

## ***Hurt***

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She had a sudden craving for cranberry juice. Was this disturbing? Perhaps. Instead of getting Neosporin and a Band-Aid from the bathroom, she walked to the fridge (it *is* closer to the kitchen table) and poured herself a glass of cranberry juice.

She placed the box on the kitchen table, held one end with her right hand, and used her left to hold the pocketknife to rip through the tape. The pocketknife gashed through the tape easily, too easily, too quickly. She had dragged the knife into the palm of her right hand, ripping through her skin. She had felt stinging, saw the open skin, but with no immediate sign of blood, she kept opening the box. Then when she went to move one of her long, brown hairs from her face, she felt something wet touch her forehead: blood, dripping down her palm. A gash about two inches long. She shanked herself and couldn't help but smirk. The go-to threat in high school was to shank someone who disrespected you—or rip their extensions out. And here, she had done it to herself. She always knew the pocketknife would someday betray her, a karma-like punishment for owning a weapon.

The blood flowing immediately from the cut was a deep crimson, the color of a royal queen's cloak, and as it flowed down her skin became brighter, like the logo of a sports team.

She sipped her cranberry juice on the walk into the bathroom. She did nothing to stop the bleeding. It was the first time she felt alive in \_\_\_ weeks. What was that song by Johnny Cash? *I hurt myself today to see if I still feel pain.*

Sleep evaded her for days, or weeks, months? The concept of time seemed meaningless. When she did sleep, she never dreamt. She never dreamt of idyllic and beautiful fantasies where everything was pastel colors and she fell in love and awoke with a deep, satisfied sigh.

She heard everything as if closing her eyes automatically magnified her sense of hearing to which every single sound was unbearable. The furniture settling in like the crack of a baseball on a bat. A car driving by on the road might as well have crashed through her bedroom. The neighbor's moans and direct instructions followed by cries out to a deity on the weekends—needs no comparison.

Regardless of the noise, she didn't know how anyone slept. New Year's Eve stopped feeling exciting a few years ago. She was happy one year would come to an end, but dreaded the start of another. With a global pandemic, *everything* becoming more expensive, student debt, racism, homophobia, transphobia, housing crises, climate change, healthcare—do others stay up wondering when the world will finally implode?

Sitting on the bathroom floor with the cranberry juice in her left hand and the blood dripping on her right, she thought of the last time she had Codeine when she was 19 years old. It had actually been prescribed to her by a doctor because she had bronchitis. She had only heard of it because she knew rappers mixed it into their Sprite. She took the dosage, carefully measuring the dandelion yellow liquid into the cap to reach 10 milliliters. She drank it and about 10 minutes later she heard her alarm, which should have been impossible except that it was in fact 8:30 a.m. the following morning. She awoke in the same clothes, on top of her blanket on her bed, her hair barely disturbed from its bun. But she had *slept*. She felt that this wasn't something to cure her bronchitis; no, she had been given a magic potion to solve her crippling insomnia. She would take it when she went days without sleep or when she felt particularly anxious. The pharmacist had given her a rather large bottle, so it lasted beyond her bronchitis. She doesn't remember how long she used it (either as a side effect of the Codeine or the fact that linear time as a concept is absurd), but she remembers why she stopped.

Her college sent out an email detailing that the U.S. was in the midst of an opioid epidemic; if anyone felt they had a need for drugs for any reason, they were to reach out to a professional, but the school actually referred to this “need” as addiction. She scoffed. She wasn’t addicted to anything; she wasn’t a statistic. The title of the administrative person who sent the email was far too long, but whoever this D.A.R.E. personified was stated that amongst a group of anonymous students surveyed, they had all started with prescription medication (Codeine), a legitimate prescription for a medical need (bronchitis). Students took the medication they were initially prescribed and were scared to come off of it or had gotten addicted to it.

She called the number listed at the end of the email and when a woman with a little too overly enthusiastic voice answered, she almost hung up. Her gut told her not to. She told the woman that she had been prescribed Codeine because of bronchitis, but she now used it to sleep, but that didn’t mean she had an addiction, right? When the woman told her she had the support of the whole community, that she was proud our protagonist called, that she was so strong and brave and loved, our protagonist decided to just dump the remainder of the bottle in the toilet. Partially to save herself, partially to end the conversation so she’d never have to speak to this woman again. Later, her psychologist told her she made the right decision, regardless of motivation.

But now, nearly 10 years later, once again, she can’t sleep.

She was alone, in every sense of the word. Her friends were all engaged or are in long-term committed relationships. She didn’t even have a pet, as it would make her rent even more expensive. She wanted what they had.

A few of her friends claimed she was living the life, what that means in your late 20s varies. They envied they had all lived out their wild days, while she still had the chance. They envied that their hair was beginning to gray while hers grew longer and almost darker. They envied the fact that they were all gaining weight and she lost 10 pounds; the fact that it was due to anxiety meant nothing to them. A philosophical hairdresser once told her “Ya know sweetie, people always want what they can’t have.”

She took a deep breath and saw the blood run down her hand like ivy vines. She sat on the floor in her flannel pajama shorts and a “Philly Philly” t-shirt. Her long legs stretched past the toilet and she rested her right ankle on her left one. She remembered a classmate once wrote a poem about self-harm: *no matter what, your*

*body fights for you.* The blood cells eventually clot to stop the bleeding, you vomit up the alcohol, you get fevers to know you're sick—your body fights for you, even when mentally, you don't have the motivation.

She didn't want to wait for the blood cells or wait for the blood to coagulate on its own. She didn't know how long she had been watching her hand bleed. Divine intervention occurred in the form of getting off the floor, turning on the faucet, and letting the rush of cold water wash the blood off her hand. It stung and she winced, but perhaps this was a good thing: she could still *feel* pain. *No matter what, your body fights for you.* She opened the hidden cabinet behind the mirror to grab the Neosporin and the largest Band Aid, the one she normally throws in the garbage with the rest of the box when it's empty because who could possibly need a Band Aid of that size?

She felt pride in treating her own wound. She fought for herself. When she went to bed that night, sleeping on her left side so her right hand wouldn't be under the pillow, she shut her eyes, dreamt of nothing, and had felt grateful, for the first time in eons (time doesn't exist as a construct, remember?) when she woke up the next morning that the world didn't end while she slept.