

MY CHEMICAL IMBALANCE

HONORS THESIS

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by

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Abstract

My Chemical Imbalance is a play exploring my struggle with mental illness. In our world, mental illness has become a hot topic in traditional and social media. Stigmas associated with mental illness often prevent people from seeking the help they need, thinking they can handle the issues by themselves. I believe that sharing our stories around mental illness may encourage hesitant people to have the courage to seek help. I am one of many who have learned to become self-aware of my mental health needs. As I continue to live a fulfilling life, though the fix has not been quick, and the continual battle to regulate my medication is difficult, it has all proven to be worth every step of the journey.

Artistic Statement

Theatre is the art of collaboration and storytelling. Why do we still need this art? It is the same reason that we study history. It is so that we are continually learning and improving from the stories of others. My personal goal in life is to inspire others to live their lives to the fullest. This to me, does not mean that a person's life needs to be full of adrenaline airplane jumping escapades. It means that you are living a life that you are proud to say is yours. We all have our own form of adrenaline fulfilling activities, for me it happens to be making art that affects others in a positive way. It is so important that peoples' stories are told, so that lessons are learned. This play would have never come to life on the page if it had not been for so many other people. And to them I have boundless appreciation and love. This is also true for my audience without you the story being told would never be heard and conversations would never be started.

*This is not a final version of this script, it is still a work in progress.

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Characters

All Characters are played by the same actor.

Present Day Lorin: Early 20s. Confident, narrator of the story.

College Lorin: 18-20. Tries to hold the world on her shoulders.

Teenage Lorin: 17-18. Exhausted

Preteen Lorin: 10-12. Shy and uncomfortable in her own skin

Childhood Lorin: 8. Naïve, her world has been turned upside down.

Psychiatrist: Early 30s. Clinical and monotone.

My Chemical Imbalance

(CS left a bed with a chair US. CSR a chair. USC a black cube. Enter Lorin CS in blackout. A beat. Spot Light comes up illuminating Lorin standing CS).

Present Day Lorin

The rollercoaster of life is illustrated in a painting. At the end of the ride we step back and see all the hues that make us who we are. The engineer of my rollercoaster, Mr. Funk, lays the colored tracks of my life masterpiece. He gains enjoyment from the loops and quick turns that are my personal life triggers that throw my brain into a perpetually imbalance. Teetering through life seek a smooth course that I expect to be around the next corner. Early in my life my colors begin to change from a nursery pale pink, to the vibrant orange and yellows of childhood. To a redbrick wall of the lack of a father's love, the dull purple heartbreak of divorce, the swirl of brown and beige of getting a new dad and my dad getting a new daughter. In my preteens my color pallet explodes into a kaleidoscope of every color under the sun as I try to fit in. But puberty comes knocking at my door before everyone else's. My late teens turn to the grey storm clouds before a hurricane when I almost lose my brother. Then the grey cloud turn into a sunrise as I begin my journey into college, where a lack of medication turns into a black void. Proper medication and self-awareness now bring me to a spectrum of vibrant hues that continue to paint my life.

Blackout. Lights fade up to illuminate entire stage.

Preteen Lorin:

It's January 1st, 2006 a time for a new start; put the past in the trash with the wrapping paper and bows. We find space for the new toys, the new kitchen appliances, and the new clothes. New Year, new you. My family has stayed through Christmas to bring the New Year in together. My cousins sleep in my room, so I get to sleep on an air mattress in the game room. Woo...

(Walking US to bed speaking to family) Good Night, Love you! Sweet Dreams! Love you too! *(Preteen Lorin lays on an air mattress, a red, yellow, and blue armchair at the head of the bed.)* Tonight I feel the air thicken. The room feels like it is closing in on me, and I start to feel nauseous. In the armchair right behind my head I feel a presence sitting and watching me. *(Trying to get comfortable, the comforter falls off the bed, starts to reach for comforter, she is paralyzed with fear.)*

Sound cue of an old ancient voice, "Don't Move! I'll show you my face."

Preteen Lorin:

No, no, no! I don't want to see your face. Please no. Don't show me your face!

Sound cue Voice: "I see you moving"

Laying stiff staring at the ceiling

Preteen Lorin:

Dear God, please let the sun come soon. I don't want to be in the dark anymore. Please God, protect me. Amen.

