

I knew her sadness first; saw it in thin, scarred lines on her pale skin, heard it coming from her mouth when she told me her name. The sad parts of our souls recognized each other, found each other, and though mine was much smaller, more tamed, it was enough for us to become close friends quickly. I told her I'd be there for her no matter what, not knowing what that meant until she called me one night from the water, her body urging her to wade in and never come back up. I begged her not to, told her we'd get through it together. She promised she wouldn't, but she didn't say never. She just said, "Fine, not tonight."

After that my world became consumed with getting her from one tonight to the next and somehow I'd taken on the task of saving her before I'd had any of the joy of being her friend. She fought me often, but only as hard as someone with little fight left can.

My mother told me, it is not your responsibility to keep someone else alive.

But if it wasn't my responsibility it would be hers, and that was a responsibility I knew she couldn't bear. If I didn't, no one would, and then when she inevitably went into the water and never came

back—I would be right to blame myself.

The second time I got that phone call, she didn't make me any promises, instead layering one apology over another, eulogizing herself before there was even a body. She thanked me for my friendship, tossing out a casual goodbye the same way you would at the end of a party you didn't really want to be at.

Then she stopped answering her phone and I called my mom, then my sister, then the head of HR to find her address, then her one last time. That time, she answered, and I told her with what little voice I had left that I was sending the police to her house if she didn't guarantee me she'd be okay. She paused, and I could hear her weighing her options on the other end, cycling through them like any other routine decision; coffee or tea, red wine or white, live or die. She finally spoke, as decided as before, saying okay, she would go to bed unharmed. There was no need to send the police, she promised, she wasn't in the mood for dying anymore today anyway. I believed her that night. I chose to believe her, because believing her was easier than believing the part of me that knew she was probably lying, and even if she did get through tonight there would just be another tonight tomorrow.

When she showed up the next morning at work I sobbed so hard I had to take the rest of the day off. I held my breath for the next four months, afraid of what would have to happen for me to get any of my oxygen back. At least once the worst thing in the world happens, there's nothing left to fear. It's the moments before the worst thing that are fucking terrifying.

I got to keep Chloe, somehow, and it's my most selfish victory. Because I don't know if she stayed because she really wanted to, or because she just didn't want to let me down.

That was two years ago. And even though there's always a part of me that's waiting—waiting to learn that the progress she's made has all been a lie, waiting for the call that this time she just did it without consulting me first—she's still here. She kept her promise, and she stayed.

She doesn't call me from the water anymore. Now, she calls me from land, feet flat on her bedroom floor, her girlfriend laughing beside her. Now, she promises she'll stay, not just for tonight but for this week, for this year. Even when the air gets cold, even when the water looks warmer, she turns around, and she walks back inside, and she stays.