

Her calm composure plowed through the faces filled with panic and fear running the opposite direction as she powerfully marched down the hall, stopping nonchalantly at the door marked "Lily". Without knocking Stephanie barged in, her body mimicking that of an angry boxer. She knew the puffy bags under her eyes were appearing more visible by the second due to the searing hot anger pouring from every inch on her body, but mostly her face. She could feel her cheeks sprouting a bright tomato red as she screamed, " YOU STOOD UP YOUR AUDITION" ... Stephanie took a breath, "That didn't work" she thought to herself, and yet again attempted to calm down, this time practicing her breathing ritual her yoga instructor had attempted to teach her last week. Stephanie looked up, a small face caked with make-up, and framed with shiny, golden hair gleamed back at her. "You think it's funny", Stephanie exclaimed, pointing to the sarcastic grin looking back at her. "I didn't skip... don't worry, I just rescheduled, I called them and everything, you're freaking out for no reason Steph", I said looking up. A staccato vibration buzzed my hand, indicating I had a text. I saw Stephanie's mouth begin to move, holding my hand up I motioned I was busy at the moment.

The bright screen lit up as I saw a text from Chase. "Meet me at 5:30, our usual spot, bring the \$ this time". I felt a hot spark fly around in my stomach, but then it seemed to fall into a dark pit. My mind raced, " How can I take this much money without them finding out". Fingers snapped two inches away from my face and I glanced up to see the very unhappy face of my manager Stephanie, still there... clearly unable of understanding that I had more important matters to attend to. "I'm done with all this immaturity, I don't know what kind of act you're attempting but it's over NOW. Do you hear me?" Stephanie breathed directly in my face. I could smell the onion bagel she must have devoured at breakfast. Cinching my face, I regained my sense of smell, looked her in the eye, and smiled. "And what exactly is the smile on your face supposed to mean?" Stephanie sarcastically questioned. "It means I'll work on it", I said in a voice I thought sounded reassuring. I'm pretty good at sounding like I care and all is fine, at least I hope that's what I sound like. If only

they knew how broken I was on the inside. Just two months ago, Jacob my now EX - boyfriend of two years had been caught cheating with some stupid girl. If that wasn't bad enough, the same month I was hit again, my mom, the only person who I could possibly relate to, was diagnosed with breast cancer. The doctors tell me she has a good chance of surviving, but every time I see her, more hair is gone and the bright eyes that used to smile at me, are now filled with a numb, dull stare. Life was hard. I was a mess. That's when I met Chase.

My friend Lauren had invited me to her 17th birthday party at her penthouse in New York. Everyone who was anyone would be there, making my attendance an obvious priority. I remember stepping into the building on that frosty day; my entire body numb from the arctic tundra New York had become this winter. I took the elevator up to the top floor. Immediately, as the doors opened, I was welcomed to the sounds of blaring music pounding the floorboards. My eyes scanned the room; I didn't see anyone I knew. I spotted Lauren in the corner flirting with some boy. I started walking closer and got a good look of who she was talking to. He was cute. He was pretty tall with wavy brown hair and deep blue eyes. Lauren squealed when she saw me approaching. Her glazed eyes looked up at me. Almost in a trance she said, "Oh my goodness, you look amazingggg", she stuttered, dragging out the last word. "Thanks, Happy Birthday", I chuckled giving her a hug. As I backed away, I caught the boy's eyes. He smirked at me. Lauren staggered over to say hi to some new guests that had arrived. I started following her, when I remembered there was a cute guy standing alone in the corner. Safe to say, I quickly turned around and introduced myself to Chase.

1:00 AM turned to 3:00AM and I was still sitting on the black leather couch, my mouth dry, and my body sweaty and shaking. For the last 4 hours I had shared my entire life story with this stranger. And he had shared something with me in return. A syringe.

That was the night everything started. Chace had given me an escape route, a portal into a different world. A world that was perfect, not crumbling apart like mine. A world where I actually felt good about myself, for at least a little while. Chace and I became quick friends. He was always there whenever I needed to vent about Jacob, or when I just needed a shoulder to cry on. But most importantly, he provided me with the source of my happiness.

