

UNCORRECTED
PROOF
NOT FOR SALE

*kiss
of
broken
glass*

*When nothing
stops the hurt
but pain*

MADELEINE KUDERICK

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UNCORRECTED E-PROOF—NOT FOR SALE
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kiss of broken glass

by MADELEINE KUDERICK

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DEDICATION

*To everybody out there
who is aching for the
kiss*

Tuesday 3:22 p.m.

So here's the thing about being
Baker Acted.

You lose everything—
your belt,
your shoelaces,
the perfume bottles in your purse.

They take it all away in the
emergency room

and make you sit in the aisle with a
box of Kleenex

and a gown that doesn't close in the
back.

There's nothing to do except watch
the clock

on the wall and wonder how pissed
your mom's

gonna be when she gets there.

Tick.

Tick.

Tick.

A cop guards you the whole time,
picks his teeth with a toothpick,
scratches his dandruff,

stares at you like a real creeper.
He talks about you too,
like you're not even there.
To the nurses and orderlies.

“They caught her in the school
bathroom,” he says,
“using a blade from her pencil
sharpener.”

A Pruned-up Old Nurse Comes Over

She looks at your wrists and ankles
and the places high on your hips
where it's easy to hide the dark cut
lines
even when you're wearing short-
shorts.

She's holding a sheet of paper,
with an outline on it,

like a paper doll with no clothes.
She marks up the paper doll
with her fine-point Sharpie,
across the wrists,
through the ankles,
on each hip.

Slash.

Slash.

Slash.

You watch that nurse,
and while you're watching
you wish a thousand times
that you'd just waited till you got
home

instead of doing it at school where
that

Two-Face Tara caught you by the
sink—

red drops running down the drain.

You think about the tap of Tara's
heels

as she ran to get Mr. Lane and the
whoosh

of the bathroom door as he shoved it
open wide,

and the look on faces peeking from
the hallway—

smirking,

 mouthing,

busted!

And Here's the Other Thing You Need to Know about the Baker Act

Even if
the principal promises
you'll be home before dinner—

Even if
the guidance counselor says
they'll release you right after the ER

Even if
your teary-eyed mother rushes in
and begs the doctor not to admit you

*“She’s only fifteen for heaven’s
sake!”*

It doesn’t matter.
You’re not going anywhere.
They’re gonna lock you up,
in a psych ward
for 72 hours.

On My Way to the Ward

Creeper clamps his hand on my
elbow,
and it feels rough and prickly as
steel wool.

He swipes his badge through keyless
locks
and steers me down a pale green hall
where everything smells like fake
pine,

and the lights that flicker all look gray.

Then we stop.

It takes half a century for the elevator doors to open and the whole time we're

waiting I have to lean away so Creeper's

disgusting chunks of dandruff don't flake off on me.

Inside the elevator it's smaller than a coffin and even though I've never been

claustrophobic before, this torpedo of

panic launches in my chest and I try to

yank my arm away and say,

Get your freaking hands off me!

But instead, this stupid sob spills out
and a tear rolls down my cheek,
and there's nothing I can do but
stand there in that flimsy gown
with all my feelings hanging out.

When the Door Opens

I see a sign overhead:

Adler Boyce Pediatric Stabilization
Facility

Someone's scribbled on the wall:

Attaboys Prehistoric Sycho Farm

Creeper pushes an intercom button.

“New patient,” he grunts. “Kenna
Keagan.”

An old woman comes out,
white hair in a bun,
lips tight,
shoulders stiff.

She nods at Creeper
and signs for me on the dotted line
like I'm a package being delivered
by UPS.

Then

I step into the ward.

I thought it was gonna look like jail
inside,
with steel bars and silver toilets.
But it doesn't.

It's all rainbows and angelfish
instead,
painted on the turquoise walls,

glued to the ceiling,
just like kindergarten.

And right away I think,
it's a good thing Avery can't see me
now.

This is just the kind of thing my older
sister
likes to shove in my face to prove
that she's superior.

That—
and the way she looks like
a runway model even in sweatpants.

That—
and the fact she aces every test
with her freakazoid memory.

That—

and the promise that someday
she'll score 2,400 on her SAT,
go to Harvard,
and win the Miss Universe Pageant,
while I stay home and scoop out
my basic B existence
like the plain vanilla,
no topping,
community-college material
that I am.

But I Guess that Figures

Because Avery's only my half sister.
Her dad was some kind of med-
school prodigy
who graduated from Johns Hopkins
and probably would've discovered
the cure for cancer if he hadn't died.

My dad's just the backup dad.
The one Mom married afterward
so she wouldn't lose the house on

Long Boat Key.

He's an accountant for PwC, which means

he makes good money doing boring stuff

and is hardly ever home.

But I remember this one time

when Dad's client was in Chicago,

he brought me and my little brother,

Sean, with him

to the top of the Sears Tower—103 floors up.

We climbed into this solid glass skybox

and Sean giggled and danced on the invisible floor.

“Look at me,” he shouted. “I’m walking on air!”

And for a minute, I felt like I was too.

We gazed out over the city
where the blue sky meets Lake
Michigan
and the sun reflects between
buildings
like a cat’s cradle of light.

Then my dad knelt down
and pointed toward Lakeshore Drive
and I wanted so badly for him to say,

“See that building?
The one over there?
That’s our new home.

Just for me and you and Sean.”

Then we'd be so overjoyed
we'd turn into kites
and we'd glide down 1,353 feet
into our new lives.

But that's not what happened.

Instead

Dad muttered something like,
“Too bad your mother and Avery
missed this.”

Then a cloud passed across the sun
and the city grew suddenly gray
and the cat’s cradle fizzled like
a spent candlewick.

Inside the Ward

The nurse who works night shift waves me over to the counter with her roly-poly arms.

She's eaten way too many Ding Dongs.

“You're in three B with Donya,” she says.

“But don't you act like that rotten

girl.

Not if you want to get outta here.”

I see a purple Mohawk poke out of
the bedroom

followed by Donya’s pale blue eyes.

She waits for Ding Dong to turn her
back

then flicks her middle fingers,

two at once,

double-barreled.

Donya’s the kind of girl I like right
away.

She slips down the hall and I follow
her

to a room where kids are squished in

beanbag chairs

watching a flat-screen TV bolted
behind thick plastic.

They turn to look at me and I can feel
their eyes

crawling on my skin like red ants,
measuring,

judging,

labeling,

just like at school.

The Donya pulls me aside
and tells me how she's been
committed five times

and that the Baker Act

is a giant Epic Fail

just like everything else in Florida.

“I can’t wait till I’m eighteen,” she says.

“So I can ditch this moron state.”

I ask her why she’s here—at Attaboys, and she gives me one of those zigzag answers that don’t say anything specific.

Just that she hates life.

In general.

“You can see how that’s a problem, right?” she says.

Then she tells me how easy it is to hide your feelings around here.

“All you gotta do is *pretend* to be happy.

These Sunshine Suckers eat it up.”

Then she tells me to say:

Yes

I'll eat their slimy green Jell-O.

No

I don't mind sharing my life story with total strangers.

Yes

I'm feeling so much better now.

No

I've never heard voices.

She looks at the bandages on my arm.

“And for God's sakes,
don't say anything stupid
like algebra homework
makes you want to kill yourself.
Not even as a joke.

There's no jokes in here.

Just reasons for them to keep you longer.”

Donya shuts up and motions toward the door.

The night nurse is walking in.

“Lights out, my little bandulus,” Ding

Dong says.

And it's kind of sick,
but everyone gets up,
without saying a word,
and we follow her down the hall.

Like the good little Baker Actors that
we are.

The Whole Time I'm Getting Ready for Bed

Ding Dong stands in the doorway
clicking a pineapple sucker between
her teeth.

She takes the soap bar when I'm
done,

squeezes a lump of Colgate on my
fingertip,

and watches so I don't strangle

myself with dental floss.

When she's gone, I open my
nightstand

looking for something to read,
but all I find are notes
scribbled inside the drawer.

I want to get out of here

F U Attaboys

Help

Then I lie down on my cold, stiff
sheets,

and I kick myself for the millionth
time.

You freaking idiot!

Why didn't you just wait till you got

home?

And I listen to Donya
grinding her teeth
and the sound of traffic
gunning across the bridge,
and I think about all the people
outside our shatterproof window,
coming and going,
 laughing and living,
 hoping and dreaming,
sharpening their
perfect little pencils
and never *once* thinking
about breaking the plastic
to take out the blade.

I'm Having a Nightmare

A terrible dream where I'm running
down a dark country road
and lightning is slashing
across the purple sky.

Then I see this horse.

A gruesome, white, wild-eyed horse.
Rearing in a barren field.

Tearing its flesh on the barbed wire
fence.

I bolt awake.

My heart pounding.

Fingers cold.

I look around for my alarm clock,

and the anime poster on my wall,

and the lava lamp I got for

Christmas.

But they're not there.

Then, slowly, the room comes into

focus,

and I see Donya's spiky hair,

and the rubber-soled socks on my

feet,

and the wristband on my arm that

says:

Patient #349817

And it feels like my heart stops
as I remember where I am.

Wednesday 8:00 a.m.

It's time for group therapy.
I don't *have* to talk.
But Roger says it's better if I do.
He asks me to go first
and I decide to get it over with
because pretty much everyone
is squirming in their seats
dying to know what juicy business
brought me to Attaboys.

So I tell them my whole story,
about the bathroom,
and the pencil sharpener,
and Tara-the-Two-Face.

I'm not embarrassed to talk about it,
because *everybody's* cutting at my
school.

Even Tara.

I say how the girls like to compare
their scars
and their slits
and their checkerboard ankles.

We teach each other things, too,
like how to hide pins in our mattress
seams,

and steal blades from a dad's
double-edged razor,
and how to break bottles in terry
cloth
so they won't make a sound.

And we share our best lies,
the ones that will fool any mother—
cat scratches,
bike wipeouts,
shaving nicks.

It's kind of like a club, I say.
Sisters of the Broken Glass.

Roger raises up his hand, stop-sign
straight.

He talks about making positive

choices

and all that other kumbaya crap,
but nobody's listening.

Donya sticks out her tongue

and I see a silver stud pierced
through the tip.

It makes me think about the time

I jammed a sewing needle

straight through my earlobe

without even numbing it.

Pop!

I remember the tickly, fizzy way that

made me feel

like drinking root beer on a roller

coaster.

And the memory makes something go

click,

click,

click

inside my head like a trigger.

I start to fixate on the paper clip stuck to Roger's folder.

The one with all those shiny, sharp possibilities.

I imagine the clip uncurling, transforming,

becoming straight and strong and stiff,

just like an arrow.

A few beads of sweat form on my neck

near the vein that beats faster every

time

something really good or really scary is about to happen.

I bet I can swipe that clip when Roger isn't looking,

and I have to bite the inside of my cheek

so nobody sees how excited that idea makes me.

Then I remember what Donya said.
How they can keep me here
even *longer* than 72 hours
for something as lame as a paper cut.

So I sit on my hands
and try to get a song stuck in my head

instead,

and send screaming telepathic
messages to Roger

to put that freaking paper clip away
before the *click, click, click*
shoots a bullet in my brain.

Have You Ever Tried to Quit?

Roger really wants to know.

He waits for me to answer,

then leans in and looks at me

with eyes so dark and doelike

they make me get all Bambi-ish

inside

and for a split second I think about
telling him.

But then something coils around me
like a boa constrictor
squeezing,

tightening,

crushing,

until I choke out the words to make it
stop.

“I can quit *anytime*,” I say.

Then I slump back in my seat
and stare at my laceless shoes
and wait for the snake to slither
back into my head.

A Girl Peeps Up from across the Room

“I’ve tried to quit,” she says.

