

# Girl of Sea and Sky

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# STAR TALK

Sometimes, I play word games. It keeps me from going insane.

\*

“Psych” ward, for example. If I rearrange the letters, it could be “spsych” ward. A ward for former spies, and with a “ch” tacked on the end, it sounds like ‘spike’. It’s edgy. Slightly thrilling. But I’m not a former spy, and that’s not the reality here. If I add an “o” because it’s difficult to work without vowels, it becomes “psycho”; I can make more words. It’s limited, yes. Chops. Posh. Soy. Shop. I haven’t seen a shop in a long time. I’ve learned that many of our words without vowels come from Greek and Icelandic. Our word “hope” is Icelandic. I wish I had some.

If I drop the “o” and add the rest of the word “iatric”, there’s much more to play with, but so far, I’ve only come up with “chair” and “chia”, as in the seeds, and then my mind goes blank. Probably the drugs. And there are no chia seeds here. Plenty of chairs. Everywhere. It’s not a bank or a Land Titles office. This place demands a different type of chair. Pink, plush, very worn velvet coverings. Patients need chairs like these. They don’t sit on them; they sink into them. It’s a hospital, but not one where there are heart attacks, burst gall bladders, blood clots or babies making their way into the world before they should. There are no get-well cards on the tables in the Star of the Sea Hospital. It’s simply assumed we will.

Just as I’m arranging “chia” into “chai”, Dr John Magnusson breaks into my thoughts. He leans in slightly as though there’s a small crick in his back, but he doesn’t want anyone to notice. I notice.

‘Your words, Sarah, a few nights after you first came in. I want to go back to that night and what you said.’

I shake my head. I can’t remember, I tell him. He reads from the file, his glasses slightly slipping down his nose, over the bump, like a hesitant skier.

I remember some things, but I'm not discussing them with him. He can stay out of my head.

'You said, "I think I might have killed someone". You were talking to the constellation of Andromeda. That's what you told the nurse.'

Can't remember, I tell him. But I did say that. And it's true I was talking to the constellation of Andromeda. And the nurse wrote it down. It's got nothing to do with a mental illness; I've been talking to Andromeda for years. One night, a few nights after my admission, I got desperate. Andromeda hadn't spoken to me for a week, I was confused, and I told her I might have killed someone. And because the nurse wrote it down, it's on the file. Andromeda didn't answer when I told her I might have killed someone. That same night, the patient who I call the White Whisperer sidled up to me. She always wears a white hospital gown, her silver-grey hair partly hiding her eyes, rimmed with red, red lipstick bleeding into the furrows around her mouth. She looks like a cherry pastry.

'Murderer,' she hissed. And then she shuffled down the corridor. And I thought about the difference between killing someone and being a murderer. "Killer" and "murderer" can be synonymous. "Killed someone" and "murderer" can be worlds apart. Provocation, self-defence, manslaughter. Insanity defence? Well, I'm here, aren't I?

When Andromeda didn't answer that night, a part of me was relieved. It meant I could laugh about being in such despair to get her attention that I made up a story, casting myself as someone I don't recognise. Talk and truth are two different beasts. The truth about what happened is inside me; it's curled behind a rib, in interstitial space, or riding the waves of blood coursing through arteries, perhaps pulsing in rich, red plasma. It could be hiding in my heart, in the third chamber, shifting shape to stay silent, concealed, or maybe it's contained in a dendrite in my brain, fighting with other cells to breathe life into a story that won't start. Dr Magnusson wants that story. He wants the beginning, the inciting incident, everything.

I can't tell anyone about this, of course. What would people say? Huh?

Your best friend is a constellation? The Andromeda constellation? And now she's not talking to you? You say you might have killed someone and yet you're not a murderer? I know what would happen. Suddenly, their voices would lower; they'd arrange their facial features to the "gentle" setting and say, 'Perhaps you need some help, of the psychological kind. Maybe you need to talk to somebody,' is what they'd say. And they'd think, 'No wonder she's in a psych hospital.'

I get it. Most people would have an immediate diagnosis about a woman whose best friend is more than two and a half million light years away from Earth. That's why I can't discuss it with anyone, not any of the other patients, certainly not the doctors and in particular Dr Magnusson. Perhaps he'd prescribe more potent drugs or maybe move me to another ward where people talk to all kinds of things.

