

## *A Blank Canvas*

by Toula Pappas

I am staring at a blank canvas. There is a blank white canvas sitting on the table in front of me. The brushes are dry and still in their packages, looking at me with their judging-brush eyes. The clean glass of clear water has a steady ripple from the subconscious tapping of my foot. What am I supposed to do with a blank canvas? Am I expected to fill it with my words, with my thoughts, with pretty pictures? Paint splotches and colour pallets dance around in circles in my head. How do I paint something that is just as empty as the house I am standing in? For months, I have been standing in the same room, in the same clothes, stealing glances at the same canvas looking back at me in this very moment. When I wake up, I know I have things to do. I know there are responsibilities and commitments, and that I must hold to my promise.

My hands are getting so sweaty; the pencil I have been holding for at least an hour continues to roll its eyes at my unmoving arm. My cell phone buzzes quietly in my pocket. It is warm against my body, retaining every degree of body heat that escapes from my skin. The temperature everyday has been getting higher and higher as opposed to my mental capabilities. My seasonal depression ended with the winter, but as summer quickly approached, the capacity for the number of life experiences that my brain can take in is rapidly decreasing. I want to take my phone out of my pocket, read the notification bar, and look at who has decided to text me, but I do not have the willpower it takes to force my hand into my pocket.

Lately, it has been hard to do anything other than stand and stare at my emotional support canvas. The emotional connection I have formed with an inanimate object is something I did not expect, but after the two years of extensive, unexpected time spent looking at a screen, I shouldn't be surprised. Blank canvases used to put a smile on my face; they used to fill my head with possibilities and hope for what I could create. They used to make me happy; they used to get me excited to buy new paints.

I have taken art classes since I was a child, spending many years on colour theory, sketch drawings, and clay molds. But year after year, as I got older, all I can remember is the gradual dislike of any form of creation. Don't get me wrong. My coping mechanisms tend to be any form of art I can find, but as the years go by, all I see is the negative. My feet are beginning to hurt, the pain spiking up my ankles and through my calves. Should I sit? Should I stand and welcome the pain? Should I fall and never move again?

All the questions I can come up with might always have an answer, but I can never seem to find one, and even if I do, I struggle to accept it. The mental connection I have formed with the cracked phone screen in my pocket reminds me of what I can never let go. It reminds me of what I hear in my head every moment I spend outside my empty house. Sure, the people closest to me reassure me that nothing is wrong, that whatever I am thinking is exaggerated by the constant stream of social media expectations. But there are times when I realize that I am not much different from the blank canvas I have been staring down for the last two hours.

The clock says it is time to sleep. I set my pencil on the table in the spot where it lies day after day, where it waits for me to pick it up every morning. The repetition of my movements gets lost in the steps I take to go upstairs. I turn off my phone and get into bed. Staring now at the ceiling, I know I won't sleep for another couple of hours. I think this all happens in my head, but sometimes I wish that it didn't.

Maybe the time would go by faster that way.

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