I notice her scarred, bony arms,
her black, bulging eyes,
and the hollow sag of her cheeks.

She reminds me of the baby robin
that fell from its nest two springs
ago.

The one I cupped in my hands and
fed

with an eyedropper every time it
cried:

Mashed potatoes. Egg yolk. Cod-
liver oil.

I remember how the fluff
disappeared

from the baby bird's head and how
pinfeathers sprouted from its wings.

I'm surprised when Roger says the
girl's name.

Skylar.

Like the bright blue sky

on the day I released the robin.

I remember feeling all tangled up inside that day.

Happy to set the bird free. Sad to watch it go.

I think about how enormous that feeling was,

like a balloon blowing up inside my heart,

bigger and bigger, until all I wanted to do was find

a way to let the feeling out before my heart popped.

I think about how I tried to follow the bird with my eyes.

To see where it landed in the tall

cypress trees.

But then Avery sprayed me with the hose

and made me jump two feet, and she laughed

when I couldn't find the bird anymore.

“Thank God that little crapper's out of here,” she said.

Skylar Flits Out of Her Seat

It's all her mother's fault. For heaping so many unnecessary calories on her plate.

She jabs a finger at her SkinnyJeans.

“I'm *huge*,” she says.

“I had to stop eating.

What else could I do?”

Nobody answers.

I look at Roger, with his cheap,
coupon haircut
and his brown Walmart shoes and I
wonder
how someone like that could ever
help any of us.

But then he does something
unexpected.
Something almost promising.

He get one of those *aha* looks in his
eye
and he hops out of his chair,
and for a split second, I feel a flutter
of hope.

But then he stops behind Skylar's seat.

Waiting.

Expectant.

Motioning with his hands

like we're supposed to do something.

“Well come on, Group,” he says at last.

“What *you* think Skylar should do?”

And that's when I realize

I was right all along.

Roger doesn't have the answers either.

I Get Thirty Minutes of Free Time

But there's no point in free time because

there's nothing to do. I think of all the text

messages piling up on my cell phone.

Holy crap!

WTF?

R U there?

I wish I could answer them.
But, my phone is locked
in the secured room,
along with the blade I hide
in the battery compartment.

My stomach starts to knot.

What if Rennie called?

I know she's my best friend and all.

But she gets pissed when I don't
answer.

I mean, *really* pissed.

Or what if there's a text about Tara
spreading lies?

Or what if there's a message from
Chase Grayson, the Soccer God,

and he says something
sweet and adorable like

uok?

and I'm stuck in this oatmeal pit,
cut off from civilization,
missing my one and only chance
to talk to the boy I've had a crush on
since the second grade?

If they had to take away my cell
phone,
they might as well have amputated
my head.

Day Nurse Flaps Her Big Bullhorn Lips

“Exercise time.”

I follow her to the rec room.

But there’s not much there.

Just some crumbly old floor mats,
a stationary bike, and a treadmill.

It’s not like the fitness center back

home

with rows of stair climbers

and elliptical machines
and a rack of blue balance balls
just waiting to be squeezed.

I get on the treadmill and dig in my
heels.

The conveyer grinds an inch. Maybe
two.

Like there's sandpaper on the bottom
of the belt.

When I look up, a boy is standing
inches away,

staring at me with his army-green
eyes.

I notice his tangled hair, his crooked
nose,

and the little scar above his lip that
makes it look like he's about to

snarl.

“I can fix that,” he says.

I step down and let him yank on the belt

just so I can watch his biceps curl
and study the small of his back
as his white shirt rises up and down.

“There,” he says, wiping his hands
on his jeans.

I feel a little tickle bubble inside.
Then I think—

That’s the nicest thing anyone’s ever
done for me.

And if I wasn’t already in love with

Chase,

I might just give this boy my number,
or maybe I'd ask him to meet me at
the grocery store,

in the organic aisle, because nobody
shops organic

and it would be sort of private there
and maybe standing in that secret
space

right beside the flaxseeds and
granola

he'd lean over and kiss me
with those sexy scar lips.

But I don't say any of that.

I just ask his name.

“Jag,” he answers.

And I figure that means his real name is something embarrassing.

So I tease him about it.

“No way,” I say.

“I bet it’s Stanley.

Or Leonard.

Or Marion.”

And I love how he steps closer to answer me.

“It’s Jag,” he insists. “For real.”

He looks over his shoulder, makes sure Bullhorn isn’t watching, then bumps the inside of my palm

with his knuckles,
soft and playful, until a warm blush
crosses my cheeks.

Then he says his name again.

His *whole* name.

And this time it thunders off his
tongue
fast and hard like a bullet train.

Jaggernaut Mancuzzi.

And for ten star-spangled seconds,
Chase Grayson ceases to exist.

Room Check

I'm sitting in my room.
Wanting to be alone.
Daydreaming about
Jaggernaut Mancuzzi.

Bullhorn pops her head in the door.

“Are you okay?”

Five minutes later.

“Are you okay?”

Five minutes later.

“Are you okay?”

Five minutes later.

Are you freaking kidding me?

Drawing for Distraction

We're allowed to draw at Attaboys,
which just goes to show how stupid
they are

because a pencil is way more
dangerous than a toothbrush.

My yellow #2 is whispering to me.
About that pretty pink eraser tip.
I can almost smell it.
The scent of rubber on raw skin.

I imagine slipping my arm under the
table,

and rubbing the eraser

faster

faster

faster

until my arm catches fire

and the skin splits open

and blistery liquid

drips down

to my elbow.

Like mercy.

But I don't do it.

Even though I want to.

Because Rennie says eraser burns
are for losers.

I Decide to Draw Instead

At first my lines are soft and gentle.
A wispy willow branch weeping
at the corner of the page.

But then my strokes grow heavy.

I draw a girl with eyes closed, chin
down,
and lips sealed in the smallest of
pouts.

Her arms end abruptly at the wrists
and her legs trail off just below the
knees.

A body unfinished.

“Is that you?” Skylar asks.

I shake my head no.

“I wish I could draw like that,” she
adds.

“I just write. Poetry mostly.”

I tell her I’m no good but she doesn’t
let up.

“You could be the next Salvador

Dalí,” she insists.

“You know? The guy with those melting clocks.”

I do know.

I know a lot of crazy things about Salvador Dalí.

Like how he was afraid of grasshoppers

and how he kept mustaches in a cigarette case

and how he slept with a spoon in his hand

so he'd wake up to the clatter of tin and remember all his dreams.

I know he had freaky dreams too, with tiger-eating fish,

and giant eyeballs,
and full-grown men
hatching from elastic eggs.

And I know about *The Temptation of Saint Anthony*.

That's the painting with the
gruesome, white,
wild-eyed horse rearing on stilted
legs.

I feel the hairs rise on the back of my
neck
as my own dream begins to
resurface.

I try to push it down, but it's like
holding

a basketball underwater—
slippery, buoyant, strong.
It won't go away.

I curl my fingers around the edge of
the paper
crushing the corner as I clench my
pencil tight.

Then instead of sketching hands and
legs and feet

in all the places where the girl's
body is interrupted,

I make dark, dripping lines that
bleed

off

the

page.

My Favorite Place at School

Is the bathroom.

I draw there, too.

In the extra-wide handicapped stall
where I can rest my head against
the cool maroon tiles and line up
my pens like little soldiers.

It's quiet in there and peaceful
with a sliver of light

that shines through the window.

It's okay to be myself
in that handicapped stall,
even if being me feels
sort of like a blank piece of paper.

I don't have to come up
with any colorful lies in there,
or force a smile until my cheeks hurt,
or roll up my long cotton sleeves,
and show off my scars,
just to fit in.

If Only

I'd eaten my lunch there yesterday.
In that handicapped stall.
Instead of going to the cafeteria
and sitting at the back table with
all the Rennie wannabes.

Then I wouldn't have heard how they
cut
while their mothers got manicures
and how they burned squares in their

skin

using salt and smooth ice.

If only I'd looked the other way
when they took off their bracelets

and

lifted the cloth of their tight cotton
camis.

Then I wouldn't have seen
the angry, square welts
or the crisscross of red
that triggered me so bad.

If only I'd put in my earbuds
and cranked up the volume
to drown out the gnats buzzing

cutcutcutcut.

Then maybe,
I could've left school
on the 340 bus
instead of in a squad car
wearing zip-tie plastic handcuffs.

If only.

Oh, and by the Way

You can't trust anyone.

Especially not guidance counselors.

Like the phony hair flipper who
acted

all buddy-buddy in the backseat
of the squad car but then left me
with Creeper in the emergency room.
She made all kinds of promises like:

You can go home as soon as your

mom comes.

But I bet she knew all along that I
was hosed.

She probably signed those Baker
papers herself,

right next to the rent-a-cop who
dragged me

out of the bathroom and the
prehistoric principal

who couldn't stop staring at my arm.

So that just goes to show.

Even if someone says things like:

I feel your pain

I've been there too.

And even if that someone

wears Aéropostale and still has
pimples.

And even if
she puts her arm around you
and makes you feel good for a whole
wide minute.

It's all an act.

She's full of it.

Just like everyone else.

One Phone Call a Day

That's all we get.

My mother sounds annoyed when she answers and that makes it almost impossible to put on my Oscar-winning two-ounce voice and say:

“I want to come home.”

She doesn't talk at first,

and I pinch the metal cord
between my fingers
like I'm trying to wring
the answer out of her.

“It's out of my hands now,” she says.
“There's a legal process to follow.
A psychological evaluation.
A family meeting.
A 72-hour mandatory hold.”

I wish my mom would say she's
sorry
so I could wrap her words around
me
like a towel still warm from the
dryer.
But she doesn't.

Instead, we talk about orange juice pulp,
and scrambled eggs, and how Dad reacted
when she told him I was here.

I can just imagine that conversation.
Mom with her hand on her hip,
elbow out, like a bossy teacher.
Dad on the other end of the line,
shoulders slumped, like Piglet.

“Kenna was caught cutting at school today,” Mom says.

“Which class?” Dad asks.

Then Mom rolls her eyes. Roller-

coaster big.

Like Dad's a complete idiot.

“Not cutting class,” Mom says.

“Cutting *herself*.”

Sometimes I Wish Dad Wasn't So Clueless

Then maybe he would've noticed the twisted black hair ties wrapped around my wrists like bracelets and the leg warmers that covered my ankles in June.

And then maybe he would've realized that hair ties and leg warmers aren't

some new fashion trend
and he would've demanded
that I show him all that hidden skin
and chased me up the stairs
when I stomped off screaming
how it was none of his business,
and pounded on my bedroom door
when I slammed it in his face
and ripped it off the hinges
just like Superman
to save me.

I bet I wouldn't even be here now.

If I had a dad like that.

Dad Used To Have A Little Superman In Him

Like the year Mom drove to Johns
Hopkins

so Avery could visit her dead dad's
family

and talking about a dead dad was so
fun

they stayed all summer and never
wrote,

which is why *my* dad decided
to take me and Sean away.

I remember how he would crank
up the engine on this
old, rented motor home

and we'd drive till we burned
up like two tanks of gas,
and we'd pass the RV park

and pull off the highway on impulse
just to follow some dirt road
that led to nowhere.

Then we'd watch like a million
identical
stars wink at us from the sky

for finding their secret spot,
and Dad would give us a glass
of bubbly white-grape juice
for pretend champagne toasts,

and he'd do these stupid card tricks
where the ace disappeared
and Sean couldn't stop laughing.

There was no mother-father fallout
for skipping the five-star hotel
and sleeping on pine needles.

And everything was absolutely
perfect
until Dad turned around
and drove us back home.

That Was the Last Time

I dreamed about Dad being Superman.

