
S LICES

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“Good Morning, Jack, how are ya honey?”

My rowdy, red-headed friend approached the window, giving Nurse Antonelli a playful wink before taking a paper cup that looked more like a thimble in his varsity-football-big hand. Hair a mess, backpack unzipped, and collar partially upturned, he raised the cup to his lips, throwing the two pills back as enthusiastically as a college freshman takes a vodka shot. He turned to face me and opened his mouth: “All gone! Catch ya later, Doodles,” calling me by an unfortunate nickname I acquired at boarding school. This was Meds Line, and we were the Meds Line Crew. There were at least forty students on meds at any given time, probably closer to sixty. We joked about making T-shirts, our dosage numbers on the back.

It was easy to tell why certain kids were there. Jack was an obvious ADD child. Alden took meds for ADD and depression. Emma took every anxiety medication under the sun before being expelled for harboring a supply of prescription drugs that would make any pharmacy proud. Boarding school was a difficult place to keep secrets and they were harder to keep if you went to Meds Line. Everyone there had *something*. I always wondered: *Did they know? Could people tell what I had?*

Every morning for almost three years I looked through the window to the other side, to the tidy rows of bottles and labels—towards my salvation. It’s strange to think I always said thank you for those two pills, but I did.

Sip. Swallow. Smile.

“It’s hard to explain,” I told her. The school psychologist, Dr. Ferns, sat across from me in an armchair with her feet tucked beneath her, just as she had the first time we met. It was the reason I knew I could talk to her—the way she sat on her feet. “Well, just try and walk me through what happens.” I loved this woman, who knew more about me at the time than my own family, yet I still had trouble looking her in the eye when I told her the truth. I had to look up. Up and out through the floor to ceiling window, with a diamond shaped pane at the top. I would look out the window, watching the leaves change week by week, and tell her my truth.

It was as if I watched myself do it. Hunched in the bathroom stall, I’d start with a few cuts on my right arm. Then I would

switch to the left. It wouldn't feel like enough. It wouldn't feel like I had tried hard enough to *make* myself feel. So I would keep going, working my way up my arms until my skin was hot, stinging, swollen. I would cut until I was tired. Sometimes panting. Frantic to prove that the age old adage was true, that it was in fact better to feel pain than nothing at all. I would stop, throw the razor onto the windowsill and look out into the night, wondering each time what I had done.

"I'm coming," read the text. I pressed my face against the frosted window, as if I could see him running to get me, hold me, save me. When I realized I would never be able to see him coming, I slid to the floor against the radiator. Willing the seconds to pass more quickly, I cried until I heard banging on the door. "Mai, open up." When I hugged him I put my elbows around his neck, my forearms crossing over one another, facing up. I didn't want to ruin his sweatshirt.

One day while on health leave from school, I went to the Metropolitan Museum to get lost. After wandering around for a bit, I went to the ladies room. I opened the door only to see the reflection of Mrs. Andrews—our headmaster's wife—in the bathroom mirror. Without hesitation, I turned and bolted. I hoped she hadn't seen me. I walked quickly and aimlessly until I ended up in an unfamiliar wing of the museum and sat down on a lacquer bench.

That was so weird. What is she doing here? I looked around. I was alone in a windowless room with enormous engraved tablets on each wall. *Why did you run away?* Mrs. Andrews was famously affectionate, and had I not turned and run she would have hugged me right there in the bathroom. *What are you doing here?* I had left school for a few weeks, supposedly, to get better. In doing so, I had left the love that kept me afloat: my friends, Dr. Ferns, the dorm that was my home—all the people who had fought for me when I could not muster the strength. *What the hell are you running from?*

Seeing Alice Andrews in the ladies bathroom of the Met, 263 miles from campus, was proof of how futile my attempts to run away from my problems were. Because no matter where I went or what I did there was one person I could never escape. I carried my fears, my anxieties, and my suffocating desire to be the most loved, the most beautiful, and the most perfect with me everywhere, the way I carry my scars today.

I didn't want to get lost anymore, so I stood up, walked two miles down Fifth Avenue, and went home.