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Category: Short Story

Naproxen

Sleeping next to her felt cruel. I didn't know whether to me, or her, or both. I hoped she cried big fat tears about me in the shower; I hoped she debated whether or not to kiss my hand when she gave me manicures. I also knew that if she did kiss me, I wouldn't know what to do, and we would probably just end up sleeping next to each other again, fully clothed. And anyway, she shook in bed, like an overworked radiator. She claimed this was anxiety about being in the big city combined with a terrible period, which I had diagnosed for her as endometriosis.

This diagnosis could've been wrong, because she had never had pain medication before, and so likely was experiencing what normal people just dull with Advil or Aleve or whatever else sat expectant in the medicine cabinet. She had never taken Advil or Tylenol or Motrin or the best of them all, Naproxen. This was because her dad was into Chinese medicine and would just tell her to cut out milk and take a cold bath. Well, she was in the big city with me for the entirety of our spring break, and her goateed father was far away. And she was sleeping in my foam-topped bed, her leg touching my pajama pants all night. So, no, she would not be cutting out milk and taking a cold bath. I would give her a white pill and a sweating glass of water and lift this hurt from her like a shirt she had been wearing.

I wanted to pay her student loans, looming like GoodYear blimps above her. I wanted to buy her a new house, a new guinea pig, all the hair dye she could want. I could give one gift to her now; I could show her pain pills. I could dull the screeching of her uterine lining and maybe once that clamor stopped she would notice that she loved me and feeling her toe touch the leg of my pajama pants would feel extra special.

I told her all this in simpler terms. You can't overwhelm people, especially when blood is pouring out of them. She slipped on her shoes and we ran outside, to the CVS across the street. The red glare of the CVS sign usually annoyed me, but tonight it looked rosy. We looked so small in the security monitors. I pocketed a bottle of my favorite pain-duller, Naproxen, and ran.

She followed me back across the street, past the doorman who always said hello to me in a creepy, low voice, past the office of the superintendent with the wonderful last name of Murderkayev. We collapsed back in the foam bed, and after wrestling with the child's lock top, I deposited two tablets into her hand.

I'll get you water, I said. I'll be back in a minute.

I don't know if I want to take them right now she said. I'm tired.

No, no, you should take them before you go to sleep. So you don't hurt during the night.

They don't have copper in them or anything? My dad says copper can rupture the spleen.

I don't think so. I take this all the time, and my mom does, too. I'm not ruptured.

She didn't respond. Instead, she went on her phone and opened Instagram. She scrolled silently through videos of slime and sand being cut and cakes decorated to look like turkeys being sliced, revealing the inside to be chocolate buttercream.

Let me take a picture of you she said. Make a face.

I scrunched my nose into my eyes. I scrunched so hard I saw swirls like oil spills against my forehead. The flash lit the insides of my eyelids red. I went on my phone to see it posted on her account, my name tagged under hers. I loved that: proof of relations. In the picture, my lips were stretched thin in a smile, my chin jutted forward. The

caption: *this klepto.*

She was still sitting in the bed, entranced by videos of honeycombs being shaved down. My cheeks turned red. I typed a comment: *She thinks Advil ruptures your spleen* I heard her phone ding next to me. She didn't look at me. Another comment from her appeared: *Everyone who hates this bitch like my comment* I liked the comment. We were joking, I was in on the joke. I prayed that no one else would like it.

A boy from the grade below us did, one who had a crush on her. Both of our phones beeped with the notification. I wanted to pinch her, I wanted to kick her out of the apartment, out of my city. I laughed out loud.

People are going to think we're actually fighting I said. *Do you think they'll know it's a joke?*

I needed reassurance, I needed her to laugh and delete the caption and type out some heart and star and butterfly emojis.

It's funny, she said. *That's all. I'm going to take my shower soon.*

You do that, I said. *Do you still want the Naproxen?*

No. I'm okay. I sorta like when it hurts. It makes me more alert.

I took a long time changing into my pajamas so she would see my naked body if she popped back into the room for a pair of socks or her travel bottle of Pantene. She didn't pop back in; she had everything she needed. I laid on the bed alone, tried to imprint my outline into the memory foam. I wanted to stay as alert as she was, ready for some large task that would never arrive.

Neither of us had eaten any dinner. I felt the bones of my pelvis through my pajama pants. It was comforting to grab onto something hard like that. I slinked downstairs and took two kiwis from the fruit bowl in the kitchen. I carried the kiwis, along with two silver soup spoons, up to the room. I cut my kiwi in half, and she came back into the room in a robe. I handed her the other kiwi and one of the soup spoons.

I was hungry, I said. *There's one for you.*

Thank you, she said. *These ones are so green on the inside.*

We sat on the bed, spooning the kiwi guts into our mouths. I put the gutted kiwi skins on the side table and turned the lights out. She started to shake beside me in bed again, her whole body rippling under the covers. I stared at the back of her head until she stilled. I grabbed at the sheets, at my pelvis sticking up like a mound under the covers. I felt so green on the inside, I wanted to take Naproxen for some hurt I was sure existed in my body.