Or flying off the top of the Sears Tower.

Or driving an old RV into a brand-new life.

Because somehow I just knew we would always come back. No matter what.

And that meant Dad would be Piglet
forever,
and I would always be the bottom of
Avery's shoe.

I didn't realize it back then,
but I guess it's kind of true,
what that poet said.

How once you lose your dreams,
it's like a snowstorm rolls in,
even if you live in Florida,
and the fields freeze over,
and you feel like a bird
with broken wings,
until pretty soon
you can't even
remember

how to
fly.

At Least Sean Still Has Dreams

He's gonna be a marine biologist one day.

But he's not like most eight-year-olds

who want to be a biologist today,
a firefighter tomorrow,
an astronaut the week after that.

Ever since his Cub Scout troop

visited

the Tampa Aquarium, he's been saying

he's gonna be a biologist and that was

almost two years ago.

Anyway, he's always talking about these random deep-sea creatures he sees on the Discovery Channel, like the Atolla jellyfish that lives thousands of feet underwater in total blackness. But whenever it wants to, the Atolla can turn its body into a big blue lightbulb, and not the Kmart special kind, but a beautiful, brilliant blue.

Glowing.

Luminous.

Unexpected.

Sean says when it happens,
the whole sea stops to watch,
and God looks down and smiles,
because that jellyfish
just goes to show
there can be light
even in the darkest places.

But what does he know.

He's only eight.

Wednesday 11:30 a.m.

I plop down on the couch to watch a daytime talk show through that scratched-up Plexiglas.

Donya's yelling HOOYAH every five seconds because there's this girl on the show with a coin-round face and hair the color of pennies, who just told her boyfriend

she doesn't love him.

Never did.

Even though he's the kind of boy
most girls would drool for.

Even though he's got eyes
like slices of summer sky.

Even though he can sink a free throw
all the way from center court.

None of that can make her love him,
not for all the corn in Indiana,
because she's in love with someone
else.

A girl.

A girl who's like cinnamon apples.

Spicy and sweet.

“I knew it,” Donya says.

She hops off the couch and struts around the room with her boobs flat as pancakes in that ultratight underarmor sports bra.

“Hooyah.

Hell, yeah!”

But when the girl’s father appears, Donya starts to grind her teeth just like she does at night.

“Parents are hazardous to your health,” she says.

She twists her plastic wristband
around and around
until I see the red letters
printed on the underside.
The ones that say *suicide watch*.

“What are you looking at?” Donya asks.

But before I can answer she’s up in my face.

“I wasn’t trying to kill myself,” she says.

“It was just a buzz gone wrong.
That’s all.”

I nod and tell her that I get it.
That I believe her.

Even though I don't.

Then we flip through the channels
until that fat Hoosier daddy
is booed off the stage.

Wednesday After Lunch

I notice a piece of paper on the wall with those little tear-off tabs dangling from the bottom.

The paper says:

ARE YOU LOOKING FOR
SOMETHING?

TAKE WHAT YOU NEED.

And the tabs say words like:

Love

Acceptance

A second chance

I look around to see if anybody's watching.

Donya and Jag are arm wrestling.

Skylar's dumping her uneaten tray.

Nobody's paying attention.

So I pull off a tab.

It feels strange in my hand.

Oddly heavy.

Like the paper is holding something bigger than itself.

The same way an acorn

holds a full-grown oak tree
inside its tiny shell.

I want to put it in my pocket.

But then I stop and think.

What if this idea sprouts?

What if it gets pink and purple with

promise

but instead of growing strong like an

oak tree

it just flops over and dies like my

coleus plant

in the first grade and leaves me with

nothing but a dead word

and a Styrofoam cup filled with dirt?

Screw that.

Which One Did You Pick?

Skylar flits over and points at the frayed edges of paper where three tabs are missing.

“I picked *will power*,” she volunteers.

“And *discipline*.
And *self-control*.”

Her arm is outstretched and for the

first time

I can see her wormy scars close up.

They look like pink leeches sucking
on her skin.

I'll never get like *that*, I think.

My cuts are so much prettier.

Thin as spider silk.

Laced around my wrists like
bracelets.

In a week they'll start to heal

and I'll watch as they fade

from rubies,

to ripples,

to smooth opal skin.

When they're gone,

I know I'll miss them.

I wonder if Skylar ever had cuts like
that.

Pretty as pink pearls.

Before the leeches came.

She Notices Me Staring

I look away
but not fast enough
and her fragile smile melts.

“Sorry,” I say.
“I’ve just never seen scars
like that before.”

She studies me.
Traces a finger across her arm.

Tells me they're her babies.

She's even got names for them.

Fat baby.

Ugly baby.

Lonely baby.

Failed- a-test baby.

Dissed-at-school baby.

Argued-with-mother baby.

Why-don't-you-just-kill-yourself

baby.

My cuts don't have names like that.

But if I gave them names, they'd all
be Rennie.

Rennie

Where do I begin?

I guess we met around
the second week of sixth grade.

Right about the time I was
discovering

that in middle school there's no such
thing

as being a wallflower.

You're either popular or ridiculed.
Accepted or abandoned.
Worshiped or crucified.

There's no in-between.
No place for invisible.
Nowhere to hide.

I was a little unprepared for that,
having been a houseplant all my life.
Comfortably nonexistent.

But Rennie took me in.
Introduced me to the black-booted,
purple-haired dress-code violators
who would one day be
the Sisters of the Broken Glass.
And for the first time,

I belonged to something.

was seen as someone.

was popular somehow.

I belonged . . .

Even though I knew that meant

I'd have to cut too.

Sometime.

Six Months Later

Elbow on the sink.

Right hand trembling.

Drag——the——glass——
across——my——wrist——

chalky——dotted——lines——

don't——even——break——
the——skin——

Lungs are feeling tight.

Heart is thumping hard.

Rennie's words are swirling in my

head.

Just one cut to feel alive . . .

And Then

Whoosh!

The skin tears
and I feel this rush
swirling in my brain
like a waterspout.

A finger-tingling,
tongue-numbing,
heart-pounding

rush.

And the pain doesn't feel like pain
but more like energy
moving through my body
in waves.

Rushing.

Cleansing.

Pulsing.

Purging all the broken bits out of me
like a tsunami washing debris to the
shore.

Afterward

I feel the calm,
the bliss,
the sheer weightlessness
of zero worry.

I'm floating on a smooth glass pond
with bottle-nosed endorphins
swimming all around,
splashing their tails,
smiling their perpetual smiles.

And I want this feeling to last forever.

Because if the feeling lasts,
it won't matter what Avery says,
or what my mother doesn't say,
or how twisted I feel inside
because I know for sure
that on this calm, tranquil pond
nothing and I mean *nothing*
can ever make a ripple in my heart.

But here's the bad thing:
The feeling doesn't last forever.
It *never* lasts forever.

In fact, it barely lasts ten freaking minutes.

Before the guilt sets in.

I Guess That's Why I Picked the Word

Hope.

Because part of me really hopes I can quit.

So I can stop feeling guilty all the time.

Like when I'm washing laundry in secret.

Or wasting my allowance on sterile

gauze.

Or lying to my little brother, Sean,
about
why I can't go swimming with him.

Those are the times I fumble around
looking for *hope*.

I hope Rennie will still like me if I
quit.

I hope I can stop wearing concealer
on my arms.

I hope Bio-Oil really works.

I hope I won't miss my scars (too
much).

But then I remember those ten mind-
blowing minutes,

and I think about how it feels the next
day,

when everyone crowds around me at
lunch,

looking at my cuts, rubbing my
shoulders,

dabbing me with *I-feel-so-bad-for-you*
ointment.

And I remember the spotlight of
Rennie's grin

and the way her approval makes me
feel special,

and I gotta say, that's a pretty
ginormous feeling.

Like an over-the-top, Sears Tower
kinda high.

And just thinking about that

makes my little wad of hope
fell like a spitball
slipping through my fingers
103 stories down
to the bottom
of
my
pocket.

Wednesday 3:22 p.m.

It's been 24 hours since I got to Attaboys.

Donya says they have to give me my official psych evaluation in the first 24 hours, or they'll have to let me go. That's part of the Baker Act.

I guess that's why Roger's waving me over now.

He introduces me to this pinched-up Pomeranian face with a clipboard.

Dr. Annoyed-To-Meet-Me doesn't even look up.

She just drones off the same pointless questions they asked in the ER.

1. Do you know why you're here?
2. Do you think you need to be here?
3. What would you do if we let you out?

Hmmm. Let me see.

I'm here because Tara-the-Two-

Face

is a big drama queen who peddles gossip

like Girl Scout cookies, and opening that bathroom door was like selling a thousand boxes of Thin Mints.

Do I think I need to be here?

Are you kidding me?

NO. I don't need to be here.

But this works perfect for Tara, because she'd do *anything* to have Rennie all to herself.

And what will I do when I get out?

First off, I'm gonna strangle Tara with a fat wad of dental floss,

now that I know how dangerous
waxed string can be. Then I'll friend

Jag

on Facebook and reblog a few GIFs
for my vast audience of Tumblr
followers.

All three of them.

After that, I'll ride my bike to
Rennie's

and we'll raid her mother's
bathroom,

paint our nails Lincoln Park after
Dark,

and drink Monster until we get a
caffeine buzz.

I want to tell the Pomeranian
that's what I'm really thinking

just to see the look on her face.
But Donya warned me,
it isn't worth it.

So I give her one of those
fake, elastic smiles
and deliver my best lines of BS.

“I'm here because I made an
impulsive mistake.

But I'm feeling much better now.
And it will never happen again.”

Then I do a little curtsy-bob with my
head

and the Pomeranian bubbles in her
stupid

Scantron sheet and trots away.

Donya Catches Me in the Hallway

“Not bad,” she says. “Might even get you out.

Unless . . .”

“Unless what?” I ask.

Donya snaps her gum
and loops the pink strand
around her finger slow as taffy.

“Unless you got good insurance,” she says.

“Then you’re screwed.”

I follow Donya down the hall.

“What’d’ya mean I’m screwed?”

“Cha-ching,” she sings.

I stare at her, my face blank,
like she just spoke Egyptian.

“Oh, come on, Kenna,” she says.

“Don’t you get it?

If you got good insurance,
they’re gonna milk it.

Take their time with you.

Find your inner child

and all that crap.

But with no insurance—

Voila!

You're miraculously cured.

Sometimes the same day.”

I don't want to believe her.

But Donya knows this place like the
inside of her pocket.

And if Donya says I'm screwed, then
I probably am.

Speaking of Being Screwed

At my school, *nobody* narcs on cutters.

Not the goody-two-shoes
who pretend they don't notice
and turn their heads the other way.

Not the stoners who can barely
raise their eyelids.

Not the jocks who are too busy growing tumors on their arms.

Not even the jerks who call us *emo's* and *attention whores*, under their breath.

Nobody.

So that makes Tara the first narc in history to go running off to “get help” just because someone needs a Band-Aid.

Only that's not why she did it. Tara did it because she's a freaking competitive cutter who can't stand it if anyone has better scars than her,

and she got it into her head that people were paying more attention to me than to her.

That's crap, of course.
But that didn't stop her.

And now that I'm gone,
she'll *own* fourth period lunch,
with her duct tape bandages
and her six-inch slits,
and she'll be a freaking rock star
just like she wants.

I Wonder What Rennie Thinks

Does she think that Tara's
a two-faced greedy bitch
for ratting me out?

Or that I'm a dumbass
for getting caught?

It's a very tricky relationship.

The three of us.

I remember how one time
my math teacher spent the whole
period talking about triangles.

How they're the strongest shape,
and that's why they're used for
building

bridges and trusses because they
won't

geometrically distort, or some crap
like that.