As I leave his office, I'm reliving the last time I spoke to Andromeda. She was enthusiastic, soft even.

'You're making progress, Sarah,' she kept saying. 'Keep going.'

She doesn't understand, although she says she does. Andromeda knows more about me than Dr Magnusson will ever know: my divorce, moving back in with my parents, my artwork and my memory loss since an accident. I can't remember an accident, but they tell me that's what happened. I'm hurting because she's ignoring me. It's now been seven days, ten hours and thirty-two minutes, to be exact. I'm counting constantly; it shows just how dependent on her I've become. And I miss her. She's done this before, ignoring me, but it's only been for a night or two. There's no one here I can talk to. I'm lonely, but I want to be alone because there's not one person here at Star of the Sea Psychiatric Hospital who would understand. Two weeks ago, Andromeda said I had to change my attitude. I ran from the garden, curled myself up into a ball under a tree down by the stone wall, and let rivers of silver snot and tears drip down my face.

'You're fighting everything, Sarah, every step of the way,' she said.

'I don't belong in this hospital. It's been almost a month and it's not fair.'

I'm trapped here.'

Andromeda sighed, her blue gases swirling as she breathed out.

'Sarah, I was chained to a rock for quite some time...'

'I know,' I said. 'I've read Aristotle and Euripides. But yours is a myth; mine's reality.'

'Sarah, I sympathise, but you will go home eventually. You have to trust the process here, let the others in, let the doctors help you.'

'But I can't remember. Really, I can't. I have no memories.'

Before she shut me out, Andromeda and I had a ritual. We met every night in the Balinese garden outside Ward Four. Then, last week, everything changed. She suddenly disappeared. She'd been a bit cool the night before, which was disappointing and mildly irritating, but I never expected exile. We've been friends forever, always talking, faithful companions for as long as I can remember, and I can still remember things; I've been locked up here since 21<sup>st</sup> January 2023.

It was eight-twenty, the first bell, when our last conversation took place. The sky was awash with silver-purple ribbons of clouds. A mottled moon, obscured by grey-white mist, occasionally made a fleeting appearance. Our dialogue was left unfinished as a cohort of nurses appeared like a small, white ant army to see us back to the wards. Seeing the onslaught of staff, Andromeda lowered her voice and spoke quickly.

'You do have memories, Sarah,' she said. 'You know I can see inside your head. At the moment, I can see you have beautiful memories of a beach, a man, and, sadly, a drowned child. Sometimes, they're vague, but you want to keep them. But then there are those you're trying to suppress: the road at night, eyes cracked with blood, the note he left, the one you call the Dark Companion Star...'

I stopped her there. Don't talk about those things, I told her. The Dark Companion Star is still following me, but not as much as before. If you

want to help me, get me out of this hospital. Andromeda made an irritated noise in the back of her throat and flicked away some Cepheid stars as if she couldn't be bothered with them. No, she told me. You have to get out of the hospital by helping yourself. Start talking.

'Please, there's no one else. Only you, Andromeda.'

Andromeda breathed out slowly. Suddenly, she reached out, pulling in a star, swift and brutal. I couldn't hear her; she lowered her voice, but something was wrong.

'Sorry about that, Sarah. It's Sadiradra. Delta Andromedae. She's magnitude three point twenty-seven, and yes, she's one of the brightest stars, but she's lazy and thinks it's all right to not shine up to the magnitude she's been given. Anyway, I've got her sorted. Now, where were we?'

The sound of the second and final bell drifted across the garden. Nurse with Nose Ring stood in front of me.

I didn't want her to think I was talking to anyone, so I told her I was thinking aloud.

'It helps sometimes.'

The nurse nodded but didn't write anything down on her clipboard. Andromeda turned away, deliberately, so that I wouldn't be seen talking to her and further complicate my diagnosis. Talking to a constellation would not be seen as progress. Neither of us wants me lumped in with those patients who talk to themselves or talk to someone or something they think they see. Andromeda held back until the nurses had ushered most of the patients in. The skies clouded over, grey upon black. The moon hung like it was the last night of its life, and as it slipped behind a dark cloud, Andromeda appeared just for a second, her voice fading into the still night. Surrender, she told me. Surrender. When you surrender, you'll remember.

'Come back. Please. Andromeda. There's no one else I can talk to.'

I started to explain, but she simply turned down her stars, acting as

though dawn was breaking and her duty had been done for the night. I haven't seen her since. And the nurse must have written it all up because the doctor knows about Andromeda.