The winter was torturing my family. My sister and I could barely go outside without getting frostbite but being inside wasn't any better. My mom was going through intense chemo, leaving my dad with all the household chores when he came home from work at midnight. For spring break we escaped the frigid city and headed south; to the wonderful state of Florida, where everyone trying to do the same thing we were, had found themselves.

I awoke in a dark, air-conditioned room alone. Another day with nothing but my racing thoughts to keep me company. I tried getting out of bed but it felt like someone had stabbed every inch of muscle in my stomach. "Just like it felt yesterday", I whimpered out loud. But I couldn't finish my breath, a warm, putrid feeling was making its way up my throat and all I could do was lean over. "Ugh", wiping my mouth, I painfully reached for my phone on the counter and dialed Chace's cell.

Each ring seemed to take an hour. Second by second I was losing any grasp of patience left within me. "What's up?", a deep voice answered. I opened my mouth but all that came out was a raspy, strained noise. Slowly I forced myself to speak, "I ran out, I don't know what to do". "Well that's not my problem, is it, you're the one that went through it all", Chace replied carelessly. "Well what am I supposed to tell my family, they think I just have the flu.... What if I'm not ok", I spouted filled with anger and confusion. "Then let them think you have the flu, this is normal, you'll be back in what... two days, then everything will be ok again", he said quickly. I opened my mouth to say bye, instead a wave of knots filled my stomach, but I was too weak to move. I started coughing and heard a chuckle coming from the phone's speakers. Without thinking I slammed END CALL and let my body fall to the ground.

“Lily, darling, answer me”! Hands were on my face and my body was burning. Slowly I opened my eyes. The bright lights flooded my pupils. “She just opened her eyes Carly, don’t call the hospital yet!”, my dad exclaimed. My insides writhed and I felt my head spinning. The room reeked of vomit and I felt a crusty blanket under my back. The strong arms of my dad lifted me up onto the bed. “What in the world happened in here”, he asked worried. My eyes had finally adjusted to the sunlit room and I could see why exactly the entire room smelled. Embarrassed, I threw my head down “I think I have the flu”. “You think?”, he chuckled. I gave him a half smile. “Your sister will keep an eye on you, I’ll go get you something to drink, you look dehydrated”, he said walking towards the door. I could feel my chapped lips burning. “Thanks”, I mumbled grabbing the T.V remote.

The screen opened to a commercial of the new mall in Sarasota featuring a fancy handbag shop. I let my mind drift away for a moment, wishing I could enjoy the warm weather and beautiful view with my family. That’s when it hit me, my purse! I had an extra stash hidden in case of an emergency...this seemed to classify as an emergency. I smirked, and slowly rested my feet on the ground. With every bit of strength I had I grabbed my purse from the chair. Unzipping the back pocket, I felt a sharp jab and found the rest of the tools I needed. After I completed all my preparation rituals; it was finally time. My cure was minutes away! Soon I would be laughing and tanning with my family in the hot Florida weather. I stretched my arm out and rolled my sleeve up. With a simple poke, I injected myself with the cure to all my problems.

The familiar rush of euphoria filled my veins and I could finally relax. Every knot in my stomach became undone and every loose worry in my head erased. I sensed my youthful energy returning to my dormant body at last. I inhaled to help my body relax even more. And I inhaled again...and again. This time my lungs didn’t fill up with air. I felt my body tighten and my mind started racing. Panicking, I gasped for oxygen but my throat was too tight, nothing was coming in! My breathing became almost non-existent. I felt someone strangling me. Then blackness.

The Deadly Needle, 11-12, p. 5

Beep. Beep. Beep. Beep. I can't open my eyes. I can't move my body. I just lay there. All I can hear is the loud beeping sound, reminding me that I'm alive. I hear a faint whisper; "This is the fifth heroin overdose we've treated this year alone, she really got lucky you found her just in time". My body goes numb; all I feel is the tingling in my toes. I put all my focus on them. It's the only part of me that still feels alive. "I had no clue", I hear the voice of my dad reply.