

Why we need you

AUDREY
KELLY

Column



As I run, I feel the wetness of the pavement soak into my socks, making the gravel feel more and more rough with each step. It is 1:52 on New Year's Day morning, and I just got a call from my stepmother that she's going to kill herself.

We haven't talked in months, but thank God she is only a few houses down from where I'm staying. On the road, I see the cars with the drunken drivers make their way home from their parties, and I have to dodge each one.

But all that my brain was concerned with was: is she alive?

I just need to get there. Get there, and deal with whatever I am going to witness.

I scream as I shove the front door open, calling her name as loud as I can. The dogs don't greet me with their usual barking, and I know something has happened. I hear my estranged step brother's voice, riddled with the fear. She lies in her bed, pills everywhere, and looks a shade of green and grey that I can't put my finger on. She looks like a corpse.

I know in that moment that I won't ever forget the smell of alcohol and medicine radiating off her body.

My step-brother is crouched over sobbing

as his girlfriend calls the ambulance, and I go straight to where the pills are spilled. She can't even recognize her own son, but she asks if everything is fine.

I say that she is okay -- I lie.

Because I need to keep her awake.

Where my dad is, I have no idea. But the sight of broken, whiskey filled glasses and fist shaped holes in the wall give me my answer. I sing to her, I shake her, and I explain to her who we are at least five different times within the span of 25 minutes.

That's how long they take to arrive — 25 minutes, yet the station is only a mile away from the house.

And as each second goes by, I can feel her slipping away.

An hour ago I was watching High School Musical with my friend, and now I watch as the paramedics drop my stepmother off of the gurney, giving her a bruise that will last for weeks — if she survives.

Dad still isn't answering. We follow the truck to the hospital, and all we can do is sit in our own awkward silence, the past few months

weighing on us all. There's small talk, crying and possible reconciliation, but the silence in that waiting room doesn't make the loudness of it all go away.

In the span of five hours, her oldest son, mother and ex-husband show up — who she had also called to say goodbye. Dad finally arrives at seven in the morning, and the look we all give him says all that needs to be said.

“
But the walls still seem haunted when I walk in the house.”

AUDREY KELLY

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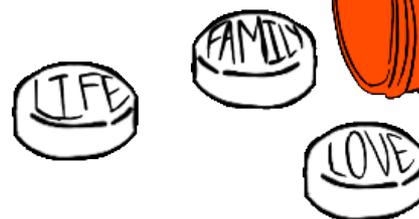


photo illustration // Joey Watts

Apparently they had fought, he left the house, then turned off his phone. This is when she made the calls.

After seven hours of hearing nothing, I realize I have to get back before anyone wakes up. I sneak back into the house as though the events of the past night haven't happened, and finally get the rest my body aches for.

The dose of Xanax she took doesn't kill her, but she's in the coma for two weeks.

And when she wakes, no one knows what to say. The family has been split for months, and is now brought back together by the demons in someone else's mind.

It's been two years now. I don't celebrate New Years Eve anymore.

The son who was with me when it happened hasn't spoken to her since -- he can't forgive the sight. She and Dad worked out their differences through therapy and cutting down on drinking. I see them at least every month, and I refuse to hold the past against her, knowing very well the feeling that she went through.

But the walls still seem haunted when I walk in the house.

And she knows now that she needs to be alive -- for her. For her family. For her career, her kids, her future. For love.

If you are feeling like this and hiding it like she did, please talk about it. Think about

Warning signs of mental illness include...

- Trying to harm one's self
- Severe, out-of-control, risk-taking behavior that causes harm to self or others
- Significant weight loss
- Excessive use of alcohol and/or drugs
- Drastic changes of mood, behavior or personality
- Intense worries or fears that get in the way of daily activities

24/7 Crisis Text Line
Text "NAMI" to 741741
National Suicide Prevention Lifeline
1-800-273-8255

the things you would lose if you did, even the smallest of things. If she can get better, you can too. I've seen it happen. I've seen people enjoy life again after losing all hope.

That's what's so special about hope -- it's infinite.