I desperately want to talk to someone about our falling out, but there isn't anybody—especially the other patients. A woman who talks to the stars will be seen as delusional by the doctors and possibly normal by many patients, and neither opinion is desirable. What they don't understand is this: I have always talked to the stars. Long before this hospital, long before this hermetically sealed life in ward four, way back into childhood, I've followed them. I know their stories, and they know mine. I know Andromeda like I know the feel of clay under my hands and the movement of my brushes across the roughest canvas and best Belgian linen. The constellations, the moon, the night sky: they've always been there for me.

When I first discovered Andromeda, I liked her straight away.

'I'm a northern constellation, and I will never come south,' she said at our first meeting, a defiant tone in her voice.

'I know,' I said.

She doesn't belong anywhere over Australia. Forever fixed in her V-shaped configuration, her ten stars are the neighbours of Cassiopeia, Cepheus, Pegasus and Perseus. Her constellation is not particularly spectacular. Other stars shine brighter and are larger and more easily visible in our hemisphere. Some are fortunate enough to hold a place in the zodiac. Andromeda has no such pretensions. In fact, she's quite modest.

'You know,' she said, 'the star at the north-eastern corner of the constellation of Pegasus actually belongs to me, but people say it's part of the constellation of the winged horse, which is wrong. But that doesn't matter. I'm happy to share.'

It was this quality that made me warm to her. Her story grabbed me years ago, and now there's even more of a connection between us.

'I was the Chained Woman of the northern skies, put there by my own

father, Cepheus, King of Ethiopia,' she says. 'That is until Perseus rescued me.'

'Yes, and I'm trapped in a psychiatric hospital with little hope of release in sight. My own narrative is far less glamorous than your Greek myth. No such gallant saviour has come for me.'

My father, Myles, had nothing to do with my admission. A piece of paper signed by two psychiatrists was all it took to have me placed here after an accident, and until my memory returns, I'm prohibited from leaving. Andromeda and I have misdiagnosis in common as well.

'I was once misdiagnosed as a nebula,' she told me.

She laughed as if this was the most preposterous thing that could have happened in the history of astronomy. 'Anyway, it's been corrected now. People understand that I'm a spiral galaxy in my own right.'

'You're quite beautiful whether you're a nebula or a galaxy.'

'That may be so, and thank you, but it's important to know what and who you are.'

'Well, I've been misdiagnosed too. I shouldn't be here at this hospital just because of some memory loss.'

'What does the good doctor say about your memory loss?'

I know she knows the answer, but she likes to hear it from me.

Dr Magnusson doesn't like to label patients, but since I pushed for a definite diagnosis, he says what I suffer from is psychogenic or dissociative amnesia, caused by circumstances that result from severe trauma. That's why I can't remember things. It's frustrating. I feel like I don't know who I am. And they call me a 'jumper.' And the patient who wears the white hospital gown calls me a murderer. That's unfair. It's not true, is it?

'Don't take any notice,' Andromeda said. I heard the crispness in her voice. 'The parts don't make the whole. My galaxy is called M31, named

by Meisser, and that's all right, but it's not who I am at the heart of me. Oh, and continue on with portal time at night in the garden; it's a ritual that will help bring back memories.'

She pulled in red hydrogen gas while talking and arranged it around her outer disc. While she preened her galaxy, I sat and let vague memories swirl inside my head. There are large chunks of time missing that I can't account for. Amnesia—it's such a gentle word. It rolls softly in the mouth, aspirating, relieving, soothing. It doesn't sound like an affliction. It sounds like a perfume or entrée from somewhere quite exotic. The doctors say I don't have a long-term mental illness. With time and treatment, my memories will return. They're quite confident of a full recovery.

My broken ribs and arm are slowly healing, and there isn't the discomfort that there was at first. The deep wound in my back is bothering me less. For weeks, I was like the planet Uranus, always lying on her side, but now I can move without pain and turn and sleep on my back. Physical healing isn't enough to get my release. It's only part of it, Andromeda told me.

How do I know what is real and what isn't? Have my memory banks been damaged by the accident? When I think about our recent conversation, I can see how the cracks set in. Dishonesty seems to have its own momentum; each little lie gathers a bigger one, and I have told Andromeda a few untruths, but perhaps I'm not responsible for this. Since the accident, because that's what the doctors believe has happened, I've had trouble with memory. I can't remember many things, and the memories I do have? I don't know whether they are real.

