

Not to be Dramatic, But

The police officer who kicks open the door of my bedroom looks like Ryan Gosling, and I'm suddenly aware of how terrible I must look—eyelash extensions wet and matted like the legs of the spider I once crushed beneath my snow boot, face red and puffy, vomit in my hair and down the front of my ex-boyfriend's sweatshirt. There are two empty pill bottles on the bed next to me. I try to sit up but I'm weighed down by the Xanax and the Zoloft and the Grey Goose I used to chase it down. A waste of expensive alcohol, but I didn't want to go out on a bottle of Burnett's. If you're being sent to the electric chair, you don't choose McDonald's as your last meal.

It's November 24th, an anniversary that I don't like to celebrate. It's more of a mourning than anything. I usually just take a couple of Benadryl on top of the usual round of SSRI's and mood stabilizers and anti-psychotics that my psychiatrist prescribed to me and sleep the day away, or watch the entire Twilight saga in a Xanax-induced stupor. I don't know what it was about this morning that was different—what the allegorical straw was that entirely shattered my will to live. What I do know with certainty is that I woke up, and I wished that I hadn't.

"Is she dying?" Michelle asks the police officer. She was the one who called 911 after I sent her a series of unintelligible text messages and locked myself in my room. I know it's a lot for her to handle on a Saturday morning – her only day off work. I wonder what would have happened if she had decided to sleep in.

"The ambulance is on its way," he doesn't answer her question, which worries me. *Am I dying? Do I still want to die?* I close my eyes, but the officer places his hand on my shoulder. "I need you to stay awake until the paramedics come," he says firmly. I notice that I'm drooling.

I've regretted one-night stands and eating ice cream without taking my Lactaid but there is something particularly terrible about deciding you want to live once your organs are already en route to shutting down. I think about the interview I watched with the man who jumped off the Golden Gate Bridge and regretted it the minute his feet met the empty air. He shattered his spine when he hit the water, but a sea lion kept him afloat until the Coast Guard could pull him out.

My roommates are huddled around the end of my bed – Lexi, Michelle, Sherry, Katrina, Lauren. I've never seen Katrina cry before (she's a Gemini), but she's sobbing uncontrollably into Lauren's shoulder. Sherry's on the phone with someone, her voice solemn. They're all trying to help the officer keep me awake, tickling my feet and talking to me as if I were fully conscious. I imagine that they're all sea lions, swimming rapid circles around my bed so that it doesn't sink, dark and deep and far away.

I want to fall asleep. Instead, I projectile vomit across my pillowcase. Lexi's sitting next to me now, dabbing at the corners of my mouth with the left sleeve of her sweatshirt and wiping the tears from her own face with the other. I try to say something to reassure her, but I don't remember how to speak. The room starts to spin and Lexi dissolves into the pile of vomit on my bed and I don't know where the police officer is and everyone is crying but maybe it's just me and then I'm in the air floating up up up but before I hit the ceiling I'm in the ambulance and it's so quiet and peaceful and I have to go to sleep right now.

I dream about my dog. I don't remember what the dream is about, but I know that he's there. His name is Sonny Coco, and we adopted him from the shelter when he was a puppy; nobody wanted him because he has two lazy eyes that sometimes roll into the back of his head when he's tired. He also has a severe case of separation anxiety. The first time we left him at home by himself, he jumped through the kitchen window and had to get twelve stitches in his

ass. Dogs don't experience time in the same way that people do. Three hours could have felt like three years to him, and that's an awful long time to be left alone.

I wish I had the same sense of time that dogs do. It's been exactly four years since it happened but it feels like it's been three hours, and still hurts like a festering sore; shame soaked through the lining of my favorite pair of Calvin Klein underwear. Band-Aids are only physical but I like to pretend that I have a whole box's worth of them in my brain, stuck somewhere deep within the prefrontal cortex, as easy to fix as a skinned knee.

I wake up in a hallway bed in the emergency room, and I'm pretty sure I'm still drunk. It smells like isopropyl alcohol and microwaved dog food. There's a nurse sitting in a chair next to me, and she stands up when she notices that my eyes are open. "I'm glad you're awake," she says. I stare at her blankly. I don't know what she expects me to say. I watch as she pours a package of black powder into a cup of water and mixes it together with a straw until it's the color and consistency of molten tar.

"I need you to drink the whole thing," she hands it to me along with a bottle of blue Gatorade. I take a sip and gag immediately. It's uncomfortably lukewarm and tastes like sulfur and rotten fruit. "Activated charcoal," she says. "Keeps your body from absorbing the drugs."

It takes me several minutes to drink it. I pull my phone out of my back pocket, hoping to find a pleasant distraction in the form of a meme or a cute picture of a dog. I have four missed calls and even more text messages from my mother.

Good morning! How was your night?

Do you have my birth certificate? I need it to get Jessie's passport!

I think it's in that yellow folder.

Are you awake?

Chloe?

Sherry called me. Please let me know you're okay.

I'm driving up there right now. I'll be there by tomorrow morning.

My stomach lurches, but not from the charcoal. Sherry must have been talking to her on the phone this morning. I don't feel confident enough in my brain to formulate a decent response, so I type out *I'm alive*, send it, and put my phone back into my pocket.

When I finish choking down the black sludge, Officer Ryan Gosling takes the nurse's seat next to my bed. I try to smile at him, teeth stained black from the charcoal. If this were an actual Ryan Gosling movie, he might find my damaged brain and snot-covered face endearing. He might whisk me away from the hospital on his private jet and fix the chemical imbalance in my brain with the power of True Love. But my life isn't a romcom, so he places me on a 5150 hold.

"I can't stay here for three days," I slur, my voice still unable to form a solid connection with my brain.