But as usual, school has nothing to
do

with real life because if you ask me
triangles are the weakest shape of
all,

ready to blow apart at any minute,
especially when the three corners

are

Rennie,

Tara,

and me.

If Sean Was a Shape

He'd be a circle.

Pure.

Honest.

Perfect.

You can trust a circle.

It doesn't have any crooked angles
hiding secrets in the corners.

It's the same with Sean.

Sure. He can be annoying when he blurts things out like little brothers do, but at least he says what he means.

He's not a liar.
Or a fake.

I bet you could search a thousand classrooms, and cafeterias, and gymnasiums, and never find that kind of honesty anywhere else. Believe me. I've tried.

I think Sean may be
the last circle on earth.

Wednesday 4 p.m.

It's bad enough we have to spill our guts

at 8 a.m. when any normal teenager would still be hibernating.

But apparently one gut spill per day is not enough for Attaboys.

So when the afternoon rolls around, they herd us back into the therapy room for another session.

The only good thing is that Jag's sitting six inches away from me in his Screaming Zombies T-shirt and I can smell the faint woodiness of skateboard on his skin.

Jag reaches his arms back to stretch, and it's like every muscle in his body is in perfect, rippled balance, and I can just imagine how good he looks on his long board, pivoting his Levi's hips, flexing his marble six-pack, surfing the smooth cement with his arms long and low like fighter-plane wings.

He catches me staring at him
and smiles with that half-broken grin
until I feel so sweet and tickly inside

it's

like I'm swirling in a cotton candy
machine.

Too bad Roger has to ruin it.

Tap, Tap, Tap . . .

Roger drums his pen on the whiteboard

like he wants to knock some sense into us.

He says we should talk about having goals,

because that's what all adults think we need.

Goals and college plans and career objectives.

But what do they know?

I mean, who says their world is *right*?

What if our real purpose on earth is something as simple as

Have fun.

Feel good.

Be free.

If it is, then 99.9% of all adults are failing miserably on this earth, and when they die they'll probably be reincarnated as boring worker

ants

because that's about all they're good for.

I almost feel sorry for Roger.
Not because he's going
to be an ant in the next life,
but because he really believes
the crap he's writing on the board.

*TOP THREE REASONS FOR
HAVING GOALS:*

- * Goals keep you focused
- * Goals give you purpose
- * Achieving Goals is something to
celebrate

He says it's best to write your goals
on paper
and he hands us a yellow sheet and a
felt-tip pen.

I know I should play along and scribble something like:

- * Quit cutting
- * Get straight As
- * Join a club

But that would be too easy.

And then someone might expect me to do it.

Besides, who can think about goals sitting six inches away from Jag's lips?

Those soft pink pillow puffs, dreamy as clouds and totally kissable.

So that's the first goal I write,

in microscopic letters:

Lock lips with Jag Mancuzzi,

Then I notice Skylar
looking even thinner
after three peas for lunch
and I scribble down another goal:

Buy Skylar a jumbo burger.

Finally Donya catches my eye,
pretending to walk with a cane,
like that's how old I'll be
when I get out of Attaboys.

So I smooth out my paper
and write my last one:

Blow this place!

And Roger is right.

It *does* feel good to have goals.

Right up until the time

he comes around and collects them.

Waiting and More Waiting

I wonder how long you can sit
in a folding chair before your spine
actually fuses to the metal.

Or how many Nemos
you can count on the wall
before you want to bang
your head against it.

As much as I hate the idiotic

group sessions, the time in between is even worse.

It's a million shades of boring.

The only entertainment besides zoning out to Judge Judy reruns or watching Bullhorn pluck her lip

hairs,

is when we get a new arrival, like the little head case who rolls in right after group.

He's about the same age as my brother Sean.

Eight. Maybe Nine.

Supposedly, he jabbed his teacher with a pencil.

But looking at him now,
crumpled in a ball on the floor,
he doesn't seem dangerous to me.

It's makes me wonder,
isn't there something else
for an eight-year-old?
Like a ten-minute time-out,
or no recess,
or "Sorry, kid,
you lose your lollipop."

Do they really have to Baker Act
him?

Seriously?

And when he opens his mouth I

realize

he doesn't even speak English
because he's all like
"lo siento, lo siento, lo siento"
but nobody's listening
to the little stabber
no matter how many times
he says he's sorry.
They try to lift him to his feet
and he goes sort of wild,
kicking and spinning,
knocking Ding Dong's
sucker jar off the counter.

The orderlies swoop in
and loop this long white jacket
around him until he looks
like a caterpillar in a cocoon.

When they cart him off,
the only thing I can see
are his tiny inchworm eyes
crying out for help.

And it makes me think:

*I don't know why you
stabbed your teacher, kid.
But I sure hope you got her good.*

It's Almost Time

I'm staring out the window.
Tapping on the glass.
Trying to remember the last time
I actually wanted to see my mother.

Tap.

Tap.

Tap.

Nope.

Nada.

Nothing's coming.

Visiting Hour

Okay.

Maybe I shouldn't have rolled my
eyes

at the very first question Mom asked.

But—"how's the food?"

Like I'm at summer camp?

Please!

And now Mom's going through that
whole

breathe-deep-and-count-to-ten crap
like it says to do in the tough-love
book

she always forgets in the bathroom.

Before long, she starts quoting
chapter three:

“Blahblahblahblahblahblah . . .”

And then there it is:

Bad choices.

I knew she would say it.

That's the book's favorite phrase.

She grits it between her teeth

like a fat wad of bubble gum

so the other words won't slip out.

The ones she really wants to say.

Like how I'm such a huge

disappointment

and why can't I be more like my
sister?

I want to tell her,

Hey Mom, I've got news for you:

A hard-boiled egg instead of
chocolate cake?

(That's a bad choice.)

Vampire Diaries instead of
Supernatural?

(Bad choice.)

Plastic instead of paper?

(Bad choice.)

But shredding your arm with a razor
blade

and getting Baker Acted like a
psycho?

That's not a *bad choice*, Mom.

That's a freaking disaster!

But just when I'm about
to go off on her, I start to feel it.
The way my cuts tighten up
like Grandma's arthritic fingers
right before a storm.

I guess I should've mentioned
how my scars can tell the weather.

Only not hurricanes or tornadoes.
More like the emotional weather.
Like when Mom's waterworks
are about to spill.

So even before it happens,
I know her lips are gonna quiver
and the creases on her forehead
are getting ready to bunch up.
And then out comes the downpour.
A torrential ten-Kleenex typhoon.

Luckily her crying sort of waters
down
the rest of the tough-love words:

Foolish.

Dangerous.

Serious consequences.

After a while, the storm blows over.
Mom's hands puddle in her lap
and her head droops like a branch
still heavy with rain.

Great.

Now I'm gonna have to hug her and
shit.

And when I do, she's probably
gonna
whisper that question in my ear.

The one I can't answer.

Why, Kenna? Why?

Deep, Dark Secret

It would be so much easier if I had one.

Like if I thought I caused
my brother's illness,
my boyfriend's suicide,
my parent's death.

Like if I had
an alcoholic father,

a bipolar mother,
a secret abortion.

Like if I'd been
molested,
abused,
stalked.

Like just about ANYTHING!

Then maybe this would make more
sense

and I could answer the question—

Why?

But here's the thing.

I don't have any deep, dark secrets.

Not like that anyway.

My life's not some riveting novel where you rush through the pages to get to the end and find out what horrific, repressed memory caused me to cut.

The fact is,

I've had a pretty ordinary childhood.

Boring? (*Yes.*)

Predictable? (*Yes.*)

But stitch-worthy? (*No.*)

So I guess that brings me to the *real* secret.

The deepest, darkest kind there is.

I've been cutting for absolutely no

reason at all.

And That Makes It a Billion Times Worse

Because that means I'm just a
copycutter.

A follower who did it to fit in.
And now I can't stop.

I bet if my IQ was even
a pimple-bump above average,
I would've thought of that
before I made the first cut.

But I didn't think.
About anything.
Except—

my perpetually perfect sister
my Judge Judy mother
my Piglet father
my no-sprinkles future
my incurable case of Ordinary
the sting of being alone
and the rush of being accepted.

On second thought,
maybe it's the little problems
that pile up the worst.
Deeper and darker.
One after another.

Until there's no light at all.

But at Least I'm Not an Idiot

Like Tara who #cut4sid.

That all started because some troll
tweeted about how Sid Riff
was smoking pot instead of
recording albums like a hottie
should,
and some fans decided to cut
themselves

and post pictures to show Sid how sad they were that he was turning into a bad person and making their whole lives a lie.

24 hours

30,000 messages

and 23 million impressions later,

Tara came to school with the words *cut4sid* carved into her thigh and a smile as wide as Texas because she'd been retweeted 4,962 times.

It was the highlight of her year.

And the funny thing is,

she doesn't even like Sid Riff.
But that's the kind of thing
competitive cutters do.

And that's exactly what my mother
would never understand.

How cutting's everywhere now.
On a whole new level.

Not just in the closet.

Sometimes people do it because
of their deep, dark secrets,
or to fit in with friends,
or to piss off parents,
or to be razor rock-stars.

But who cares why we do it.

It's a stupid question.

So when my mother asks,

I don't even answer.

By the Time My Mother Leaves

The urge to cut is so strong
it feels like Saran Wrap around my
brain.

No other thoughts getting in or out.

If I was at home right now
I'd bolt up the stairs,
three at a time,
not looking back,

until I got to the bathroom,
where I'd lock the door,
turn on the shower,
hover over the sink and
slice,

slice,

slice.

God I miss that feeling!

The rush.

The calm.

The way the blood pools warm at
first

then cools like morning dew on
slivered skin.

The sway.

The swirl.

The way the crimson dances 'round
the bowl
then trickles tiny teardrops down the
drain.

The crimp.

The curl.

The sound Saran Wrap makes as it
unsticks
and finally lets the air back to my
brain.

Skylar Notices Me

“Try this instead,” she says.

And then she shows me how to snap
a rubber band against my wrist.

It’s not as good as cutting.

But somehow the steady rubber sting
settles down my nerves enough to
draw.

I look at my limp, leaking girl

lying worthless on the paper.
She deserves hands, I think.

To wave hello.

To catch bouquets.

To squeeze palm to palm.

Not hands to hold a blade.

But I can't seem to draw them right.

They're lifeless, unnatural, cold.

They make me want to tear the paper

up.

So I sketch the moon instead.

Moons are easy.

A white, unblinking eye

watching through the window.

Like a god who sees bad things
happening to good people every day
but doesn't even care.

Skylar glances at my drawing.
She's writing a poem,
counting syllables on her fingers
one by one.

Skylar thinks God *does* care.
Even when it doesn't feel like it.
And she's pretty sure that one day
God will lift all the pain right off her
and toss it aside like an old jacket.

But for now, she's wearing it tight.
Zipped up to the chin.
Just like me.

Skylar Shows Me Her Poem

*Silent sobbing. No one sees.
Weeping like the willow trees.
Feel my heart about to pop.
Need to make the aching stop.
See moon's shimmer softly pass.
On the shards of broken glass.*

It's an ekphrastic poem.
That's what Skylar calls it.
She says that means the poem

was inspired by a piece of artwork.

My artwork.

I tell her that *ekphrastic*

is the dumbest word I've ever heard.

It doesn't sound very poetic to me.

More like a hairball that the cat
coughed up.

But *her* words are poetic.

Beautiful.

Powerful.

Painful.

Like she cut out a piece of herself
and left it lying there on the paper,
just so I'd know—

I'm
not
alone.

Jag is Sitting on the Windowsill Nearby

He's staring at the moon.

Thousands of miles from here.

