

From *(W)retched* by Michelle Kendall

University Hospital was about thirty minutes from our home. I'd seen it before. It'd always seemed ominous to me, set far back from the road. And even with a lot of windows, the hospital gave me the impression of impenetrability and of secrets. It seemed like the kind of place you went if you had cancer or a broken leg, not an eating disorder. None of this made any sense. Mom rode with me in the elevator to the fifth floor. She folded and then unfolded the sheet of paper Pat had given her. She swayed, shifting her weight from her right to her left foot. I kept my focus upward. I tracked us rising as the floor numbers lit consecutively. Mom cleared her throat once again.

With each "ping" of passing floors, I moved closer. My home for the next twenty-eight days. A psych ward waited for me. The elevator crept upward. "3" – "4". Up we went. Ping. Another floor. I looked to my right. Mom was standing next to me. Ping. Her eyes held the mounting illuminated numbers. She exhaled audibly and slouched ever so slightly. Resigned. Ping. "5". I shivered. What was happening? I couldn't tell. Was this nerves or excitement?

The doors slid open. We remained immobile for a moment facing the nurses' station.

As if emerging from a dreamless state, I stepped out. I wasn't afraid. In fact, I felt a shot of life explode in my gut. I smiled.