

# Hold On Till May

It started and ended with death.

Both of which were mine.

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The Beginning:

It began with the death of my soul; everything inside me that shined, all the little pebbles that collected in my heart over the years--the memories, the joy, the foolish giddiness I possessed-- vanished as if they had been surgically removed for my own good, as if they were my useless tonsils that were taken out when I was seven. The problem was they weren't my useless tonsils. They were things I needed, things I wanted; although that didn't necessarily occur to my mind. My mind was a clumsy place where things fell in and out of place, and I always tripped over whatever random, pointless, cluttered junk was piled up in there. It used to be playful and imaginative, that changed. Drastically.

The "big change" happened when I was thirteen. It was a soul devouring, mind altering, emotion skewering event. It didn't happen gradually like that of a sunset or sunrise, but all at once as if someone had just shoved it down my throat, into my heart, where it spread through my veins to infiltrate my lungs--making it hard to breathe-- into my brain--making it hard to think rationally--and my eyes--making it hard not to break down every day, every night, tears streaming with no sign of ceasing. I couldn't control it--I had no choice. It happened and I couldn't stop it.

It was depression. It had crept into all the tiny crevices of my body and dug its claws in to stay and feast on me. There was no specific, life-changing event that occurred to invite this unwelcome entity into me, it just opened the jarred door of my being and slipped in to greet me. I suppose it liked me, because here I am, still haunted to this very day, four and a half years later.

My name is Cora, and this is the story of how I died of sadness.

Every day was hard. It was an uphill battle, as they say--whoever "they" are. It was challenging to get out of bed, brush my teeth, take a shower, get dressed. The simplest actions became excruciating. But I did them. Every day I got out of my comfortable bed, out of the cocoon I made of my quilts and sheets. I put on a brave face--a fake smile--and walked the walked, talked the talk, again, as "they" say.

I walked to school, music blaring, avoiding silence. Silence was the worst when it came to depression. It let the thoughts flood in--you're miserable, insufferable, nobody loves you, you're weak, why are you even alive, why are you even trying, you'll never get anywhere in life, never do any--you get the point.

I kept walking, glancing at the cars passing me by. I could so easily jump in front of them, make it an accident. But I didn't. I don't know why, I guess the masochist in me loved to suffer on living. I strode into my government class, taking my corner seat by the door. Almost immediately my best friend, Lucas, walks in and plops down next to me.

"Hey,"

"Hey," I said quietly, smiling slightly.

"You look dead; did you get any sleep at all last night?" He knew I almost never slept. I woke up at least six times a night, which is exhausting, but I guess I got used to it.

"I got some," I shrugged as he rolled his eyes at me. Class began and ended the same as always--Ms. Tabil rushing in at the last minute, laughing it off and lecturing for twenty minutes, video on something boring and pointless, then screaming at us as we walk out the door not to forget to do our homework. And every day, I would stare at a wall while still somehow paying attention when I needed to. I would stare and think about how much I want to die, or how empty I feel and no one would notice. I would suffer silently in a room full of people, some of them my friends, and no one would notice.

People think depression is loud, that it's sobbing, being constantly sad, but it's not. Depression is silent. It is tattered feelings or none at all. It's being awake at four a.m. and staring at the wall, feeling like there's nothing, you're nothing and this whole "living" thing is pointless, hopeless. You feel nothing and everything at the same time, and you have moments, precious moments when you actually feel something, when you actually smile because you're best friend got his foot stuck in a fence and you're snorting because you're laughing so hard you can't breathe. But you only get moments, few and very far between, and then you revert back to the void shell you always are. It is a slow erosion of self, and it's not fair.

I shuffle to my next class, looking up to only smile at a face in the crowd. I try so hard to smile as much as I can, not to only seem okay, but to make sure if someone is in my place also; they at least get

one smile today, to make it through the day. I flash one more smile towards a tall, brutish looking senior. He smiles back and I smile wider, feeling enlightened.

My existence was acknowledged.

I walk into Calculus feeling hopeful. I know it's ridiculous, but the smallest of gestures give me hope, give me a reason to keep going. The small inkling of optimism in me shines through some days, making me feel as if I have a chance to make it to the ripe age of eighteen.

I scribble notes as the teacher drones on about modeling applications to physics. None of it really matters.

