



“Care”

The first time she cut herself making his breakfast, it was an accident. Six stitches across the thumb and palm, cutting frozen bread with a blunt knife. The pain had been dull, somehow distant as he drove her to the ER, dull while he waited in the parking lot, smoking, dull as she sat in the clean hum of fluorescent light.

When the doctor first called her in, he didn’t seem remarkable. She laid back in the chair, her mind elsewhere. But when he gently took her hand, an unfamiliar feeling writhed inside her. He peeled off the ruined dish towel and spoke to her reassuringly as he cleaned the places where the flesh had been opened. She expected pain when the doctor began to stitch—she’d braced for it. Instead, a strange shiver ran up her body from the places where the needle touched. Her head swam, her stomach nauseous with butterflies. A rising sensation climbed her ribcage and her thighs clenched tight together. She shuddered as the last stitch was pulled tight, firm. The doctor misread her reaction as pain, and so as he finished cleaning her hand, he apologized.

Afterwards, as she walked back to her boyfriend's truck, she felt any sense of embarrassment fall away. Her involuntary moan had startled the doctor, but she didn't mind. The pall of cigarette smoke enclosed her as she climbed into the passenger seat, but she rolled down the window. And as she looked out into the bright morning, she smiled.

By Harman Burns