"They're going to transfer you to a psychiatric hospital. You'll stay there."

"But I have a midterm tomorrow."

He laughs. His teeth are straight and white. I wonder who his dentist is. "Don't worry about it," he says. "You should just thank God that you're alive."

I'm not religious, but I used to go to church. Pressured by the leader of my eating disorder recovery group, I would wake up early on Sunday mornings and drive my beat-up BMW, lovingly nicknamed The Shitmobile, thirty minutes into town so that I could attempt to cure my crippling aversion to food through Jesus Christ.

I decided to stop going to church on November 24th, 2014.

A friend of a friend was throwing a party, and I had decided to go last minute. The police had shown up shortly after my arrival, and in the frenzy of drunken, underage kids jumping fences and running away in droves to avoid their parents being called, my friends had driven off without me. Calling my mother to pick me up wasn't an option, and Ubers didn't exist in the small mountain town I lived in, so I resorted to walking the two miles along the highway back to my neighborhood. I held my favorite pair of Vince Camuto pumps in my hand, the blisters on my heels more uncomfortable than the pine needles beneath my bare feet. The asphalt was softened somewhat by the rain and the alcohol.

Several concerned people had pulled their cars over to offer me a ride. I wasn't in the safest part of town, and most of the people who were out after ten weren't the most reputable characters, so I refused most of their offers – but I recognized the man in the forest green Subaru Outback from the handful of times that I had gone to church. I was under the impression that I could trust a godly man, but when he pushed me up against the passenger door of his car and replaced the air in my lungs with his own, I decided that there was no such thing.

As I lay covered in sweat and tears and vomit in the emergency room, the last person I want to thank is God, so I silently thank Lexi and Michelle and the rest of the sea lions and the nurse who pumped me full of dark matter.

When the officer leaves, I'm escorted down the hallway by a security guard. He's fat and old and I doubt he would be useful in an actual emergency, but I've seen *Paul Blart: Mall Cop* enough times to know better than to judge him based on his appearance alone. I can hardly stand, so he holds me by my bicep as he half-guides, half-drags me through a series of dimly lit corridors. It feels more like one of those Halloween mazes than a hospital, a gauntlet of screaming and crying and sad machines that are either beeping too fast or too slow.

We stop in front of the women's restroom, and he hands me a bundle consisting of a hospital gown and a pair of yellow slipper socks. "You can change in there," he says. "I'll be waiting outside if you need anything." I give him a forced smile with my black teeth and stumble into the bathroom. It takes me ten minutes to get my pants off. The jeans I fell asleep in the night before are glued to my skin with vomit, and I resort to lying on my back on the bathroom floor, feet in the air, tugging at the hems of my pants with the last dredges of strength left in my body. I slip into the hospital gown and put my clothes into a plastic bag. The security guard is waiting for me in the hallway, just like he said he would be.

The man in the green Subaru Outback didn't give me a ride home that night. He shoved me out of the passenger door that I couldn't for the life of me get open minutes before, and as he drove away, I realized I left my Vince Camutos in his car. I hated myself for caring. I left my body and watched myself stumble the rest of the way home, stiff legs on autopilot.

I walked through the threshold of her house, greeted by an uncomfortable warmth. The soles of my feet were rubbed raw by the miles of wet asphalt, and as I treaded lightly along the hardwood floors, I was suddenly cognizant of the numbness that had spread between my toes. My little sister snored quietly in our bedroom. I stripped off my wet clothing, crawled into bed

and wept silently into my pillowcase. Tears are thick and warm like blood but at least they don't stain your bedsheets. I could have drowned in them like the man almost did in the San Francisco Bay and the only evidence that I ever existed would be the wet pile of clothes that I shoved deep underneath my bed, satin dress torn in all the wrong places. Out of sight and out of mind but nothing could erase the hurt hurt hurt in my chest that throbbed in time with my heartbeat. I've traced lines across my thighs with my fingers that feel more real than the hands that have spread them open.

I'm transferred to the Sutter Center for Psychiatry sometime after the sun goes down. It's a theatrical affair, and as I'm wheeled into the lobby on a stretcher, the patients poking at their hospital tray dinners don't make an attempt to hide their amusement. Not my ideal Saturday night. I try not to make eye contact with anyone as I'm lowered off the stretcher, careful to make sure my ass doesn't show through the thin hospital gown. A small lady with red hair and a pinched voice leads me directly into a cramped office.

She asks me a series of questions I don't have the answers to.

Are you still feeling suicidal?

Does anyone else in your family have a history of bipolar disorder?

Your tox screen shows that you have tested positive for marijuana, MDMA, opiates, benzodiazepines, amphetamines and cocaine. How often do you do these drugs?

Then, the kicker.

Why did you do it?

It's a loaded question. I don't want to tell her about the green Subaru Outback or the Vince Camuto pumps or the men who find you when God's not looking.

"My brain doesn't work very well." It's not a lie, but maybe I'd be better at handling what happened if I remembered to take my meds or accepted the fact that binge-drinking isn't a sustainable substitute for therapy.

When the interview is over, she gives me an Ambien so that I can fall asleep and shows me to my room. It looks like my freshman year dorm, only more sterile. I notice that the room must be designed so that you can't kill yourself in it. No sharp edges, no ceiling fans, no glass. There's a girl asleep in the bed across from mine.

"That's your roommate, Miriam," the red-haired lady says. "She's a trip." I don't ask her what that means.

"Do you need anything else?"

"Can I have a notebook and a pen?"

"I'm not technically allowed to let patients use pens unsupervised," she says. "Just don't do anything stupid."

She returns a few minutes later with a red composition book and a standard BIC pen. I thank her, and she leaves, shutting the heavy door behind her and leaving me to scribble out my thoughts before the Ambien forces me to close my eyes.