I wonder if he's thinking about
the three goals he wrote for Roger's
exercise:

- * Get out of here without the family meeting.

- * Get out of here without the family

meeting.

* Get out of here without the family meeting.

But the sad thing is nobody gets out of here without that almighty meeting.

Especially when decking your dad is what got you here in the first place.

Donya's Staring at the Moon Too

But she doesn't call it the moon.
She calls it *Lunabella*
because that sounds like
a sexy-hot girl who would
meet her at Chicory's
and drink café mochas
until they were both
as happy as exclamation points,

and they'd hold hands
on top of the table
not just underneath
even when Donya's
stupid parental unit
steamed in
hotter than coffee
ranting about how two girls
holding hands was a sin.

I ask Donya if that really happened.

But she doesn't answer.

Instead she just says that Skylar
can tell her so-called God
to shove His so-called plans
and stop messing up

every minute of
her so-called *life*!

Jag Hops off the Window Sill

“My father’s Higher Power was a lightbulb,” he says.

“A 60-watt incandescent.”

Jag tells us how he used to go to Al-Anon meetings
before his father drank up all their savings
and started talking with his fists.

“AA lets you believe God can be anything or anyone,” he says.

“Like God can be Buddha or a ceiling tile or even a lightbulb.

It doesn't really matter. As long as you believe that *something* is your Higher Power.

I ask Jag if AA would let Colin Krusher be God.

“I know Colin is more like a fallen TV angel, “ I say.

“But he's been resurrected four times on my favorite show

and he's the only angel who's lasted through series nine

so that pretty much makes him

immortal, if you ask me.

Plus, in real life, Colin founded a charity that gives away shoes and umbrellas and mattresses to old people who haven't had a new bed in like half a century. So Colin deserves to be God way more than a 60-watt."

Jag nods and looks at the floor.

"Yeah. I guess Colin could be God," he says.

"But just so you know, that lightbulb thing didn't turn out too good for my dad."

Lights Out

Donya's grinding her teeth again.
Like she's mad at half the world.

I bet my dad doesn't have to
listen to a racket like this
when he's at the Hyatt
or the Holiday Inn
a thousand miles
away from home.

I bet he props himself up
on fluffy hypoallergenic pillows
and drinks four-dollar bottled waters
and watches the 10-p.m. news
with all the comings and goings
of some random city.

And even though he'll only
stay there a day, maybe two,
I bet Dad cares more
about what's happening
in De Kalb, Illinois,
or Madison, Wisconsin,
than he cares about

what's happening
to me.

My Dream on the Second Night

I'm on that dark country road again
where the sky is purple
and the air is so full of static
the hairs rise up on my arms.

Then I see that horse.

The gruesome, white, wild-eyed
horse.

Flaring her nostrils.

Rearing her head.

Like a warning.

I want to bolt back into
consciousness.

But right away I can tell
it's one of those hosed dreams
where you can't wake yourself up
no matter how hard you try.

I'm trapped.

Immobile.

Suffocating.

But then I hear Rennie's voice:

Just one cut and you can breathe.

When she appears,
she's ten feet tall.
On freaky spider legs
just like the ones in Dalí's paintings.
And I figure that right about now
Dali would probably drop the spoon,
wake himself up,
and paint some freaky clocks.

But I'm stuck watching Rennie
as she mounts the horse
and wraps her legs around its belly.
When she grabs its mane, the horse
bucks and flails,
and I feel my heart thud like a nine-
pound hammer.

Thump-thump.

Thump-thump.

Thump-thump.

Then the horse begins to run.

A great Goliath gallop

that shakes the ground

and spits mud in every direction.

I know what's coming next,

even before the white flesh

tears across the barbs.

I hear a voice screaming in my head:

Wake up.

Wake up.

Just drop the freaking spoon

already!

Then the dream ends.

Just like that.

I'm sitting on the edge of my bed.

Catching my breath.

Feeling as psycho as Dalí.

Dreams Are Just a Body's Way of Sorting Things Out

That's what Ding Dong says.

I sit at the night-nurse station while she rifles through my chart checking to see if Mom authorized any medication like sleeping pills.

Fat chance of that.

But I let Ding Dong search anyway, digging through random papers, jabbering away.

“Did you have one a them falling-down dreams?

Then you’re probably just feeling helpless. That’s all.

Or maybe you dreamed about being naked.

Was that it? You don’t have to hide it, girl.

That doesn’t mean nothing bad. You’re just shy.”

She pauses and stares at me hard.

Then shivers shimmy across her shoulders.

“I think you had one of them ugly dreams.

Where your teeth were falling out.”

That one makes me smile
and I think about telling her

I had a whole set of snaggleteeth
that wiggled like worms

right out of my mouth,

because that kind of dream

might get her dreads in a wad,

and then maybe she'd give me the

meds

without my mother's precious
signature.

But I don't say a word.

Because I'm afraid if I open my

mouth

the white horse might gallop out
instead.

So I go back to bed pill-less and
prickly,

all twisted up by the last thing she
said:

“Trust me, girl. Whatever it was,
that dream is tellin’ you something.”

Thursday 7:16 a.m.

Breakfast on the second day.

I see a butterfly on Skylar's arm,
a swallowtail with swooping swirls
and polka-dot wings.

She drew it herself with a black
Sharpie.

“For the Butterfly Project,” she says.

Then she tells me how it works.

First, you feel the urge to cut,
but instead of picking up the blade
you pick up a pen
and draw a butterfly
on your arm
or your ankle
or anywhere you want.
It doesn't really matter
as long as it's on your body.

Then you name it for someone
special.

That's what brings the butterfly to
life.

So now you've got this living,
breathing ink

on your forearm or by your belly
button

or the dimple behind your knee,
and the butterfly is flapping its
wonderful wings

while you take algebra tests and
clean your room

and eat cold chicken nuggets in the
cafeteria.

And because you love it so much
you stay away from the blade
because that's the only way
to save your swallowtail's life.

You can't wash it off either.

The butterfly has to fade on its own.
Because if you wash it off in the sink
or cut before the ink fades naturally,

then your butterfly dies.

Those are the rules.

Sick, huh?

But Skylar's so sure it'll work,
she floats away from the table
like she's a butterfly herself.

I don't know if I should feel
sorry for her
for putting so much faith
in permanent marker
or if I should feel
just a teeny bit good inside
because Skylar named her butterfly

for me.

Skylar's Breakdown

Nervous

It's all Bullhorn's fault.
She never should've said that
Skylar's gonna become another
Teenage Statistic if she doesn't
start seeing herself for
the Beautiful Person that she is.

Then Donya wouldn't have said,
"Oh yeah, twigs are soooo hot."

And Jag wouldn't have laughed
until chocolate milk spurted out his
nose.

And Skylar wouldn't have bolted
down the hallway screaming,
“Lemmeout! Lemmeout!”

And I wouldn't have sat there
with my mouth open
wishing I'd said thank you
for the butterfly.

There's So Much Drama

My mother thinks it's all because of the hormones in cow's milk making girls hit puberty way too soon.

And not just the early bloomers.

A whole generation of twelve-year-olds

budding in their teeny-weeny bikinis and sprouting armpit hair before their frontal lobes

have a chance to catch up.

But what does she know?

My mother also thinks that margarine is one molecule away from plastic and that fried food will make her hair turn gray.

That's whacked.

But sometimes I wish she was right, because to tell you the truth,

I'd give up dairy products all together

if it would make all the drama go away.

And Skylar come back.

Before Group Therapy

I'm staring at Jag's
perfect pecs,
his awesome abs,
his flawless face
when Roger points
at sneakers propped
on Skylar's empty seat
and says,

“Take them off.”

And then . . .

Plop.

Plop.

I'm staring at Jag's
pissed and perfect feet.

The Three C's of Addiction

Why does Roger look at me like that?

I've never soaked gummy bears in vodka
or snuck off campus to get high at lunch,
and just because I smoked pot
one time with Rennie,
that doesn't mean

I'm addicted.

But Roger says
if you *crave* something
and lose *control*
and keep doing it
over and over
despite the *consequences*,
then you're addicted.

Yeah?

So what?

Why does he keep looking at me like
that?

What I Find in Skylar's Empty Room

Five carrot sticks she pretended to eat at lunch.

Four clumps of hair that brushed right off her head.

Three unopened letters.

Two bloody tissues.

And a poem she wrote today—

What the Blade Says

*I am the shadow
that waits in dark places,
silent and patient,
to follow you home.*

*I am the tiger
that eagerly chases,
racing and running,
wherever you roam.*

*I am the hunger
that feeds on your madness,
biting and clawing,
to swallow you whole.*

*I am the silver
that soaks up your sadness,
body and spirit
and all of your soul.*

The Rubber Room

Donya finds me in Skylar's room and sees the bloody tissues in the trash.

She says she knows exactly what that means and she pulls me out of the room.

She points down this long narrow hall,
past the rec room and the emergency exit,

to a thick black door with a tiny slit of a window.

I tell Donya we shouldn't go, not because the room is *restricted* but because if Skylar *is* in there I don't want to see her, not like that.

But Donya makes me go.

Well, not exactly *makes* me.

I mean, it's not like she drags me by the hair. But she has this way of making you think that *not* doing something is way worse than doing it, no matter how bad that something

seems.

Sort of like Rennie.

So we slip past Bullhorn
on our rubber-soled socks
and we figure we've got like
two and a half minutes until
Bullhorn discovers that we're gone.
But even before we get to the door
I hear this sound that makes me
want to turn around again.

I wouldn't call it crying exactly.
It's more high pitched than that,
like a kitten.

Donya pushes me to the window.
This time with more than her words.

“Is she in there?”

The window is smudged and the room gray

so I can't make anything out at first,
except for how the walls look like
they're covered in mattresses,
and the floor is sort of spongy.

But then I see something
in the far back corner,
and I feel my ears get hot
like they always do when I'm mad.

“Is it her?”

“See for yourself,” I say.

Then I brush past Donya
pissed at her for making me look,
because that's the kind of picture
I'll never get out of my head.

That poor little pencil stabber.

He looks so much like Sean.

I Need to Chill

So I wedge myself by the window
and I watch
garbage men heaving green plastic
cans,
and a man running to catch the bus,
and a woman walking her mop dog,
and wrapping up its poop like a
present.

It's like there are two worlds now.

The In Here.
And the Out There.

The suspended animation.
And the full speed ahead.

And suddenly I'm desperate
to know what Rennie's doing.

In the Out There.

Right now.

This very minute.

My One Phone Call

It feels like a century since I saw
Rennie
through that dirty squad-car window,
looking sort of shocked and mad,
like someone had splashed water in
her face.

She must've been really pissed at the
cop.

I drum my fingers on the counter

as the phone rings five times.

Come on. Come on.

I know you're in art class.

Just pick up already.

And then I hear her.

“This better be good.”

Her words are like punches
knocking the breath out of me.

I want her to say:

OMG! Are you okay?

This is sooooo unfair!

Are they gonna let you out soon?

Everybody misses you like crazy.

But something's off.

"I just wanted to talk," I say.

"So talk," she answers.

I hear water running and someone giggling
in the background. Then Rennie sighs,
like she's bored with me already.

"Look. The school's on high alert," she says.

"A message went home telling parents to be
on guard for the Top Ten Signs of Self-Harm

and now every mom in Manatee
County
is searching for scissors under the
bed
and taking inventory of their Band-
Aid boxes.”

I hear the phone changing hands
and another voice jumps on the line.

“You can’t even get a plastic knife
in the cafeteria thanks to you.”

And right away I’m sick to my
stomach
because I know who it is. That
growly,
annoying, gag-me voice could only

be

coming from one person.

And that's Tara.

Yeah.

The Two Face.