Somewhere in the mix-up of things lies the truth. Doubt and certainty clash. Perhaps the things I remember did not really happen, or maybe they happened but not in the way I think they did, and so are as liable to change as thoughts are. Occasionally, there are times when I circle around a small slice of recall and, feeling encouraged, I dive right in, only to confront a fog that smothers the memory. At those times, I'm afraid.

‘Your fear comes from what you might find, Sarah, and fear can be a mechanism for protecting you from going further into memory as you may not be ready.’

Andromeda crossed the spiral arms of her galaxy, drawing in dust clouds. Greens settled in amongst oranges, reds, purples and pale pinks.

‘Come on, Andromeda, you’re omniscient; that’s an asset; you see everything from up there. Doors and keys and alarms and staff rosters are all under your gaze. All you have to do is tell me how to escape.’

With time haemorrhaging from my life and a release date nowhere in sight, impatience crept over me as the days and nights bled into each other, and I became desperate. I didn’t think it was out of the boundaries of our friendship that she let me know I might escape. She told me not to be rash. She said she understood how trapped I felt, but staying in hospital was best for me. Andromeda waited out the centuries, modelling patience and restraint, qualities I simply can’t find within myself.

‘Perseus came for me, Sarah,’ she said. ‘Someone or something will come for you as well.’

‘Who and what will come? And what are they going to do to help me?’

I banged down my coffee cup and clamped my lips together, forcing myself to keep back a string of expletives that would undoubtedly be noticed by the nurse on duty.

‘Have patience,’ Andromeda said. ‘Be one with them. Please try getting along with others. You’re sharing the same space. And on that note, I’ve got to go. The Milky Way and I have things to discuss. In four to five billion years, my galaxy and hers will collide and apparently form a super galaxy, so we might as well try to get on together. Hubble’s done the research. Right, remember, Sarah, be one with them.’

It was this last comment that disturbed me the most: that she could honestly believe I could see myself as part of the unfamiliar landscape that is Star of the Sea Hospital, that I could so easily identify with the angst-

ridden people whose lives are fluttering at half-mast; the ones who suddenly scream for no reason at all or cry or ask you your name a hundred times a day or bombard you with their frontal lobe fracas until you feel like screaming yourself. On the last night Andromeda spoke to me, I sensed her frustration. That she might start to withdraw had crossed my mind, but a total withdrawal was something I wasn't prepared for.

Then there was the encounter with the patient I call the White Whisperer. She walked toward me, deliberately slow, and came right up in my face.

'Murderer,' she hissed, and walked away.

She's mad, I decided. Still, it unnerved me.

My parents echo what Andromeda and the doctors have advised me to do—be compliant, follow the rules, start talking, learn people's names, participate in group therapy and not think about escape. How easy it is for them.

In this hospital, to be seen as making progress, patients need to talk. Talk with their psychiatrist one-on-one and talk with their allotted therapy group. It's difficult to discuss why I'm here when I can't even remember what was served for breakfast this morning. I suppose I could tell them small, insignificant things, the carefully cut corners of a much bigger picture. Daily reports on the healing of my ribs or how I can start using my arm now the plaster has come off might pass as contributions but are probably not quite enough. Patients are supposed to talk about how they feel, about what happened to bring them to Star of the Sea, that sort of thing. Quite often, they talk about their childhood.

The other night, I constructed a diatribe in my head, the sort of thing I could rehearse and tell the therapy group. It went like this: My name is Sarah. I live in Armitage Bay at the moment; then I'd go on to describe the houses: faux federation houses bloated with the "we've-made-it" tell-tale signs of middle-class aspiration; the boats and their trailers in the driveways; the builders' shingles shouting "yes, we're extending"; the

couples on their verandahs giving instructions to the person they pay to mow the lawn. After Vera's sister—oh, Vera's my mum—died and left her with a hefty inheritance, my parents finally got to mingle with the better sort of people, those who were blasé about water views and voted conservatively. I watched as Vera and Myles practised keeping straight faces when expensive champagne was opened, or someone bought a boat that cost more than our house. I watched as they perfected the look of nonchalance, as though affluence had always been a part of their lives. I watched as the decades-old description of directions to our house faded away. Oh, it's easy; once you're off the highway, turn right at the swans made from old tyres, left at the six gnomes in a circle, left again at the melting Santa still there from the Christmas before, and right at the fence made entirely out of beer cans. This description was replaced by a new one—half a kilometre from the yacht club. Yes, we're members. You *must* come as our guests. The lobster is wonderful. Anyway, I've lost my memories. They say I was involved in an accident, and then I tried jumping off a cliff. I can't remember any of it. Oh, and maybe I killed someone. That's what I'd say.

