

"How have you been sleeping?" The question startles you. You hadn't been paying attention.

"Well enough," you lie. The truth is that you simply haven't been. Sleeping, that is. Nothing more than a half hour completely on accident. But if you tell your doctor that, they'll put you back on the sleeping pills. You already know you'll just end up throwing them out. They taste awful. And well, you don't want to sleep. So really, it just makes more sense to lie and say that you are. Less complicated that way.

"How many hours?"

"Oh, uh. Around six or seven a night. I have trouble staying asleep longer than that." The script comes easily to you now. You play the part of recovering insomniac well. Of course, you've never had insomnia, but the doctor doesn't know that. No one does. They wouldn't believe the truth.

"That's normal for people coming off of medication," your doctor says. They pause and peer at you over their glasses. "Of course, it's normal for people to relapse as well." They say this meaningfully, and you wonder what it is they're seeing that gives it away. You tried your best to remove any signs of sleep deprivation, but the look they give you... Your doctor knows.

"I'm not relapsing," you say, trying your best to inject as much confidence into the statement as you can. Technically, it's true; you can't relapse into a condition you never had. "A little stressed out, but I'm trying to be diligent about my sleeping habits."

Your doctor nods and turns back to their computer, having seemingly accepted that explanation. You breathe out a sigh, relieved.

The visit goes quickly after that, with you giving fake answers to all the questions and nodding along to all your doctor's recommendations. It's bright when you step outside the clinic, the world a muted light gray. It's quiet too, which makes you uneasy. It always seems to happen when it's quiet. You shove earbuds into your ears, already playing music, and make your way home quickly.

It's not long before darkness starts to descend and you curse the rapidly approaching autumn. You unlock your door just as the setting sun turns the sky a vivid purple and let yourself inside. You don't dare take the earbuds out, already knowing a silent house will greet you. Instead, you start methodically turning on every light in every room, chasing out every single dark corner in your home. It's neurotic and somewhat unnecessary, but every bit helps. You've done this every night for weeks so it must be doing something. The process is much quicker than it used to be.

After you're done, you debate making dinner, but you don't have the appetite. You eat just as much as you sleep these days. You search for the energy to try anyway, and find none. You instead find a spot to sit on the floor in your living room, knowing by now that the temptation of the couch is too much for you.

It's a long night. After so many days spent doing this, you are running out of things to do to occupy yourself for the long stretches of night. You spend hours scrolling on social media, downloading and playing random games, finding new things to watch on tv, and just staring into the distance listening to music.

Then the lights go out.

You shoot to your feet, having made no conscious decision to do so. You rush over to the light switch and flick it a few times. Nothing. You take one earbud out and turn towards the nearest window. There's no storm. Not even any wind. In your mind, there are no thoughts. Just a litany of panic and dread and fear.

You shove the earbud back in and rush over to where you left your phone on the floor. After some fumbling, you manage to get it into your hands and turn it on. You hold it shakily, not quite sure what to do now.

Your phone rings.

The vibration startles you so bad that you almost drop it. It takes you three tries to answer.

"Hello?"

"Hey, sorry to call so late," your best friend says. There's some chatter in the background. "Do you still have power?"

"No. Do you?" You're hoping, *praying*, they say yes.

"I don't know, actually. I'm not at home. Still at work and all the machines just went down. We're running on the generators right now."

You had forgotten they work the night shift. "Do you think it's a blackout? I thought it might be, but there's no storm."

"Really? It's not raining where you are? Because it's *pouring* here. It's literally raining *sideways*, it's insane."

Your heart may very have fallen out of your chest, the way it drops. The dread is so stark that your hands have gone numb from it. You drop the phone. It hits the floor with a clatter, but your friend's voice still sounds like it's right in your ear. They chatter for a minute then pause, obviously waiting for you to respond. A few seconds pass then they laugh, like you've said something particularly funny. Music is still playing in your earbuds.

*Fuck*, you think, *It's too late*. Nothing you do will save you now.

You rip the earbuds out and toss them to the floor. The house is dark and silent. You run to the front door and rip it open. It's

only once you're outside that you realize that you don't have shoes on.

There's no storm outside, but there are puddles as if it's rained recently. When you step in one, it ripples. Your socks stay dry. There's no one walking the streets, so there's no one to see the way you break down screaming and crying. It doesn't matter if there was. You can scream yourself hoarse. You can cry yourself into a stupor. They wouldn't see you. They wouldn't hear you.

You lash out in your distress. You pick up a loose brick you find and send it crashing through the glass window of a storefront. You crawl through the hole you've created and trash the inside of the store too. It's only tangentially through your destruction that you realize it must be a pawn shop.

Eventually, you tire and you collapse right where you are in the middle of all the glass and loose jewelry. You cry because you don't know what else to do. You don't know how long you sit there, and it doesn't matter. You can't get out on your own.

Then you blink, and you're waking up in your bed.

It's your alarm that woke you. You turn it off and stand. Your clothes are different. You're wearing pajamas. Your phone is laying in your bed, not on the living room floor where you left it.

You realize belatedly that your alarm going off means you have work today. It should be Saturday. It's not. It's Wednesday. You get ready in a daze, trying so very hard not to think about it. *It's a dream, you tell yourself, It's just a nightmare.*

Your home is much cleaner than you remember. Most of your things are not where you remember putting them. It takes you several minutes looking for a specific shirt before you realize it's already with the dirty clothes.

As you go in the kitchen to grab something quick to eat before work, you see a note stuck to the fridge with a magnet. You don't recall owning any magnets, nor buying this one. You live alone. There's no one else to leave a note but you. You don't remember leaving this one.

*We need eggs :), the note reads, Also, I threw out all those disgusting energy drinks. You should really be more mindful of our health.*

You feel a trickle of fear creep through your calm facade. You force yourself not to panic. It's fine. You must have just forgotten that you left that there. Only crazy people think... You can't finish the thought.

You leave the house knowing you won't be sleeping tonight. You pass the pawn shop on your way to work. The window is intact.