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[The Word]

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“Don’t you ever do this to me.”

I fall into her arms and the tears wipe every thought of the word away. The word that found its place in my distorted head two years ago, slowly moving into an unwelcoming home. The word that viciously broke in and knocked me onto the cold bathroom floor. The word that I can barely utter aloud without the blood stinging from my open wounds. The word that I silence to remain numb — until now.

The smoke rises from the diffuser, clouding my thoughts as the colors change, but I can only see black and white. I sit straight up on the leather couch and do not allow myself to become comfortable here. I dig my nonexistent nails into my palms, making three marks: therapist number three. The four walls create a barrier for my sanity. I notice the box of tissues to my right, the dim lighting, and the piles of self-help books. I have been here before. Not here in Harrisonburg, but in Baltimore, a place I call home. Lost in the place I left, and lost here at school, maybe home is not a place but a feeling. Either way, I am homeless, trying to reach a nonexistent destination. Maybe my home is on the other side.

“Why are we here?”

I do not know how I got here. A nineteen-year-old girl with every reason to smile decided she would never be enough. No tragedy, no extreme hardship, and no reason to believe the torturing thoughts that dragged me onto another couch. I do not know how to get back up when I cannot wrap my head around how I fell in the first place. The constant battle with the mirror, the kitchen cabinet, and the whispering dark voices. Break down, put it on a shelf, “I’m doing better,” repeat.

“What do you want to get out of this?”

I desperately want to break the cycle. I want to walk away from the ledge; eyes wide open, and run straight into my own arms. I want to look my mother in the eyes and tell her without a crack in my voice that I will never leave her. I want to unlock my door and let people inside. I want to feel the sun on my freckled skin and allow the scars to be visible. I want to feel alive.

“Are you scared?”

I am terrified. Terrified to be too much or too little. Terrified to let anyone see everything I hide. Terrified of not living when time is so exceptionally fragile. Terrified of dying too soon yet not soon enough. Terrified of being loved when I cannot bargain a bone in my body to love myself. Terrified of my mind and how it changes what I see. Terrified of life. Terrified of me.

“Tell me about your struggles.”

The words pour out of me like a broken faucet I cannot turn off. On the first couch, I would never dare let “eating disorder” or “depression” slip from my tongue. Now there is no hesitation. I want to acknowledge the existence of these demons and bring them into reality. I cannot fight my opponents if I do not recognize their presence. The back and forth battle is exhausting. Opportunities to surrender lure me in, but I want to win. Most days, I want to win.

“What happens on the other days?”

I feel nothing so strong, an emptiness so full, but only I can hear the ticking time bomb. I put one foot in front of the other but feel myself moving backwards; the past is all too consuming. I wonder how I can slip so easily into the darkness when the light once tricked me into believing I could escape, but I am powerless in breaking away from myself. On these days, I am tired. I am tired of asking why and wondering what is wrong

with me. I am tired of pretending there is a solution when I am on couch number three. I am tired of being tired.

“Have you ever thought about...suicide?”

My eyes drop from her view and the guilt brings my head into my shaking hands. The word: seven letters that have the capacity to rip off the Band-Aids and let the blood spew uncontrollably. I lay on couch number one and number two when the word broke the barriers of the four walls. I cannot silence the word any longer. Suddenly, I know why I am here. I am here because I have reached a dead end. I want to crumple the map in my hand and create a new path. I will not turn around or look for signs ahead. Take each step forward and make my mark. “She was here.” No, I am here.

The word is not confined to a therapy office. The word lives and breathes outside of these walls. The word became more than just a word when I received the news about my best friend’s father. I never knew the girl who had lived with me and brought me out of many breakdowns would feel the indescribable pain of the word when reality struck. The word is a monster that stole her father. Standing in a room full of people dressed in black, I finally noticed. The word does not come and go from people’s lives. The word leaves behind permanent stains in a world of temporary pain.

“Don’t you ever do this to me.”

I hold onto her tighter and promise I never will.