Shower Escape

All I want is scalding water
to sear down my spine
like a hot blade,
to blister my back,
to char my chest,
to melt me to pieces
so I can dissolve down the drain,
evaporate into steam,
and disappear.

That would feel good right now.
That would make sense.

But all I can find is one button,
no hot or cold knob,
no temperature dial,
just a single silver square
that says On/Off
like a light switch,
and when I press it
the drops that spill
like lukewarm milk
aren't even as hot as my tears.
I feel my lips start to quiver,
and my shoulders shake.
Then my heart splits open
and the words tumble out
like bricks.

“How could Rennie say that?
I thought she was my friend.
My sister.”

But nobody answers.
Not even my own echo.

The shower shuts off automatically,
and I'm still sobbing, watching
ribbons of water slide down my
skin.

The drops glance over the scars on
my hips,
and ricochet past the cuts on my
thighs,
and bounce off the red flippy lines
on my ankles
like balls in a pinball machine.

I'm an outcast,
a loser,
a nothing.

I step out of the shower and drag
the towel across my body, but
I can't look at myself anymore,
because every inch of rejected skin
reminds me of the awful truth:

Now I have more scars than friends.

But I'm the kind of tired
that sleeping doesn't fix.

Ten Things Rennie Never Told Me

That cuts multiply like freaking rabbits.

That no skin is sacred.

That hugs hurt.

That becoming a pathological liar is a requirement.

That guilt feels like being buried alive.

That long sleeves ride up at the worst possible moment.

That being called *emo* sucks.

That cutting can get you Baker Acted in Florida.

That people are disposable.

And that one day, she'd get rid of *me*.

Bullhorn Brings a Tray to My Room

She tells me I need to eat.

Then she stands there waiting,

like applesauce will solve

everything.

I stare at the ham sandwich cut
diagonally.

The sticks of marbled string cheese.

The bunch of green grapes.

For a split second I flashback
to when I was four years old,
watching Mom peel grapes
one by one
so I won't choke on the skin.

Mom laughs as they slip through her
fingers
and says she doesn't know why she's
still peeling them. I'm not a baby
anymore.

But she keeps doing it anyway,
grape after grape,
because that's the way I like them.

Then for the first time in forever,
I get that cookie-dough feeling.
The warm, out-of-the-oven emotion

that a little girl can only feel for her
mother.

And I wonder what snuffed that
feeling out.

If it was Avery with her
I'm-the-favorite-daughter routine.

Or if it was Rennie with her
relentless

mother bashing—like:

*Don't-expect-a-thank-you-just-
for-pushing-me-out-of-your-vagina.*

Or if maybe

somehow

it was me.

Because I believed them both.

As If Things Weren't Bad Enough

The Pomeranian shows up with her clipboard.

I don't know if I have the strength to fake my way through her questions today.

Plus, I'd really rather see why there's such a commotion in the lobby behind her,

but I can't make it out because she's
filling
the whole doorframe with her
polyester suit.

While I'm craning my neck, she
reads
from the same stupid script as
yesterday:

1. Do you know why you're
here?

*Apparently, so Rennie
can dump me for the Two
Face.*

2. Do you think you need to
be here?

It doesn't matter where I

*am. The whole world
sucks.*

3. What would you do if we
let you out?

I'll give you one guess.

Of course, I don't say what I'm
thinking.

That's the thing about lies.

Once you get good at them,
they feel more natural than the truth,
almost as automatic as breathing,
and sometimes when I'm feeling
low and lost like now,
I can't even tell the difference.

Some Friend I Am

It was Skylar in the lobby
making all that commotion,
because she came back
with fresh gauze on her arm
and two curvy, red lines
bleeding through the cloth like
smiles.

Here's the problem with that.

It's not that I think any less of her
even though my heart cringes a little
because I know she wanted to stay
clean.

It's not that the butterfly's dead
even though she named it for me
and thinking of myself as a dead
insect
sort of sucks.

It's not even that I'm worried
about what'll happen to Skylar next
even though the Pomeranian
is talking to her waaaay too long.

The problem is this:
I can't *be there* for her

even though I want to,
because those two tiny lines
are a huge freaking trigger
and they're making me
double over and sweat
until all I can think about
is ripping apart my own cuts
with my shaky bare hands.

How screwed up is that?

I Hate It When People Say

If cutting's so bad, you should just quit.

Yeah, right.

Like I can snap my fingers
and make my blades disappear.
They have absolutely no idea
how freaking hard it is to stop.

Why don't you just quit breathing?

That's what I want to say.

Let's see how that works out for you.

Roger Must Have Some Kind of Radar

Because he taps me on the shoulder
and leads

me to his office, which is barely big
enough

for a goldfish, by the way.

I'm still feeling triggered and edgy
and I expect him to say a bunch of
touchy-feely crap like:

Tell me what you're feeling now.

Or

Does Skylar's arm make you upset?

Or

*What kind of memories does this
bring up for you?*

The last thing I expect is for him to
lean over,

open his desk drawer and pull out a
jelly jar.

But that's exactly what he does.

Only there isn't jelly in it anymore.

It's filled with water and glitter,

kind of like a snow globe

but way more beautiful,

because the flecks are thick and gold

and mesmerizing in the weirdest

way.

Roger calls it a *calming jar*.

He gives it a little shake and hands it to me,

and while I'm watching the liquid swirl

and the glitter blink like a billion stars,

the strangest thing starts to happen.

I feel my breathing steady and my pulse slow down,

and a trail of goose bumps tiptoe up my arms,

just like when I was little, and Mom traced letters

on my back with her finger.

I wish I could take the jar to my room and shake it

for like the next 26 hours until I get out of here.

But there's no chance of that, on account of the glass.

So I watch it for as long as I can in Roger's office,

until the blanket of gold folds on itself one last time,

and the glitter settles to the bottom like star dust.

Roger tells me he'll give me the recipe,

to make a calming jar of my own at home,

because sometimes, he says, all you

need is a distraction.

Things to Do Instead of Cutting

Roger wants to use afternoon group for a mega-brainstorming session.

We're gonna go through everyone's problems.

Starting with cutting.

He comes up with a few ideas himself
and writes them on the whiteboard

with a squeaky purple pen.

Go for a walk.

Take a bubble bath.

Talk to someone who cares.

I don't know what makes me do it.

Maybe I feel sort of bad for Roger

standing up there all alone

with those big, expectant eyes

that nobody will look at.

Or maybe I feel like I owe him

for showing me that glitter jar.

Either way, I decide to give in.

“Draw something,” I say.

Roger's face lights up and he pens

my answer in swoopy grape letters.

And then it's sort of contagious because everyone stops sitting on their hands, and counting ceiling tiles, and pretending to be asleep, and they start giving up ideas faster than Roger can write them down, starting with Jag:

“Punch a pillow.
Jump on your bed.
Scream at the sky.”

And, yeah, I know that sounds like Jag has anger-management issues, but just like Roger says, there's no wrong answers here, so don't get any bad ideas about Jag.

And besides, I could think about that sexy skater boy jumping on his bed in baggy white boxers all day long! Of course Donya has to try to outdo

him:

“Throw fruit off your roof.
Stand on your head.
Dye your hair.”

And I have to bite my tongue to stop myself from saying that she doesn't have enough hair on that weed-wacked Mohawk of hers

to bother with any more dye. But that's just because I'm jealous her ideas were better than mine.

But the one who blows us all away
is Skylar.

And not just with her rubber-band fix
or the butterfly project. She's got a
whole

truckload of suggestions that she
rattles off

effortlessly, like she's tried every
one:

“Eat chocolate.

Hug a puppy.

Read John Green.

“Make jewelry.

Join a fandom.

Write a poem.

“Blow bubbles.

Play piano.

Sing ‘Who Says’.

“Watch *Juno*.

Order pizza.

Clean your room.

“Surf Tumblr.

Do your homework.

Say a prayer.”

Roger has to stop writing there
because

he runs out of room on the
whiteboard,

which kind of stinks because he
doesn't

get down some of Skylar's funniest

ideas, like:

*Watch English Youtubers
then talk with a British accent all
day,*

or

*Rub peppermint oil all over your
body,*

or

*Put glue on your hands and then
peel it off later.*

By the time the afternoon session is
over,

we're all joking and laughing
and it feels so good for a change

that nobody even mentions
how Skylar came up with like
937 Things to Do Instead of Cutting,
but she's the one who's sitting here
with a brand-new bandage on her
arm.

How Did You Do It?

I know I shouldn't ask.

But not asking feels like being on a diet and having a big bowl of chocolate ice cream shoved in front of me.

Like what am I supposed to do?
Just sit here and watch it melt?

Besides, Skylar doesn't mind.

I think she *wants* to tell me.

After all, it was *my* butterfly she killed.

“I took the Scotch tape off the nurse’s desk

when that little boy came in. Remember?

Nobody was paying any attention.”

I think about that sweet serrated edge and that hot, hard tape dispenser and I have to shake the image from my mind because picturing those plastic teeth biting into my skin is making pins and needles dance on all my favorite places.

“It’s an addiction, you know,” Skylar says.

“Just like drugs or alcohol.”

I try to shake her off, but she keeps going.

“Endorphins are like narcotics.

That’s why we crave them so bad.

I’m not saying that’s the only reason we cut.

There’s like a million scars out there and each one has its own story.

“But every cutter would agree with me on this—

Once you start, it’s really hard to quit.”

Skylar tells me she had a long talk about it with Dr. McKay and it takes me a minute to realize she means the Pomeranian.

“I’m really sorry about the butterfly,” she adds.

“But Dr. McKay says I’ve taken a HUGE first step.

Just by admitting I have a problem. So maybe, in a way, your butterfly saved me.”

She bites her lower lip and fidgets in her seat

like she’s trying hard to believe her own words.

But somehow she's not sure. Then she pulls my arm into her lap and before I can yank it away, she swirls her black Sharpie across my wrist.

“Your first butterfly!”

She smiles and says how it's stronger because she drew it for me, instead of me drawing it for myself.

Then, she adds a dot to each antenna and tells me

I need to name it. And it's just like when someone sets out a birthday cake and says,

“Blow out the candles and make a wish.”

You can't really help yourself.

The wish just pops into your head,
and before you know it, people are
clapping,

and wax is dripping all over the
frosting.

That's how it is with Sean's name.

It just pops into my head.

Like a wish.

A wish to be a better big sister.

A wish to be a halfway decent role
model.

And most of all, a wish not to be
a pathological liar who someday
cuts herself
with her little brother's Cub Scout
knife
and traumatizes him so bad that
he ends up locked in a rubber room
just like that poor pencil stabber.

Thing to Do #826

I don't know why but even after Skylar draws the butterfly on me, I'm still thinking about that plastic tape dispenser and I decide to start talking with an English accent. Just like Dan and Phil.
From YouTube.

“Hello, Love,” I say.
“Have you seen Dan and Phil?”

Well, they're bloody brilliant!

I just saw their shoot on Pancake

Day,

and Dan wore his trousers 'round his

arse.”

Skylar joins in with her pinky in the

air

like she's sipping Earl Grey and she

says

how she'd fancy another cup.

And Donya says, “Get off your bum,

you lazy wanker, and get the tea

yourself.”

Then Jag tells Donya to piss off.

But not in a mean way.

More as a joke.

And we talk about how

Attaboys smells like a loo

and therapy sessions are rubbish

and we can't wait to get our own

flats

so we can faff around all day

and do nothing but watch BBC on the

telly.

It's fun talking like this.

Oh bloody hell.

It's aces.

And it makes me forget

about the tape dispenser.

Completely.

Ding Dong Tells Me—No Visitors Today

But that's okay.

Because Mom's picking Dad up at
the airport,
so he'll be here for tomorrow's
family meeting.

