

It was my 11th day in quarantine. I was slowly climbing up the stairs to my room on the fifth floor carrying my lunch in a tiffin box. I always preferred stairs and now, I made it a point to climb them without fail– I didn't want to touch the buttons on the elevator. I was unusually slow. There was nothing wrong with my stamina. I was exercising regularly. I reached my room, set a small makeshift dining table. It was originally an ironing board. I sat quietly for several minutes before tears started rolling down my eyes. I didn't know why I was crying. I sat in my balcony, staring at the monsoon clouds that were arriving in Bangalore. I wished to be those clouds – free. It was then that I mustered the courage to be vulnerable and accept that I was feeling lonely. Very lonely!

Being alone is not a new to me. In fact, I enjoy my own company. For me, three is a crowd and large gatherings make me very anxious. The lockdown didn't hurt much because I could walk into our garden and watch the beautiful birds and play with Chica (our dog). When I came to campus, I felt I had a lot of time to catch up on my work and music lessons. I made a routine and sincerely adhered to the self-discipline I needed to get through this. I wanted to use this time to get into the habit of a smooth morning and evening routine which would be helpful even when I resume work. I was extremely successful in my morning routine. It still works perfectly well. But later I'd often feel lost. Mostly blank. I couldn't focus on work. I felt restless to sit and sing. But I could sweep, mop, wash clothes and scrub and clean with great concentration! So, I did that. I listened to classical music for hours, lying down and watching the clouds. I watched movies and binge watched some series too. But I could barely manage to study, read or even practice music. It required a lot of effort to just get started.

What was happening to me? Was it just boredom? Was there something more to it?

After spending hours gazing clouds, I started filling up the pages of my journal. Staying locked up in the room constantly reminded me of the time I was in severe depression and struggled with immense anxiety. There were no painful memories haunting me now but the feeling of that immense pain and loneliness that I felt at those times mirrored in the loneliness I felt today.

I did not go to the mess that day for snacks or dinner.

After talking for ten minutes to my mother, two hours with a close friend and another hour with another close friend, I slept with a gentle half-smile on my face.

The next morning, I was astonished to see a very beautiful self-similar pattern in the clouds called *Alto cumulus undulatus* to the east and the dense monsoon clouds to the west – a pattern that is a telltale sign of precipitation. Later, I watched *Togo* – a movie that made me cry and smile at the same time. I also completed a derivation that was long pending, sang my heart out and was mesmerized by the beautiful sound of the first monsoon showers.

I was alone but not lonely!