Lights fade to black, warm lights fade back up, Preteen Lorin gets out of bed walks CS

Preteen Lorin:

I hate going to school. Math is like literally the worst, and spelling, and don't even get me started on history. UGH! The popular girls are strutting around their new Hollister jeans and Abercrombie tees. Mom says there is no way she is spending \$70 for pants with holes... She doesn't get it. I have a chunky face. My hair is poufy and looks like an electrocuted poodle. All the other girls straightened their hair. I just want to fit in.

Preteen Lorin looks in the mirror playing with her hair. Is unsatisfied.

Mom! Can I get a straightener?

Gestures as if she is straightening her hair. Messes with it. Still unsatisfied. Walks DSL circling to cube UCS

As I walk through the halls, and sit in class I have the sensation that someone is still watching me, with every step. *(Sits on cube)* Something isn't right, even though not all the girls are nice to me, or the boys don't really like me like me, I'm a happy kid. I'm shy, but give me a couple weeks and I'll talk your ear off! But now all I want to do is find somewhere I can be alone and cry and not need a reason. Not because I'm the slowest in PE, or that the girls I thought were my friends have stopped talking to me. I'm not really hungry anymore.

Sound cue Mom: Lorin, you are just saying you're not hungry because you don't like what I cooked, so you can have this or make yourself a sandwich.

Preteen Lorin:

I'm just not hungry, ok!

Present day Lorin:

(Walks SR to chair) After weeks of this Mom took me to the doctor and that is when I confessed about the voice and the feeling of being watched everywhere I went. I couldn't handle the pressure of keeping it to myself anymore. I wanted to know what was wrong. The doctor refers me to a psychiatrist. *(Sits)*

Psychiatrist:

Hello, I'm Dr. Johnson. I'm going to ask you some questions to better understand how I can help you. How is your sleeping?

Preteen Lorin:

I have trouble sleeping through the night.

Psychiatrist:

Do you know why that is?

Preteen Lorin:

I hear a voice at night, and when I need to go to the bathroom or when I drop my blanket I can't pick it up, because it tells me it will show me its face.

Psychiatrist:

Why are you scared to see its face?

Preteen Lorin:

I don't know... I don't know what it looks like and I feel like it would be really scary.

Psychiatrist:

Does it tell you to hurt yourself?

Preteen Lorin:

No, but it tells me I'm worthless and fat, and that no one really likes me.

Psychiatrist:

Do you find that you aren't interested in activities you use to be?

Preteen Lorin:

Yeah, I don't really want to do anything.

Psychiatrist:

Is it hard to concentrate at school?

Preteen Lorin:

Yeah.

Psychiatrist:

How is your appetite?

Preteen Lorin:

I'm not really hungry anymore.

Psychiatrist:

Lorin, I want you to know that whatever you say in this office will stay in this office,
okay?

Preteen Lorin:

Okay.

Psychiatrist:

Do you ever have thoughts of suicide?

Preteen Lorin:

(Silence) Yes.

Psychiatrist:

Have you acted on these thoughts?

Preteen Lorin:

No.

Blackout. Lights come up CS Lorin empties a bottle of pills, swallows them, gets dizzy starts to wobble, and falls asleep. Blackout.

Light up CS Lorin drops a framed photo and it breaks, she picks up a shard of glass and looks at her hand, she cuts her hand without a wince.

Sound cue, Ma, "Lorin what happened to your hand?"

Preteen Lorin:

Oh I was playing with the dog, and he got too excited. *(Lorin grabs her hand in pain, stares at the cuts. Black out. Lights come up CSL on Lorin back in chair.)*

Psychiatrist:

I am going to prescribe you with 50mg of Seroquel, you'll take this with 25mg of Fluoxetine every day. Your brain isn't producing certain chemicals called serotonin and dopamine that make you enjoy the activities you usually do. That is all the time we have for today, I'll see you in two weeks to see how you are responding to these medications.

Blackout. Lights Up.

Psychiatrist:

Do you blame yourself for your parent's divorce?

Preteen Lorin:

Yes.

Psychiatrist:

Why?

Preteen Lorin:

Well my Dad didn't really every hug me. I would hear them arguing at night. *(Lights dim)*

Sound cue argument:

Ma: When was the last time you told your daughter you loved her?

Father: Yesterday.

Ma: Well what about today?

Father: No.

Ma: Our daughter shouldn't feel like her daddy doesn't love her.

Lights fade to full.

Present Day Lorin:

(To audience, walking CS) When I was 8 they filed for divorce. He said he wanted nothing and took everything. My mom, brother, and I moved back into my grandparents' house.

