today was a good day. I had tried to avoid going home as much as possible because over the past few years, I had come to realize that the bad face was too overwhelming for me to handle consistently. I felt peace in Isla Vista and was often frightened to go back home, no longer accustomed to her fluctuating mood swings. But it was Mother's Day, and I thought to myself how much I really missed her.

This visit was no different than the others. One moment she would be singing along in the car, overly manic about my presence and expressing how much she adored me and the next, she would be screaming at me, ranting about how much she hated her depressing life. Yet, in the times where she was happy during my stay, I found myself grateful that the good face was still fighting to stay alive.

I knew I couldn't have one or the other, however. They came in a package, and so if I wanted the good face to stay, I knew I would have to accept her uncompromising twin as well. She was my personal Tower of Terror. One with unforeseen ups and downs that I feared, yet was able to tolerate and love. I managed to find comfort in the anticipated stress, keeping in mind that she couldn't control the darkness that randomly took over. All that mattered was that she was trying, and ultimately that was enough. If she could live with the bad face and the hardships it brought upon her, I figured the least I could do was try to understand and hold her hand as tightly as I could along the ride.

So, no matter how much I hated the bad face, no matter how scared I was to face it, no matter how many mean words it would say to me or how bad it made me feel, I knew I could never let her go. The good face was the one who cared for me, the one who raised me and made sure I knew I was loved. The good face was my real mom, and I loved her more than anything in the world. I would protect her against the bad face with my own life and I felt a longing responsibility to keep her from hitting the ground.