And I suppose there was only one
flight available
from O'Hare to TIA and that was the

6 p.m.

The exact same time as visiting hour.

And I guess there must've been no taxicabs,

or airport shuttles, or rental cars, or buses

in the entire state of Florida, so the only option

was for Mom to circle around the terminal

in her Lexus until Dad's plane touched down.

That's the reason they're not here.

It's not because Mom thinks her

car's gonna

get jacked in this *lovely* part of town,

or because Avery needs a ride to
gymnastics,

or because Dad can't look at me yet,

It's just a transportation problem.

Small Talk

Since we don't have any visitors,
Ding Dong lets me and Jag watch TV
but I have to sit on the end of the
couch

and Jag has to straddle the beanbag
chair

and she makes us promise to keep an
invisible

hula hoop of space between us at all
times.

“I’m watchin’ you, my little bandulus,”

Ding Dong says as she walks out.

But she has nothing to worry about, because as soon as I’m alone with Jag,

I feel like I’m in one of those space-saving

storage bags with every ounce of air sucked

out and my thoughts are winter sweaters,

stuck together, flat as pancakes.

It’s a good thing Jag likes to talk.

He skates over every inch of

awkward silence

telling me how he kickflips and
ollies and caspers

as good as Tony Hawk. And even
though I'd trip

just looking at a skateboard, Jag
makes me feel like

I'm right there with him, sliding and
grinding down

ledges and rails.

"It's dangerous," he says. "That's
why I like it."

Then he raises his shirt and shows
me a patch

of road rash chaffed across his ribs.

But when he

sees my eyes wander to the small

red-brown circles

singed on his side, he covers up
again.

“They’re old,” he says. “Cigarette
burns.”

He wrings his hands and looks at the
clock,

and I can tell he thinks I’m judging
him,

like self-harm is some kind of girl
problem,

and any boy who would snuff out
cigs on his

own skin must be weak or wimpy or
worse.

Every brain cell in my head is
screaming out

how wrong he is, that I don't think
that at all,

but I'm stuck in the vacuum bag
without an

ounce of oxygen and it takes
everything I have

just to squeak out two tiny words.

“It's okay,” I say.

The room is dead still. And I'm
worried that

I hurt him without even meaning to.

But then Jag smiles and runs his hand
through his hair and starts telling me

about

this electric blue RipStik he's gonna
buy when he gets out of here.

And I feel this huge rush of relief.

I guess sometimes
two words
are just enough.

Skylar's Being Transferred

Yeah.

Right now.

At 6:30 p.m.

When I should be pulling her aside
and telling her about my amazing,
wordless conversation with Jag.

But she has to go.

Just like that.

They're taking her to a long term treatment center because Attaboys doesn't actually *treat* anybody.

Unless you count the drive-by pep talks

and a few minutes with a jelly jar.

They're just a stabilization facility, kind of like a drunk tank for psychos where they wait to see if you sober

up and get your head on straight.

But if you don't stabilize, if you're still a danger to self or others,

if you decide to rip your arm up with a tape dispenser,

well then that's it,
you're gonna get committed to a
place
where there's even more chicken
wire
in the window glass than here.

Before she leaves,
Skylar says good-bye
to everybody one by one,
and she saves me for last.

“I'm sorry you have to go,” I say.

“I need to,” she answers. “So I can
get better.”

And this time she seems sure of it.

I think about her telling me how
killing

my butterfly might've saved her and
how admitting that she was addicted
felt like a *huge* first step.

I still can't believe she told
the Pomeranian of all people.

But Skylar insists it was
the right thing to do.

“It feels like such a weight off,” she
says.

She rests her cheek on my shoulder
and gives me an armless hug,
so we don't hurt each other.

Then she slips me a piece of paper.

“I even wrote it down.
So I’d never forget how bad it got.
It’s kind of like a confession.”

When Skylar walks out,
she’s smiling and waving,
tracing infinity signs in the air
with a feathery finger.

Friends forever.

I want to run after her
and get her phone number
even though that’s against the rules.
But before I can move my feet
or swallow the lump in my throat,
the double doors shut and Skylar’s
gone.

Just like that robin in the sky.

Skylar's Confession

I wait a long time before I open it,
maybe because I'm afraid that
Skylar's words will be like a mirror.
I might see myself in them.

When I unfold the paper,
I feel my chest tighten up
like a charley horse in my heart,
but I can't stop thinking about
how Skylar looked when she left,

with her wide smile and her
infinitely happy hands.

So I force myself to read the poem
because I want to see how heavy
this weight must've been. How
getting it off her chest could make
her float like a feather.

And I just gotta say,
it was pretty freaking heavy.

This is what she wrote:

I made the first cut razor thin,
a gentle kiss on virgin skin,
then traded nights of peaceful sleep

for kisses that grew dark and deep,

until the slices on my thighs
soon withered hearts of butterflies,

and now there's nothing left but this

—
my aching for that empty kiss.

There's a Battle Going On inside My Head

On one side there's Skylar,
putting the mirror in my hand,
telling me to take a real good look at
myself.

On the other side there's Rennie
and all the Sisters of the Broken
Glass,
breaking the mirror and handing me

the sharpest piece.

And Skylar is saying:

Stay strong.

Keep fighting.

Just admit you need help.

But Rennie is saying:

Have fun.

Feel good.

There's nothing to admit.

And even though Skylar's a two-ounce Tweety Bird
and Rennie's a ten-foot, spider-
legged giant,

they start to go at it, beak against
claws,
and there's no telling who's gonna
win.

Before Bed, I Make Two Lists

I figure the first list is going to be the longest
since that's where I'm writing all the facts
that prove I'm not really addicted to cutting.

The second list is supposed to be short.

With the one or two things I hate
about it.

Like the lying part.

And the laundry stains.

But that's not exactly how it turns
out.

Five Facts that Prove I'm Not Addicted

1. I don't do it every day.

2. I can stop at just one cut.

3. I've never tried crazy places like my feet.

4. I don't go very deep.

5. I quit once. For the whole summer!

Five Reasons That's Total Bullshit

It's all I think about.

It's all I think about.

It's all I think about.

It's all I think about.

Even in my dreams.

First Prayer in Forever

I can't sleep thinking about those
stupid lists and I'm getting sick
of counting cracks in the wall.
So I start thinking about what
Jag said the other day.

How God could be whoever
I understand Him to be.

That doesn't seem as pushy as I

remembered from my old church
with those stiff wooden pews
and all that Our Father and Kingdom
Come crap.

It seems sorta . . . I don't know . . .
inviting.

So I figure, what the hell. Maybe I
should pray.

What's the worst that could happen?

Who knows? It might even put me to
sleep.

So I do that sign of the cross thing.

Backward probably. Then I close my
eyes

and sort of talk in my head. Like

Hey God.

It's Kenna.

Remember me?

I'm stuck here

in this psycho ward.

But you already know that.

Anyway . . .

*You're probably pissed at me
for the whole cutting thing
because of the Bible business
that says how my body's supposed
to be a temple and all.*

But I don't feel like a temple.

I feel like a shack.

And here's the thing.

*Once I get out of here,
there's gonna be triggers
around every corner,
and blades in my purse,
and voices in my head
telling me to use them.*

*And I'm sorry to say this,
but I probably will.*

That's just the way it is.

*I don't feel like I have a choice,
or another road to take, or
whatever.*

And don't worry.

I don't expect you to fix me.

*But I was sort of thinking maybe
you could do some of that God stuff,
with your hands on my head or
whatever,*

*and just make the pain a little
looser,*

*so it doesn't always feel like a
jacket*

wrapped around me so tight.

*And maybe you could do that for
Skylar, too.*

That would be good.

Then I try to remember how
prayers are supposed to end,
with *lay me down to sleep,*

and souls to keep, and all that
other nursery rhyme stuff,
but that doesn't seem to fit.

So finally, I just say Thanks, God,
and I roll over on my pillow.

Then, the strangest thing happens.

I don't see angels or hear harps
or feel the hand of God
slipping into my life
just when I need him.

The lightbulb doesn't flicker
and Colin Krusher doesn't
materialize
through the air duct (*dammit*).

It's nothing like that.

It's way more subtle.

And I'm sure some people
would say it's all in my head.

But all I can say is that it *does* feel
like my troubles are looser

somehow,

like the jacket isn't zipped
to my chin anymore.

And it's not like I jump
up and down on the bed yelling,

Holy crap!

It worked.

But I say it to myself.

Real quiet.

My Dream on the Third Night

So take a guess where I am.
Dark country road.
Electric purple sky.
Yada yada yada.

And here comes that freaking white
horse.

Only this time, she's sort of still.

Like she's thinking about something.

And I'm calm too, scanning the road.
Waiting for somebody.

And I know they're coming
because I feel so inflated,
it's like I'm walking on helium.

Then Jag rolls up on his RipStik
and I can tell right away,
he's the one I've been waiting for,
because my heart floats even higher
and we seem to talk without words.

He sees a patch of flowers by the
road,
white fairy orchids growing wild,
and he smiles that crooked smile

and leans to pick one for me.

And then, here's where the dream goes to shit.

When Jag stands back up,
there's a sea of spiders at his feet,
so many spiders that it looks like
the ground is moving.

And in fact, the ground *is* moving.

It's opening up like the mouth of a
sinkhole

and Jag is losing his footing and
spiraling in,

and the last thing I see before it
swallows him up,

are the five pointed petals of white

fairy orchid

spilling to the ground like falling stars.

The horse is going ballistic now.
She's bucking and snorting and
making all kinds of terrible sounds
that should never come out of an
animal.

She rears away from the fence again
and again,
but in the end she tears her flesh
across the barbs.

I run to her and throw my arms
around her neck.

I try to stop the bleeding but the

harder I squeeze,
the more the blood flows. It's like a
stream spilling
down the horse's shoulders,
splashing to the earth.

I pull off my jacket and press the
cloth against her skin.

I can hear her heavy breath and feel
her deep, dark pulse
throbbing beneath my fingers. Like
we're connected.

Thump-thump.

Thump-thump.

Thump-thump.

Then I feel something shift.

And suddenly I'm not holding the horse anymore.

I look down only to discover that I'm pressing the jacket against my own arm,
feeling the beat of my own pulse,
watching the cloth turn red,
under the light of the moon.

I Wake Up

So that's it?

That's what the dream means?

I'm the freaking horse?

I storm out of the bedroom and head straight to Ding Dong's desk.

“Did you dream about them teeth again?” she asks.

I shake my head and start ranting.
This time I don't hold anything back.
Not one single detail.

I figure Ding Dong's going to make a
big deal
about all the dark images like the
black sky
and lightning and how that probably
means
I'm on some kind of evil path. Or
maybe
she's gonna key in on Rennie and the
spiders
and say that means I'm caught in a
web.

But Ding Dong doesn't seem to care

about any of that. All she wants to know
is what the horse is doing.

The bucking.

The kicking.

The flailing.

The fury.

Ding Dong takes it all in, studying me with her dark eyes,
and I wait for her big dream interpretation to ramble out.

But in the end, she only has one thing to say:

“Seems to me, if you are that horse,
you’re tryin’ awfully hard to fight

that fence.”

And that’s all I can think about for the rest of the night.

Friday 8 a.m.

Donya's packing up.

Her 72 hours were officially over
last night

but her mom works second shift at a
factory,

soldering circuit boards, and Donya
says

the supervisor's a real prick and
wouldn't

let her mom off. So she's coming today instead.

I don't ask Donya about her dad.

It feels weird.

How I know so many things about Donya,
but I don't really know anything at all.

Like I know
that when Donya's tense she grinds her teeth,
and that her hair color isn't permanent
because she leaves purple streaks in the sink,

and that there really *was* a girl at
Chicory's

because Donya cries about it in her
sleep.

