

INPATIENT

The sheets on the bed cannot mask the crinkling of plastic as you shift, still in your clothes, still holding back tears. Every sound feels loud and you can hear the other girl breathing, breathing, she is *breathing* and it's so loud. You cannot remember why you agreed to come here; maybe it is the fear, maybe it is the shaking in your mothers voice when you told her you wanted to die.

It is a miracle you can hear anything over the pounding of blood in your ears as you curl your fist around the pillowcase. The pillowcase is wrapped in plastic, too. It crinkles too, as you turn your head. Face now towards the ceiling, eyes still sore and wet from all that crying you did. Your lips are a little numb and you don't know why. Everything feels off, and sensitive, and loud, and uncomfortable, and fuck, you just want to go home.

You want to beg, *I won't do it if you let me leave. I won't starve if you let me leave.*

This is hell, this is horror, this is not what you wanted.

You go to sleep, somehow, and wake up the next day.

The room hasn't changed.

The air feels stagnant, and so do you.

This is life. This is living. This is what it is to survive.

You get up. You leave the room.

This is what it is to live. Hate it every minute, turn and toss while you sleep, and cry when you get a moment alone. But alive.

You still hear your mothers voice, in your head or over the phone or just far off in the distance. She is still scared. So are you.

This is what it is to live. Or at least you think.

You aren't quite sure if you've been doing it right this entire time.

This is not the same girl in the bed. You do not remember this girl's name. She was tall, and dark haired, and you never spoke. Except for this.

You cannot breathe. You cannot scream. There is a tissue clutched in your fist and it is very wet. It is one of those moments, you realize, as you throw your tissue away and stand there. It is one of those moments that leave you empty, shaking, and you still can't pinpoint why.

The girl is standing right there, and as you turn towards her when you hear her voice, you realize how obvious your red eyes are, the wet cheeks, the shaky breathing.

She asks if you are ok.

And you only reply with two words. Curtly. Brokenly. Ugly. You walk away.

You do not remember her name.

You are angry at yourself. You do not remember her name.

You have not known true peace since hospital beds and coloring sheets and uno cards. Since watered down cranberry juice and napping under the tables. There was something so peaceful about it to you. Each moment breathable. Each moment planned.

You've convinced yourself you loved it, even though it was the worst time in your life. But didn't you, at least a little bit?

Giggling after lights out with the girl in the other bed.

Watercolors and no judgment.

Talking about yourself and people actually listening.

Maybe you loved it a little too much. The good pieces of it. And that is why you should never go back.

You are lying to them, when you say you do not want to go back. You are lying when you say you hated it. You are lying when you say that there is nothing about it you wish to return to.

There is peace in being unknown. How glorious to have no burden of personhood, how utterly freeing to have no one see you and no one to drag you to what you once held yourself to. There, you were alone, but there, you were no one at all. People who are nothing don't have to be good, don't have to give themselves reasons to push through. People who aren't people, who sit silent like good girls, who take their pills, who have no purpose, don't have to be anything at all. It's so easy.

You are a liar for loving it. You haven't always been. But for a long time now, your tongue has been coated with dirt. And you no longer taste it.

Isn't this what got you into this mess in the first place?

The first few lies didn't come as easy. Then like how after the first two cuts you start to become numb, they come easier. Smoother. More convincing.

They wouldn't have found out, had you not let it slip. You could've lied. It would've been easy.

But you didn't. Do you regret it? Still?

Yes.

The answer is always the same.

Yes.

You can't shake it off. You hate it all so much, you can't shake it off, not like dust or snow or bad dreams.

You can't
get it
off.

And maybe you're just *sensitive*, maybe you're just too ugly in the head and in the body to be able to handle something so heavy as a past. You remember everything, you remember all of it and how much you loved it and how much you hated that the sun rose every morning. How do you move on from that?

How do you move on from a small death like that? You were in the grave. You were carving your headstone.

But you never finished. And your small death wasn't forever. And you still can't shake it off, and you turn your head away to think of other things. But you can't escape white walls, locked windows, filed down pencils.

You can't get it out. You'll never get out.

It's an eternity later before you lift your head.

The walls are gone.

The air is no longer stale.

You don't know how you got here, but it is *here* and not *there*.

This is what it is to live. This is what it is to escape.

You aren't sure you can do it right but you don't have a choice— this is what it is to make it out.