

Incite Short Story Submission

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A short story on (not) facing the consequences of your actions. (second person POV and non-linear storyline)

Prompt: The impact of taking significant risks on their own lives and the lives of those around them.

September, Two Months Since the Surgery

There are some days when the ache becomes unbearable. When the weight of guilt inevitably comes crashing down once again; unstoppable, in the way the ocean laps the sand and the sun kisses the horizon. Time after time, wave after wave of agony.

You pray to whatever god may be out there for it to end.

Then again, why should God listen to a ***murderer*** such as yourself?

—

June, One Year & One Month Until the Surgery

It is terribly hot outside. The summer heat has crept on early this year, bleaching everything in hues of blue and green so distinctly *summer*. It has carved itself into the backs of your eyelids, bright and blinding.

You are sitting in the parking lot of your university campus. There is a dead cicada by your feet that you have been trying to ignore, alongside the itch in the back of your throat.

Gracelessly, someone slumps down next to you.

She has a thick bandage taped to her cheek, you notice immediately. Choppy strands of ink lay damp across her forehead, glossy under the gaze of the hanging sun. There is a plastic name tag threatening to fall off her t-shirt; *Seo-yeong*, it reads.

You frown at her, hoping she will leave you alone, but instead, she leans forward, dark, dark eyes, sharp too, assessing.

You sigh, as obvious and irritable as you can make it.

The itch in your throat grows stronger.

—

December, Six Months Since the Surgery

You're fairly sure that today is Tuesday. Recently, it's gotten difficult to tell the days apart. 'Dissociation', the lady with hideous blonde hair tells you. 'Mental shock', she says, like it's obvious, like the sound of her voice doesn't color your vision red. Who is she to tell you who you are?

You realize with a start that you don't know.

Who is she?

Who are *you*?

—

January, Seven Months Since the Surgery

It's 3 am and you're allergic to your favorite salad dressing and the lights are too bright and the GUILT is eating away at your bones.

Why are you like this?

- A. You were born this way
- B. You're evil
- C. You didn't take your medication
- D. The macaroni tasted funny
- E. Your parents say, "You overexert yourself"
- F. The therapist says, "Post-traumatic stress disorder"

—

June, One Year & One Month Until the Surgery

You meet Seo-yeong in the summer. After twenty-something minutes of silence, you say, in tradition, because this is the first thing you say to anyone of interest, "Tell me something awful."

She turns to you and laughs, clicking a lollipop—seemingly conjured from thin air—against her teeth. She says, with an easy smile that digs into your flesh, "It's not your fault"

You blink.

—

April, Ten Months Since the Surgery

This is humiliating.

You're a licensed surgeon now.

You've worked your entire life for this.

It will take less than an hour. There's little to no risk of death.

Pull yourself together.

There is no reason to be nervous.

Your hands shake anyway when you meet dark eyes in the reflection of the scalpel.

—

February, Five Months Until the Surgery

"Are you inviting me to your house...for pancakes?"

Even speaking the sentence out loud feels abnormal.

"Yeah, why?" Seo-yeong shrugs. "Got something better to do?"

You feel your vision narrow. As a soon-to-be doctor, free time has basically become something of a dream. You have two essays due in an hour and a lab report tomorrow that you have yet to start. Seo-yeong, as your classmate—dare you say *friend*, would certainly know that. You wonder if she's mocking you.

"It's fine if you don't want to. More pancakes for me—"

"Okay," you interrupt. She raises an eyebrow in surprise.

"Okay, I'll come."

Later on, much, much later, you will realize how much of a mistake this was. You will claw at your own eyes and choke on your own tongue, drowning in regret. And still, it remains your fault.

Still, you are a coward.

At least for now, you only know of dry pancakes and laughter.

—

May, Eleven Months Since the Surgery

There's something wrong with your mind, you've learned. Something. With your brain. With your neurology—whatever. The headaches, the vomiting, the guilt that swallows you alive in the maw of grief. The way you can't do anything without remembering **her**. A lot of things. You wish it would all go away.

—

July, Forty-Eight Hours Until the Surgery

"You're not ready for _____. What in the world makes you _____ gamble with a patient's _____ for what?!"

You've always hated that screeching desperation. When they yell and scream and cry and beg, so vulnerably, uniquely human that it makes your stomach churn. She's yelling now, yelling and begging with her hands wrapped around yours, like a prayer, ice cold. She is staring at you, scarred cheek stretching with each movement of her mouth, but the louder she gets, the less any of her words make sense.

"Look, just cancel the procedure, *please*. Get someone else to do it, it's not worth the risk—"

"Stop." The words slip out of your mouth as if on autopilot. Your head hurts.

...

For some reason, the silence only makes you more inclined to talk.

"I've been practicing for months, just because you don't think I'm good enough doesn't mean I'm not ready. This is my chance to gain some real experience. If you want to stay second-rate trash for the rest of your life, go ahead. But don't expect me to drop everything and ruin my life with you."

You're not sure when it was that venom began to bleed through your words, bitterness welling under your tongue.

Does it matter anyway?

—

July, One Hour Before the Surgery

If there was one thing your parents had taught you, it was to always be prepared. Expect the unexpected, and all that.

In particular, they were firm believers of Murphy's First Law:

If something can go wrong, it will.

You're not sure why you think of this now.

—

July, the Surgery

Something is wrong.

Something has gone terribly wrong.

You've just killed your patient.

It's your fault, it's your fault and it doesn't matter that you didn't *mean* to because you did and it's your fault. He's dead and you're not allowed to panic. You're not allowed to panic, you idiot, you're not the one who's dead! It was an accident, entirely avoidable; and now you are standing over his broken body and his blood is splattered on the floor and—and—and—

STOP PANICKING, think about this logically: he's dead and it's your fault and your heart is beating so hard in your chest and you can't hear much over the rush of your blood but it'll be okay, right? Because it was an accident and you didn't mean it, but you have to take responsibility anyway, you have to tell someone, you have to—

—

You were studying to become doctors; neurosurgeons, specifically.

You liked to think that you were good friends. That she liked you as much as you liked her, even if it didn't look that way to others.

So when you made a mistake—

A messy, irresponsible, completely avoidable mistake; something that paying a little more attention during the procedure could have prevented...

"W-what do I do? I... I think I messed up— It was an accident, I swear... H-help ...!"

She was the person you went to.

And in your ceaseless panic, in the lingering venom that coated your tongue...

She was the one who took the blame.

“You sick piece of *** Because of you, my son is *** Go to ***!”

“Aren’t you studying so you can save lives! How could you do the exact opposite?!”

“Seo-yeong we’re letting you go from the program”

Those dark, dark eyes still haunt you.

—

???

IS IT YOUR FAULT?

- A. No
- B. Of course not
- C. It was an accident!
- D. Yes
- E. Shut up
- F. Shut up
- G. Shut up
- H. Shut up
- I. Shut up
- J. Shut up
- K. Kill yourself
- L. I’m going to kill myself
- M. Seriously
- N. Oh my god
- O. ***It’s my fault.***