I know all those inside-out, private
little things.

But I don't even know Donya's last
name

or where she lives, or goes to
school,

or if that buzz-gone-wrong
was really something more.

And I still don't know what to expect
from her.

Not from one minute to the next.

Which is why I'm only half surprised when she takes the silver stud out of her tongue.

“Going away present,” she says.

She can tell I'm trying to puzzle it out,
so she shakes her head and fills in the blanks.

“I told those idiots it was a fresh piercing.

That I had to keep it in for medical reasons.

But really, I just needed it in case of emergency.”

She unscrews the bottom of the
barbell
and shows me the sharp point at the
end.

“Anyway, it’s yours now.”

She drops the stud in my hand and
I curl my fingers around it fast.
When I hear footsteps in the hall
I slip it into my pocket, like instinct.

Bullhorn tells her it’s time to go,
and since Donya’s not the hugging
kind
she gives me a quick wink and one
last *hooyah*.
Then she’s gone.

Jag Says He Doesn't Have Much Choice

Military school.

The Florida Sheriff Youth Ranch.

A group home for troubled teens.

Or suck it up and do the family
meeting.

We're sitting in the TV room and I
say how

it sucks to be fifteen because all our

so-called

choices are like the consolation prizes on a really lame game show.

Sorry you didn't win the BRAND-NEW CAR!

But here's a bag of corn chips and a cheesy bumper sticker.

Jag's lips curl into that sexy half smile

and I feel this global warming rise up

in my body all the way from that tickly

spot in my stomach to top of my head.

I get so nervous that I fumble my notebook, and little wisps of paper flutter to the ground.

Jag drops to one knee and I swear when

he picks them up it look like he's holding

the five pointed petals of white fairy orchid.

And that's when the universe starts moving in slow motion.

Jag reaches across the invisible hula hoop

of space and he touches my arm. The one

that's still laced with screaming red

lines.

And suddenly I'm aware how ugly it is.

But before I can pull my arm back, Jag leans down and plants his lips, soft and tender, right on my scars.

“You're beautiful,” he says. “All of you.”

And then this planetary blackout happens.

Or maybe I just close my eyes.

All I know is that when I open them

Jag's already back in the beanbag

chair

and Roger is walking in the door and it almost seems like nothing happened.

Except for the blush on Jag's cheeks and this feeling inside me that something is different.

It's So Empty

With Skylar and Donya gone,
and Jag in Roger's office
“exploring his alternatives.”

I'm all alone
with my daydreams,
and my unfinished drawing,
and Donya's good-bye present in my
pocket.

I try to concentrate on pencil shading.

But the problem with drawing hands is that

they have just as much expression as a face.

They're emotional.

Personal.

Revealing.

You could paint the freaking *Mona Lisa*,

but if you gave her Skylar's happy hands

or Donya's fighting fists, the whole picture

would go to crap, because that's not

who

Mona Lisa is.

I think about Skylar's question.

Is that you?

Two days ago I told her no.

But today, I think—

yeah, maybe it is.

And then I feel myself being pulled
into the zone

where I'm not really thinking about
what I'm drawing

but stuff is streaming out stroke after
stroke and I'm so

wrapped up in the art there could be

a jackhammer

blaring right next to me and I wouldn't even hear it.

I'm surprised when I put the pencil down.

They're the best hands I've ever drawn.

And they're not hiding inside sleeves, either,

with just the fingertips poking out, holding the fabric tight so the cotton won't roll up.

They're out in the light. Palms open. With soft, slender fingers and just enough

lines and creases to make them look real.

They're the kind of hands an art teacher might

hold up in front of the class and while the other kids

roll their eyes or crumple up their own papers,

the teacher keeps gushing away.

I mean look at these hands, she might say.

So full of hope.

One Hour Before

Roger likes my drawing.

It's much better than the crayon crap hanging in his office where we meet an hour before the family meeting.

He explains how he has to make sure he's releasing me to a stable situation

and that I'll have a strong support network

on the outside.

I think he's gonna lecture me about
not cutting
or how to use the 937 Things to Do
Instead.

But he doesn't.

He talks about relapse.

How it's just a part of recovery.

That I shouldn't beat myself up if it
happens to me.

I know he thinks he's helping
with his fancy Walmart diploma and
all.

But I almost wish he would just shut

up

because it feels like he's giving me permission.

Like he knows it's inevitable.

I'm bound to screw up.

Five Minutes Before

Mom—

Shifting in her seat.

Checking the clock.

Clutching that ugly Vera Bradley
that cost her \$118 but looks like
it's made out of pot holders.

Avery—

Texting away.

Twirling her hair.

Pretending she's not even here.

Dad—

Counting the floor tiles.

Raising his head.

Forcing a smile that looks like it

hurts.

Me—

Closing my eyes.

Forgetting to breathe.

Thinking of what's in my pocket.

The Family Meeting

So don't be disappointed,
but there isn't a big blow-out
with screaming and finger pointing
and a gallon of guilty tears.

And there isn't some kind
of miraculous healing either.

Mom doesn't admit how she favors
Avery because Avery has the same

ghost-blue eyes as her dead first husband.

Avery doesn't come clean about all the nasty things she says to me behind closed doors.

Dad doesn't jump into a phone booth and change from Piglet to Superman.

They just act the same way they always do,
and before long Roger is smiling and shaking hands
and giving them a bunch of papers to sign.

And that's when I start thinking about

the ride home,

squished next to Avery, with her
elbow in my ribs.

And I imagine Sean, craning in his
seat, asking where

I've been until I bury him in an
avalanche of white lies.

I wish I had the calming jar,
or a watermelon to throw off the
roof,
or a baby beagle to hug.

But I don't.

The only things I have
are in my pocket.

It All Comes down to This

I wonder how long it takes to sterilize

a silver stud with hot tap water.

I don't want to be gross or anything

but I don't have much time before

Bullhorn checks on me in the

bathroom.

Two minutes, I guess.

That's probably clean enough.

I close the unlockable door
and listen for the magnet to click
before I unzip my pants.

The hip would be easiest to hide.
Unless they make me undress.
Roger never told me what happens
after the family meeting.

What if they make me strip
and mark up another one of those
naked paper dolls and compare it
to the first one?

Like a Before and After.
Then I'd be screwed.

I should probably do it below the
bikini

line since they didn't make me take
off
my underwear in the ER.

That would be the perfect spot.

And it can be small, too.

I don't have to cut that much.

The family meeting was only
halfway sucky
and I just need a little calm to last
the ride home.

I'm kind of worried about the stud
though,
because it's not very sharp and I hate
the
ripping feeling, which is why I quit

using

glass and switched to Feather
stainless,

but that blade's still in my cell
phone,

so this will have to do.

I pinch the stud between my fingers
and draw a light test line three times,
which is part of my ritual,

don't ask me why,

and by the time I get to line three,

I feel static electricity racing through
my chest

and every beat of my heart growing
bigger

and more expectant, like it knows
something

amazing is about to happen, and then
there's this

swirl in the air like my body is
separating from reality

and just as I'm about to plunge the
point in—

BAM!

I hear the freaking Disney Channel
playing

in Spanish on the other side of the
wall.

And a little boy.

Laughing.

And it's not like some miracle
connect-the-dots

where I think about the pencil
stabber, and then

my brother Sean, and then the
butterfly on my arm,

and I'm so swept up by the Right-
Thing-to-Do

that the silver stud floats out of my
fingers,

and all my desire disappears like
magic.

That's not how it works.

It takes every heaving breath in my
body

to pull that point away from my skin.

And when I do, it doesn't feel
like I crushed a monster.
Or dodged a bullet.
Or did something to be proud of.

It feels like a freaking train wreck.

And I have to flush the stud down the
toilet
just to make sure I don't pick it back
up again.

But then I hear that laughing,
and I look at my arm
where I wrote

Sean

by the butterfly wing,
in caring big-sister cursive
and suddenly I'm overcome
with a gladness that the butterfly
is still alive on my arm
and not in butterfly heaven,
or wherever it is that dead
permanent marker goes.

And that's when I admit it.
Just in my head.
To myself.
One inaudible breath.

I need help.

And I wouldn't say it feels
like a *huge* first step.

Not in the Mount Everest way
that Skylar said it would.

But it definitely feels
like *something*.

And just for a second,
a swirl of promise
tickles up inside me.

And I feel calm.
Without the guilt.

Friday 3:22 p.m.

So here's the thing about being
Released.

You get back everything—
your belt,
your shoelaces,
the perfume bottles from your purse.

your wallet,
your cell phone,

the blade behind the battery.

And they give you
brochures,
and pamphlets,
and these useless psych referrals.

And then that's it.

You open up the door and walk out.
And the world's still the same sharp
trigger as when you left it.

So that makes you wonder
what's gonna happen next.
Like was getting Baker Acted
enough of a wake-up call?

Or can a kiss really change you?

Or a butterfly make you strong?

I wonder that myself.

But like I said before, my life's
not some riveting novel that's
gonna tie up all neat at the end.

Not in 72 freaking hours.

The only thing I can say is that
when I walk out those doors,

I see Sean's face shining
like that blue jellyfish,
bright enough to light the dark,

and that butterfly
still alive on my arm,
eager for another day,
and I feel my troubles
unzipped just a little,

and that seed of hope
budding in my pocket.

And it's not like I get
all happy ending-ish
and ride off into the sunset
or some crap like that.

But I do feel like I have a choice.
Like a fork in the road or whatever.

I just hope 937 Things to Do Instead

are enough.

Because to tell you the truth,
I could go either way.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

I knew from the very beginning that the question would come up eventually.

So where did you get the idea for your book?

And I knew when the time came, I'd have two choices. To give some vague, veiled answer. Or to tell the truth. But the truth doesn't belong to me. It belongs to my daughter. And it is only with her blessing that I share it.

Like Kenna, my daughter found herself surrounded by cutting as early as the sixth grade. She tried it, experimentally at first, but was soon drawn into the strangely addictive allure of the blade. Eventually, she was caught cutting at school and involuntarily committed under Florida's Baker Act.

I wrote this book in the year that followed.

I think it's important to note that while this story has roots in a real-life event, it is ultimately a work of fiction. But it's the kind of fiction that has a responsibility to tell the truth. So I spent hundreds of hours researching the blogs and Tumblr pages of countless teens

struggling with self-harm. I sank into their stories, looked at their agonizing photos, and tried to understand. In the end, my characters and the events they experience in *Kiss of Broken Glass* are a fictionalized composite of all these brave and aching voices.

Waiting to be heard.

RESOURCES

If you or someone you care about is struggling with self-harm, you are not alone. There are resources and people who can help, and many different roads to recovery. These are just a few examples. Since I am not a clinical professional, I cannot endorse these specific resources or accept responsibility for any of the services they provide. But it is my hope that this

information will help you begin exploring the power of support and treatment and that you will find your own path to healing.

www.selfinjury.com—S.A.F.E.

Alternatives is a nationally recognized treatment approach, professional network, and educational resource base, which is committed to helping you and others achieve an end to self-injurious behavior.

1-800-DON'T-CUT—S.A.F.E

Alternatives referral line.

www.twloha.com—To Write Love On Her Arms is a nonprofit movement dedicated to presenting hope and finding help for people struggling with

depression, addiction, self-injury, and suicide.

www.recoveryourlife.com—

Recover Your Life is one of the largest self-harm support communities on the internet, welcoming and supporting people who struggle with self-harm and other issues such as eating disorders, mental health issues, abuse, and more.

www.selfharm.net—*One of the most comprehensive sources of self-injury information on the web, including definitions, explanations of why, etiology and demographics, and an in-depth self-help section.*

1-800-SUICIDE—National hotline for people contemplating suicide.

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