

We do not regret until we have done.

### **After The Accident**

I used to like parties.

It wasn't the scent of cheap perfume, feigned smiles, and music so loud it made your bones shake. I liked being apart of that unnamable feeling you get when you're in a crowd. It could be likened to the melodic sounds of the steps you take when walking down a street. You're so into the moment of it all that when you eventually stop walking, you realize you missed your destination by four blocks, your stomach is incessantly groaning for its next meal, and your calm feeling instantly was shaken, beaten, and thrown farther away than you can reach. But there was nothing calming about the metal chair digging into my sides, and the smell of antiseptic flowing bitterly through my nostrils.

And I hate parties.

The banner above my head sported the slogan 'We're not sick! We're fighters!', and the punch bowl near my specified corner turned out to be more of an annoyance than a comfortable spot to sit for the rest of the evening. I was constantly moving my chair for people who decided getting punch from the front of the table wasn't good enough, because they wanted to stand at the sides of the food laden table too. I had been splashed with assorted foods, and mysterious substances, but couldn't move in risk of being seen by anyone. Conversations had never been my thing. Especially at hospital parties, where I knew no one.

"You're new, aren't you?"

I turned my head slowly to meet the intruders eyes. They were brown.

"Don't tell me. I'm sparkling? Or better yet, you've never seen me before?" I said, crossing my legs, wishing my dress was longer or wasn't a dress at all. Pants were much better.

He laughed, "Well, I was going to say I'd never seen you before." He then smirked, "But sparkling new could work as well."

I rolled my eyes, and then turned my head back to the horde of people dancing in the middle of the room. It wasn't as if I hated human interaction, I just hated most of the

people that tried to talk to me.

“What’s your name?” He inquires, sitting down onto a metal folding chair beside me with a plunk.

“Jenny.” I said, attempting to be civil in anyway I can, though I hadn’t had much practice in being civil for God knows how long.

“I’m Jason.” He smiles widely, arching a brow, “What are you in here for?”

I realized he meant why I was at a hospital party for sick kids when I didn’t look sick. I had no tubes, no cuts, no visible bandages, and yet I was just as messed up as they were. Perhaps worse. I had the cuts in my head.

“Retired cutter, aspiring depression activist.” I darkly jest, waiting for him to widen his eyes and walk away. They always did.

And yet, he simply impulsively takes my hand and flips it over so that he could see the scars as if they were fascinating. They weren’t leading anywhere. The scars didn’t form a pretty picture or portrait. They were simply the number of my mistakes and the memory of them, and so I hated looking down. I still vividly remember yesterday morning when the coffee maker was left forgotten and brewing as my father rushed me to the hospital because he

Over. Reacted.

“I- I wanted to admit my daughter, Jenny Watson. She isn’t well.” He said.

Isn’t well is the polite equivalent to she’s crazier than I can handle. I wasn’t sure if that hurt more than the fact that he actually tried to mask the real situation. I was in a haze, a dilapidated mess with running mascara painting my face as if it were costume paint, and so the words came to me in a hushed sort of way. As if I barely was there inside my own body to hear it.

It’s as if I’m floating.

My father’s lips move. The secretary nods, orange lipstick lips pursed, as her blue eyes meet mine. I’m reading their lips, but it all turns into a jumbled mess of frowns and creased corners of disapproval.

He walks over to me with the slight limp that no one can see but me from when my dog Snowy bit him in the wintertime when I was twelve. I still remember how the blood seemed to bloom like a flower in the snow. No welled up tears acquiesced. No frown formed. No remorse glinted across his eyes. His face was as empty as I felt, and it scared me. Like the masquerade masks he used to collect.

“You’ll be staying here for two weeks Jen.”

At first I couldn’t hear him, it was as if there was a wall between me and him and we couldn’t reach each other.

“Two weeks.” I breathe, slowly meeting his sea green eyes.

“Two weeks for you to be free of me.”

He turned the conversation. “Remember what I saw you trying to do this morning?”

He then glances towards me,

“You need help Jen. Pills won’t give you that. I can’t give you that. And wishing that your mom was still here won’t help either.”

Don’t talk about Mom, I want to say. Never say anything about her.

He places his hat on his head before smiling. It was the type of smile that implied a hidden meaning. It wasn’t a smile.

“You’ll be fine Jen.”

The orange lipped secretary is now staring me down. I stare back.

“Jenny Watson? Your father told me of your-” She coughs as if it were a scandalous secret, “-situation.”

The woman smiles a bit more genuinely this time. It reaches her eyes.

“And I wanted to say that the entire staff is here for you.” She nods as if to assure herself that the vomit coming out of her mouth was true, “We understand completely.”

I was completely snapped out of my reverie when Jason asks me the question everyone always seems to conjure.

“Why?”