Childhood Lorin:

(On phone) Hey Dad. I got my report card today. All A's! Do you think you could bring us laundry detergent, since I'm doing good in school?

Laundry detergent is pushed onto stage Blackout. Lights up.

Childhood Lorin:

(Sitting on the floor) Mom, I don't like when you go on dates with him. Now you are going to marry him? What about Dad? I don't understand!

Blackout. Lights up. Lorin is CSR on bed crying.

Preteen Lorin:

Dear God, I hate having to share my room at Dad's with all these babies. He is so happy with his new life, his new family. I feel like I am being replaced. *Sound cue: Whose Daddy's little girl?* He's never said that to me. *Blackout. Lights up CS.*

Present Day Lorin:

My mind needed to mature faster than my prepubescent body and I was stuck confused, angry, and sad that my life was spiraling out of control. Not only had all these events happened in the span of four years but, depression lurks on both sides of my DNA. I am the perfect concoction of genetics and personal life triggers. I was 12 years old and medicated for severe depression. Age 14, we moved to a new town. 15, I stopped taking Seroquel. 16, I stopped taking Fluoxetine. 17, my brother Rex was diagnosed with schizoaffective personality disorder.

Lights dim.

Teenage Lorin:

Stop! Just stop Rex! Dammit, she is your mother! Where is your respect? We only care about you! This is the summer before my senior year, and you're making it miserable for everyone!

Blackout. Light up.

Morning Mom. How are you doing?

Sound cue Mom: I'm ok.

Teenage Lorin:

Sorry for my language last night, I just kind of hit my breaking point.

Sound Cue Mom: I know, it's ok. We are all tired. (Alarm rings)

Teenage Lorin:

Oh my gosh! Is he ever gonna turn his alarm off?

Sound cue Mom: It's been going off all morning, but I figure it is best to let him sleep. I went in there earlier to let the dog out. (Alarm sounds again cutting her off)

Teenage Lorin:

I can't take it anymore! I'm turning it off! *(Storms over to bed reaches for phone, pauses looks at bed)* Mom! Mom! He has a garbage bag over his head! *(Light dim, To audience)* Mom yanked the bag off along with tape and shoe strings, trying to wake him up, shaking him, and hitting him. Trying to get some form of response. Incoherently he mumbled.

Sound cue: "911 what's your emergency?" Teenage Lorin looks around the room. Looks under the bed pulls out an empty pill bottle and tennis shoes missing laces. Lights up to full.

Present Day Lorin:

Rex didn't want to die, he wanted to feel different; he wanted to feel something. He was misdiagnosed. He is Bipolar. *Blackout. Lights up.* At 18 I start college.

College Lorin:

(Cell phone rings, College Lorin answers phone, walks to bed and sits.)

Hey Mom! Yes ma'am, all settled into the dorm. Yeah, met the roommate and her whole family. Haha yeah. Ok I gotta go to bed. I have an early day ahead. Love you. Night!

(Lights dim and fade back up, College Lorin dialing cell phone)

Mom? Nothing's wrong. I'm just really worried about my philosophy class. I have no idea what is going on. The guy next to me is spouting off quotes from people that I couldn't even attempt to spell their names. They talk about different types of governments I've never heard of. I have to read every chapter 3 times to try and understand it and that doesn't work. No. I can't drop the class. Because. Because, then I'm being a quitter and then I'm just going to drop every class that's too hard.

Present Day Lorin:

After many discussions and tears with my family, I dropped the course and it left me feeling like I was on a rollercoaster, the butterflies in my stomach, the fear, the question of how did I end up here? The cart jumps as it starts to rear up the tracks, the clanks sound as if the whole monstrosity will collapse from underneath me, but I'm strapped in. The butterflies are gone and I am left only with the empty gut feeling of pure terror. Suspended in the air and then all of a sudden I'm weightless and jerked left then right, just when I have accepted my fate, there is another hill to climb. I am riding along then another choice. I am so concerned about what others want, what will they think of my choice, how will it affect them? What if I make the wrong choice? What if I end up like

Rex? I am on the anxiety roller coaster and instead of coming to a full stop I think it will go on forever. But it does stop, when I realized that I needed medication.

I was prescribed 10 mg of Fluoxetine. This is when my daily battle began. I'd take my medicine for a week and feel better. So I would stop taking it. Then I would get stressed, get mad and then get asked the question....Are you taking your medicine? The answer is always no.