There are things I wouldn't mind talking about. I could tell them how astronomy grabbed me as a girl, how the telescope that Myles bought for my brother ended up being mine, how one of my strongest childhood memories is of Myles singing along with Bing Crosby, out of tune, moving his body fluidly as if he were in a dance hall, impressing Vera for the first time. 'Would you like to swing on a star? Carry moonbeams home in a jar?' I wanted both. Perhaps sharing small memories like these will be seen as participating. Perhaps, if I participate, they will give me my art materials.

I miss my brushes and canvas, and my art smock streaked with paint. My nails are long for the first time in my life, my hands have gone soft, and the calluses have been repaired. Years of twisting wire, forming clay shapes and working with metals had left me with hands rough and slightly scarred. Now, they feel like the hands of a woman who runs a gallery and passes around champagne on opening nights rather than the artist who works in the gallery and whose work is on display. I miss talking to the people who visit

and buy art. I also had a part-time job teaching photography, and I wonder who is teaching the classes now. I can't have my telescope either. The staff tell me there's nowhere to store art materials and telescopes and, in the past, there's been theft of patients' belongings. Every patient has an inventory sheet stating what they came in with. They should leave with exactly the same things.

I took the advice about talking, not to the doctors or the patients in group time but to random patients in the garden at night. I made an effort in my second or third week; I can't remember exactly, being so pumped with drugs at the time. I tried a conversation. Seeing a few patients sitting in the garden with their heads thrown back, I assumed they were looking at the night sky.

'See the Southern Cross there,' I said. 'At its base is the brightest star, Acrux, a massive hot double star. It's burning furiously through its fuel store and will die as a supernova, exploding in several million years.'

The patients looked at me, said nothing and then looked away. I didn't try again. Word spread around the hospital that the girl who watches the stars is strange, so they mostly leave me alone. Some call me the Star Girl. I don't call the other patients anything, and I've never learned their names. It's easier to remember them by a physical feature or a distinctive element of their personality. Staff are the same. The nurses say my reluctance to befriend the other patients and learn their names will be seen as uncooperative behaviour that is definitely frowned upon at Star of the Sea Hospital. 'Uncooperative' is written on my file, but I don't think that's true. I simply don't want company. My friends are the constellations and the greedy seagulls that fly into the hospital garden, living on scraps of what's left over, a lot like me. Talking is draining, and I've got nothing to say.

Garden time is mandatory at Star of the Sea, something to do with some famous shrink called Menninger and plants as part of therapy. Star of the Sea prides itself on its progressive approach to treatment, and I have to grudgingly give them credit for that. The garden runs all the way down to the sandstone wall surrounding the hospital. The wall is very high; it has to

be, as Star of the Sea is perched right on the cliffs. Beyond the wall lies my hometown of Armitage Bay and the beach. In another life that once belonged to me, I was on that beach most nights. It was there that I studied the stars, taking the telescope into the dunes. If I could look over the wall, I could see my childhood home, where I lived after my marriage break-up and before the accident.

Every night, the nurses herd the patients into the garden for an hour. Sitting out under the stars surrounded by koi ponds and benign Buddhas, we could be forgiven for thinking we were somewhere quite exotic. Only when the sounds of confinement intrude are we forced to engage with the reality that ours is not a hospital where donor hearts and kidneys are gratefully received. The sounds of confinement are no different from those of the outside world. It's the meaning attached to them that makes them significant, as they are associated with breaking up the day into segments, so we know what is happening and when. They ground us in certain rituals that remind us of where we are and why we are here. They are at times irritating, unbearable, depressing or soothing, uplifting and comforting, and can sometimes be all of the above and all at the same time. When the two trolleys come wheeling across the flagstones in the evening, they are small reminders of our fragility, our loss of control, and the dangers we pose to ourselves. I thought that tea and coffee at night might keep the patients awake, but I soon realised it makes no difference. The drugs override everything. Occasionally a doctor comes into the garden, and, if it happens to be Dr Magnusson, I always ask, 'Can I go home now?'