When I fail to answer, and instead clench my fists so hard the knuckles turn white and I indent nail prints into my palm he continues talking. I scrutinize his appearance, look straight at his face, and realize he had no air tubes or prosthetic appendages either. He

looked as if he weren't sick.

"I understand. Sometimes, I wonder what would happen if I grabbed a knife and tried to cut the cancer right out of me." When I still fail to make a proper response of some kind he adds, "The cancer is in my brain."

It's a funny fact when something goes completely and utterly wrong in your life, suddenly everyone understands completely. It was a falsity. A scam. I couldn't stand this game everyone here was playing. The talking. The laughs. The smiles. I got up, leaving the boy with brown eyes and an air tank alone in my alcove by the food table. Hopefully he wouldn't get punch spilled on that tux of his; it seemed expensive. As I walked towards the doors that lead to the main hospital hallway, I realized the staff would never let me leave without strict supervision. But the tears had already started, and I couldn't seem to stop them from falling onto my blue dress. How dare anyone say they understand?

"Are you alright?"

It was an arbitrary question, rhetorically stupid, when a girl is standing in the corner of a room with tears falling down her face. Of course I'm not alright. I want to say that. I want to spit it out.

"No? Well, I can assure you I'm worse. I have two surgeries scheduled tomorrow with a 60.8% success rate and a little brother with cystic fibrosis. Beat that."

I look up slightly, through my fingers and blurry vision, to see the same tall boy with brown eyes and air tubes in his nose.

"I have a dead mom, an alcoholic father, and a drug addiction. I'm suicidal, and I cut myself. Beat that." His eyes narrowed slightly in what I believed was anger, and yet I didn't stop. "And at least the number is even, if you're superstitious like that. I'm guessing that my life expectancy success rate would be a 25% right now. The 10% being this hospital and the other 15% being you keeping me here to talk while I was attempting to plan an escape route."

"You're nasty."

"I'm poison."

## **Before the Accident**

“Sleepers, Jenny. There are always sleepers.” He said, eyes drooping. His fingers gingerly held a pencil as he looked me in the eyes and pretended to have full control of this situation. “Dad, go to bed.” I said. My dad was a professor at our local college. He spouted the words of Thoreau as if they were scripture, especially when he was drunk. I was twelve when he started the drinking thing. He would stay up late at night to make sure I didn’t see him cry like a baby, clutching Samuel Adams much more tighter than he ever held me. And I pretended I didn’t smell the beer on his breath in the mornings or in the afternoons when I came home from school and he made the excuse of how he needed to brush his teeth before he hugged me. He looked like crap and I pretended that mom would have been okay with this before she left us five months ago in the morning.

“We cannot allow the train to trample on us again. There is an irony!” He exclaimed, before taking both my hands in his own and pulling me closer. “Jenny, tell me, what is that irony?” His breath smelled of smoke and brandy, sulfur and my disappointment. “The sleepers are what hold together-”, he cuts me off and begins speaking, “Yes, of course. The sleepers are what hold together our trains and yet they are the most unacknowledged. The most unappreciated pieces of metal. He was a fantastic genius, wasn’t he Jenny?” I didn’t want to respond to his drunken rambling. I didn’t know how to say that I felt replaced by a dead man that wrote prose decades before us. That I felt unwanted next to Thoreau because of his free-spirit and flowery words. And so I didn’t say anything at all, I only listened.

Once he fell asleep I left him there on the settee to go find Grahm. He always understood. Always listened. When I found him on the roof of my apartment building smoking haphazardly, he barely moved an inch when he heard the metal door close behind me. It was dark and I could barely see the outlines of his face, but I could feel him smiling.

“You’re late.” He said, gently, turning his head to look at me.

“I was busy.”

He motioned me to move closer and scooted over from his spot on the middle of the electricity box to make room. “Busy?”

Grahm then, unsatisfied with my slow reflexes, took my hand and pulled me over to the

box himself and said, "Sit." I did. Our shoulders brushed against each other and I shivered. His eyes trailed down to my hands and then to my wrists.

"Do you believe in miracles?" He asked me. His fingers traced the lines on my wrist as if they were the maps to the universe he so desperately needed to discover in the form of meditation and smoking. The lines weren't leading anywhere that actually mattered, and I doubted that he would notice in his mental haze. "Are you reckless? A damaged soul?" I frowned silently, ignoring the sensation of cold fingers on old and new wounds. Graham then looked up from his center of attention to meet my eyes with a hungry look in his own. Hungry for answers. "You are a walking cliché Jennifer Watson. Tell me something substantial. Tell me something that I can't already see." I scowled. "And you are nothing better. You are not substantial, smoking on an apartment roof, Graham Mitchell. Tell me something that I cannot already see."

"Was he quoting Thoreau again?"

"Yes."

"My condolences."