

We're all crazy here

"*You India ah?*" the nurse asks, confused at my Malay first name, Chinese last name & a brown-looking appearance that doesn't quite add up.

I explain the blend of Malay mum & Chindian dad,
& she hands me the blend of antidepressants & antipsychotics.

My one week in the psych ward saw me answering my fair share of race-related questions. Whether it was to the Chinese girl by my bedside who asked me why I could speak Chinese after every brain-zapping ECT session, or to the nurses who asked if I needed a tudung or halal food, I answered them as obediently as I answered the questions about the suicidal ideation that got me there.

Growing up mixed & neurodivergent means that I'm used to being the odd one out, so when they asked me if I ate halal,

or if I pakai tudung,

or if I spoke Tamil,

or why I spoke Chinese,

or "*You India ah?*",

I wasn't taken by surprise, because these things don't surprise me anymore. My sociology lecturer once told us that what came to your mind when someone asks you who you are is how you perceive yourself; what comes to my mind is always my race (or the multitude of it).

What did surprise me, though, was everything else about my stay.

Sure, the Chinese girl asked me why I spoke Chinese, but when I curled up into the thin covers at night, stifling cries into my pillow, she came with a pack of tissues in fingers torn from fidgeting with her restraints, stroking my head like her mother would when she had a panic attack during a family visit.

It was nice to sit with the Malay aunty who asked me about my hopes & dreams, & '*cheh*'ed me when I told her why I was there; unlike the Malay aunties who told me to keep my stay a secret when I talked about it during Raya, she showed me a care that could only come from experiencing the very same thing.

I loved laughing with the Indian girl who sang at the top of her lungs during the Zumba sessions which no one really wanted to go to, but did anyway. She never really knew her name, and neither did we, but what mattered to her was that we all danced to *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai* every day after lunch, and *god dammit we'd better enjoy it*.

The race questions everyone asked me were really just opening questions to the stuff that mattered, like,

"How long have you wanted to die?"

"Why do you feel this way?"

"Do you ever think that it will end?",

which are all questions that I don't always have the luxury of hearing, or answering. Mixed kids don't want to kill themselves, and asking them about it will only make it worse- at least, that's what I've grown up learning.

Mental illness has a face, & in this society it does not look like mine, so when I was allowed to be it -when I was allowed to fall into my skin- there was a freedom that came with it. That freedom only became bolder when there were so many people around me who could express it and understand it with me, regardless of race.

It's strange that I found the most belonging at a psych ward; where our different languages didn't matter in light of our shared understanding of the language of pain.

It's funny how the unity that our forefathers fought for could be found in a group of girls waging war within their minds.

The day I got discharged, the ward celebrated me. People blessed me in the names of their various gods and sent me off with a mix of hugs, *salams* and smiles. I miss them some days, my suicidal sorority- bound together from our pain; who really cares about the rest?

I'd like to think they're what kept me alive.