Lights dim, Lorin sits in chair SL as if driving a car. A small red light is glowing on her face that continues to grow larger as she approaches the light.

College Lorin:

Dear God, I can't take it anymore. I let myself get involved with too many projects. I totally just bombed all my finals. God, I just want to end it all. I just want to step on the gas at this red light. Just plow into the car in front of me. If I leave now I won't have to deal with any of this. How could I be so selfish! How could I do that to Mom and Rex and everyone that has been supporting me? I just need to step on the break. Slow down. I'll call the doctor tomorrow.

Blackout. Lights up CS.

Present Day Lorin:

I am currently on 20mg of Fluoxetine. I have 365 new starts in one year. Today is day...
(*Beat reaches into pocket takes out pill bottle swallows pill.*) 5 of taking my medication regularly. I have control over my life. The medication does not control me, but propels me one day to the next. This rollercoaster is my life, please keep all hands and feet inside the cart, and enjoy the ride. The conductor of this ride, Mr. Funk, lays the tracks waiting

for moments like, *(left leg crosses right leg)* when schedules overlap, *(Hands come up and lean back)* deadlines are fast approaching *(body contorted with right arm stretched in the air head out to the audience)* and I just can't seem to get a handle on all that is happening. *(Unwind and plant feet)* His favorite hue is the rain clouds before a storm, just when dawn has settled on the Earth. Then lightning explodes across the sky making the landscape an electric pale purple! Everything I've kept inside falls out like the rain and I lash out at people for no particular reason. *(Point at audience member)* What the funk are you looking at? *(Holding head)* Some nights Mr. Funk is the harsh pulsating red and blue "open" neon sign irritating my nostrils with the aroma of stale beer. It flashes above my head as I lie in bed, and instead of my mind being open for dreams, it's open to the demons reminding me of my flaws. *(Being pushed down by the weight of flaws)* Your weight, your laugh, your hair, your smelly feet, your childhood, *(arms up)* my **everything!** *(Walk down stage)* Here's a good one! You know when you are in a crowd of people *(backing toward center stage hands up)* and you feel like you are all by yourself, this is Mr. Funk in his prickly orange construction cone. Poking thoughts in my head that every laugh every stare is directed toward me, as he shouts "Stay out!" "Not Welcomed!" "Keep your head down!" He whispers, "Everyone sees you as an outcast." *(Darts down stage left, sharp turn stage right)* So I quicken my pace and try to get where I am headed, head down, arms folded, and an uninviting blank face. *(Face toward audience, starts backing up)*

Mr. Funk manipulates me and makes me think I am someone else, that I am the person I am afraid to be, empty, self-doubting, emotionless, distant. He finds the smallest crack and seeps and oozes in my mind, and though he fills my body, I become just a shell of a

person. I tell myself that I am worthless. This is no way to live! I will not be restrained! I know that I am sensitive to tone. I overthink words said to me. I am a human being with a soul. Soul knows no gender. The soul just know what it likes and what it doesn't. What it feels and (*reaching out*) what it longs to touch. What it hears, "I love you," and more importantly what it needs to hear, "I love you, I **love** you." The soul is weightless.

(*sinking to the floor center stage*) I...**I** burden it with worries and fear, and here is where Mr. Funk awaits. I am silent but long to SCREAM! I have the urge to rip my clothes off and run and jump and find ME! (*runs and stands on cube*) Me without society's stains, me without cares, me without doubts, me with confidence. Me with all my imperfections and unconditional love for every gleaming flaw. I want to find the purest love of loving myself and all I have to offer, a kind smile, a silly laugh, a humble hug, a shoulder to cry on, and an understanding heart. I want you to know that it will get better even if it has to get worse first. I want to pick you up and you and you until we are all standing in a cloud of dust and I want us to find our Valentine pink and KC and the Sunshine band yellow funk! This funk with elements of rhythm and blues and soul music that is filled with percussive vocals, static harmonies and heavy beats, and we learn to dance to its rhythm and enjoy all that makes us and our souls unique. Yeah, funk can be a state of depression; it's not a time for pity parties but a time to celebrate as flawed humans that are trying their hardest to enjoy the life we have. We should learn to use Mr. Funk to improve ourselves, not to impress one another but to understand each other. We've all been there, some version of there. I have surrounded myself with people who love and support me in my daily battle. I try to take all the negative and turn it into strength to fight back, and focus on the positive, because, Mr. Funk will always be around, waiting...*Blackout*.