Kitchen Lady with Blue Rinse is never late. Her tea trolley runs smoothly over the flagstones, the wheels never locking. We're not allowed to drink coffee and tea in proper cups and mugs. The cups are Styrofoam, and the biscuits are in individual wrappers like the ones on domestic flights. Lovely night for it, Kitchen Lady tells us. She says that every night. Sometimes, she stops to pluck a frangipani, which she tucks behind her ear. She looks around furtively as if she might suddenly be put in a straitjacket and hauled away.

On my first night in the garden, I asked her for a proper mug, but she shook her head. Might hurt yourself, she told me. She hands me my Styrofoam cup with great care as though it is fine bone china.

‘Sarah has already thrown herself from a cliff and survived, so I doubt a little ceramic or glass will be the death of her,’ one of the patients informed Kitchen Lady on that first night, but she shook her head again. Although my memory is in tatters, I’m sure that throwing myself off a cliff is not what I did, but people love a dramatic version, and once the story gets around, it accrues its own unfortunate fame. As well as the Star Girl title, I now have the added one of “jumper”.

Medication Nurse follows behind Kitchen Lady. His trolley is worse than any shopping centre trolley; its wheels lock stubbornly and refuse to move, and when they do, thousands of pills in small vials rattle and shudder as if they are desperate to keep out the cold. Medication Nurse hands out the meds in small plastic vials and watches as I put the white pills in my mouth, waiting until I swallow. Not content to see me swallow, he asks me to open my mouth and says nothing when I roll my eyes.

Tonight, we sip our tea, the steam wafting up into our faces. The air is perfectly still except for the gentle, occasional zapping sound emitted by the insect lamps and the yellow smoke of the spiral cones of citronella dotted around the perimeter. The Balinese garden stands torpid in the humidity. My eyes wander over the water feature, the frangipani, the weathered wind chimes, and I feel the sun’s heat held in the stone furniture as it radiates up my bare legs. The solar lamps peek from behind ferns, and the shadows dance as if they don’t know where they are. Yellow candles in coconut shell holders strung from the trees throw gentle, lambent light on the plants below. On the low retaining wall, the Registrar’s cat sleeps, her Burmese blue eyes opening occasionally if a patient becomes too loud. Henry sits beside me, thumbing through the DSM, squinting to read in the low light. The nurses are relaxed now, knowing that the night medication will soon lull the patients into compliance, taking their bodies hostage. No one will be piercing the lid of a quiet night with an anguished scream, and some on-

duty staff will cover for their colleagues as they seek refuge in coffee, cigarettes and power naps to get them through the next shift.

The garden is my lifeline, my connection to the world outside and the life I left behind. Soon after arriving at Star of the Sea, I developed a ritual to take me back. Portal-time. My nightly ritual in the garden is the portal to my old life and the memories I have left. It allows me access to the heavens, to my stars and planets. It allows me access to the time I spent with a man who I think might be real, but I'm not sure anymore. I wish I could have my telescope. It would bring everything closer, perhaps even restore some memories.

My imagination is the next best thing. Tracing the trajectories of the stars as they traverse the night sky keeps my head still. At night, the constellations vie for centre stage, demanding attention, and I plunge into deep space, into black holes, into the heavens in perfect order. An air of hopeful expectancy pervades the garden, making me feel that if we sit here long enough, there may be new beginnings; we might rise out of our seats, leave our illnesses and walk back into our lives with freshly laundered minds and bodies. For just an hour a night, there is a small sliver of the old Sarah, talking to her stars, sitting in the dunes with the man on the beach who understood when no one else did. The ritual is simple; I take a small shell from my pocket, hold it tightly, close my eyes and concentrate. A portal opens, sometimes quickly, sometimes slowly, but it never fails to transport me back to the beach at night.

Nobody knows about my ritual. The reason for not discussing it is not only the fear of the doctors diagnosing a delusional state but also to do with not wanting my memories dissected and analysed. I want them to be real, so real that I have no trouble distinguishing them from confusing memories. The medication can often make me drowsy, but when I'm with the stars and the sand, not even the drugs with the complicated names can dull the memory or erase the reality of the outside world and the memories I still have intact. Whether the doctors think they are real is another matter altogether.

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