

Everybody hurts. But not everybody bleeds. It takes a certain desperation to bring a blade to one's skin, to press down and drag. It takes a bone-deep hurt for a person to want to rip their skin apart, in order to feel. Feel better, nothing, *something*. Anything to feel. It takes a twisted, broken, hurting mentality to hurt oneself and to feel good about it. It takes my mentality.

Cutting is an addiction. My addiction. For four years I cut to cope, to feel something, to stop feeling. Any reason was a good reason.

There is a voice in my head, whispering, clawing at my mind, trying to pull me under and drown me until I give in.

Again.

And again.

And again.

It is my voice. A part of my broken mind craves the pain. Sometimes it whispers. “‘It’s okay. It will make you feel better,’” comes the soft caress. Sometimes it screams. ‘Don’t you get it?! You didn’t do it right! It’s not good enough! *You’re not good enough!*’

But at cutting, I am good enough. There is no right or wrong. No grade, no pressure to succeed. In my mind, it works. Once I cut I don’t feel bad or maybe I feel good, relaxed even. Seeing the blade skate across my arm or my wrist and seeing the first few drops of blood well up- red as leaves in the fall- that is relaxing. Bleeding is something I know. It is something I can control. It is something I can do.

Pleasing people. Helping people. For me, these two characteristics make up who I am. When I can't make people proud of me I feel awful, but when I can't *help* them the sense of failure claws at my belly, making my stomach churn. All I want is to help people. So why can't I do even that? It's the worst with my own family, which is what I'm most disappointed in myself about. My parents always fight and there's nothing I can do to stop it. Nothing I can do to make my mom stop yelling at my dad when the sky is black and my sisters and I are in our rooms, out of sight but nowhere near out of earshot. Their voices pound up the stairs and through the closed doors of my room, jumping over the music that is blasting in a desperate attempt to drown them out. So I sit there. On my bed with my eyes clenched tightly shut, wanting to hear anything but *this* again. Night after night, there are two conversations. The one between my parents and the one slicing through my skull. "This is your fault. It's all your fault. All of it. And there's nothing you can do about it. All your fault," comes the whisper, somehow louder than any screaming match. Finally, when the house is quiet and dark, I make my escape.

Escape. Freedom. Control. This is what cutting is to me. Cutting is the only thing that I have complete control of in my life and that fact is comforting to me. Everything about it is my choice. When, where, how deep, how much, what blade. I choose all of it. At the same time though, cutting is the ultimate loss of control. When I cut, I forget everything except the cold kiss of metal on my skin. I can't remember how much time has passed and when I finally stop, it's not unusual for me to have 40 or 50 new gashes in my skin. These lines of red, with little beads on seeping up from underneath are simultaneously the most beautiful and most horrendous thing I've seen. They litter my arms and sometimes my wrists, showing that I am strong enough to do something. They also show how weak I am. What would other people think of that?

Help. I don't know how to ask for it. Maybe this is why I turned to cutting. I help people, they don't help me. That's how I've always lived. The logical part of my mind murmurs in a broken voice, "This isn't okay, you *need* to get help. People won't hate you, they just want to help you." Then comes the seductive whisper, sweet as honey and bitter as pure dark chocolate. It floats into my mind, a black cloud that to my blinded eyes looks like the shining silver lining of my otherwise dark life. "No, darling," it whispers, "they won't help you. Why would they want to help *you*? You're just a broken little girl, incapable of doing anything other than messing up. If they find out they'll leave, just as quickly as they came. No, this is your secret. Keep it that way." That seductive voice is softer than a rose petal against my skin, but its' impact is a kick in my gut. They'll leave. Of course they will. People always leave me. I wish I knew why. Maybe if I knew, I could change. Maybe I could be that girl that everyone wants to have, and nobody wants to lose.

I'm not a girl who is anyone's first choice. I remain on the edges of their lives, to be pulled in or pushed out at their convenience. At their disposal. I'm the friend who is always there for someone who needs me, but when I need someone, people vanish.

At least that's how it feels to me. The logical part of my mind knows it that someone will be there for me if I need them. But I can never make myself believe it. People leave. Whether it is physically or emotionally, people leave. Often, I feel as if people don't want me. And why would they? I'm just an old porcelain doll, cracked in some places and missing parts, no longer beautiful and untarnished by the world around me.

But I'm still *me*. I'm still the girl who will always be there for you, for anyone, no questions asked. But I'm still scarred. And who would want a girl with scars? Who would want a girl who needs to bleed to live?

I don't think about death when I cut. I never want to die, I just want the pain to stop. Or maybe I want to feel something. Cutting always accomplishes what I want. For a little while at least. Then, the next morning, I wake up and see the scabs of dark red over those once perfectly straight lines. Now they are ugly. Now they *hurt*. Now, I don't like the pain. It's an itching sensation and I feel bruised whenever I bump my arm against something or someone. So I hide. Inside of a sweatshirt my arms hide, my sleeves pulled down and clenched in my hands so no one sees the bandages and tape that encircle my upper arms and wrists like a large white cuff. Because then they would think I need help, and I don't. At least, that's what I always tell myself.

I refuse to listen to the voice in the summer, no matter how much I want to. It is simply too hard to hide the cuts when the air is hot and humid, too easy for others to find my secret. For most of the year, I can justify long sleeves and sweatshirts. No one questions it. But for those few warm months, the sun lights up the sky and the heat bears down, making it unreasonable to wear the armor over my battle scars. It is always the summer when I tell myself that this is it, I'll finally quit. I'll finally be free of this, this *thing*, that's keeping me chained where I stand. But the summer breeze doesn't last long enough for me to get a foothold into recovery. Into freedom. Like how summer succumbs to the harsh winds of fall my mind falls to the voice as the temperature drops. 'They'll see' comes the voice occasionally, and it causes me to pull back from whatever progress I am making. I don't want to be *that* girl. The girl who slices up her skin is not me. Not to other people. To other people, I am that girl whose life is perfect. I have good grades, I'm involved in school and hockey, and I work. I have friends. Not a lot, but enough. I get sad occasionally but what high schooler doesn't? To other people, I'm a good girl. I don't mess up. This is why I need to hide my cutting in the summer. For a while the red lines don't mark my skin, though white ones still do. It is much easier to see red on white than it is to see

white on white. I'm afraid. I'm afraid of what other people will think of me. I'm afraid of what I will think of myself.

If people were to see my cuts, all the scars that criss-cross my arms, they would think I was crazy, they would whisper about me, like the voice in my mind. I would be branded, like a calf in the spring. Hiding my scars hides my weakness, masks my inability to help and covers up my complete perfection in screwing up.

Cutting was a part of my life for four years. From seventh grade all the way until March of my junior year of high school, the blade was how I coped. It was my addiction, my drug. That's what people don't understand. My mind turned against me, like a runaway train. I was powerless to stop it. I didn't want to stop. It worked and it didn't hurt anyone but myself.

I am recovering. As with any addiction I don't think full recovery is ever possible but I'm doing much better now. There are still days that it's hard, days when I want to give again, to bleed again, but there are not as many. The scars are still there and maybe always will be. The raised white lines are like a special form of Braille, spelling out a story. My story. Most people will know that there is a story behind the scars, but right now only I know the whole story. Maybe someday, though, someone else will learn this unspoken language and read the story of my broken, bleeding mind. And just maybe, they will understand.