Beads of sweat dribble down my forehead--I swear they build in windows to classrooms that don't open to taunt us--there's no air conditioning and the room is starting to get sticky from the forty-something odd bodies shoved into it. I roll up the sleeves of my jean shirt and the cuffs of my ripped skinny jeans. You think the rips would give me some ventilation, but appearances are deceiving. I glance around to make sure no one is looking and roll my sleeves a little further.

"What's that," the girl next to me whispers, pointing at my arm.

Shit.

I hurriedly pull at my sleeves to hide the red gashes criss-crossing my arms.

"Oh, uhm, nothing. My cat got feisty the other day and tore into my arm is all," I babbled, trying to convince her. She nodded, acknowledging my story, and turned away. My hands began to shake--how much did she see, did she know what they were, did she see, is she going to tell someone, does she think terribly of me now, she saw them, she saw them, how could I be so irresponsible, how could I be so negligent as to roll up my sleeves, stupid, stupid stupid, I should have cut myself somewhere no one could see no matter if I rolled up my pants or sleeves, no matter what I wore, how could I be so idiotic, but I only wanted relief, I only wanted to feel something, to feel anything, even if it was pain, when I cut, I do, I feel something, and I was desperate and god, god, what have I done.

The bell rings and I gather my things, shoving them in my bag, trying to get out as fast as I can; I can't let her see me flustered, she might ask more questions.

I start to walk outside when I hear her whispers behind me;

"What a pathetic freak, I saw them, she rolled up her sleeves, she only wanted attention," tears well into my eyes, I inhale sharply, trying my best to dispel them as I calmly stroll outside, passing the windows of the classroom where she stands in a circle with her friends, spitting poison.

I panic on the inside. Outside, I look pleasant, just like I should, just like I always do. I pull my phone from my pocket and dial Lucas.

Ring, ring, ring, come on Luke, where are you?

"..Hello?"

"Luke? Hey. Hey, where are you," I stutter, my voice shaking.

"Cor? Is everything okay? What's wrong?"

"I'm-I'm walking to the park, someone, someone saw, and I don't, I just I can't handle this, I don't know what to do."

"Saw? Saw what? Wait, wait, Cora. Why are you going to the park? Talk to me, what's wrong."

"I- I just. I'm sorry, never mind. I'm sorry."

"What? Cor, what are yo-" I hang up. I shouldn't have called; I shouldn't have rolled up my sleeves. I should have just suffered through the heat, what was I thinking?

Tears start rolling down my face, tracing my lips, dripping from my chin. I tore apart my body for a sense of relief I never got, and now that someone has seen, I'm misunderstood; I'm seen as a weakling, pathetic, attention seeking. I agree with the first two but the last is wrong. I want to fade into nothingness, disappear and dissipate.

Her poisonous words echo in my mind, leaking pain into my heart. I had hope. I had hope today would be okay, that I would be okay. I was wrong. The rumors will spread and everyone will know; know that I'm not okay, and that was my worst fear coming alive, wreaking havoc on my already despondent life.

I reach the park and drop my bag, climbing up the playground steps and into the small, cramped castle at the top. I curl into a ball, heaving as the panic rises. I should have jumped in front of the car this morning, I should have just let go and died. Why am I even here?

"Cora?"

I lift my head as my heart drops, it's Lucas.

"Luke, hey. What's up?" I try to play it off but I know my face is streaked with tears and smudged make up. I know he knows.

"What's up? You're kidding. You call me right as class gets out, your voice shaking, sounding terrified, saying you're going to the park, you won't tell me what's wrong, and all you have to say when I finally find you, curled in a ball crying, is what's up?"

I stutter, not knowing what to say.

"I-I was being dramatic. It's nothing, um, I'm sorry. I shouldn't have called you and overreacted like this. I'm s-sorry, Luke," I sputter, trying to cover my tracks, cover my feelings and blanket them as to not make things worse.

"Cora, Cora. No. Something is wrong and you need to talk to me," he whispers softly, inching closer and grabbing my arm, stroking it with his thumb. My eyes glaze over with tears and I begin to cry again. I heave and let go of everything I've been holding inside. I tell him everything. How I constantly think of ways to die, how I cut to feel something, how I feel nothing, how I can't even function normally most days and how hard it is to get out of bed, to live. How I'm slowly eroding away and I can't seem to be okay. I'm not okay.

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Her eyes were red and puffy, her face coated in smeared mascara and tears. She was shaking, trembling. Her eyebrows were knit together with worry and fear, her mouth gasping for air. She was rocking back and forth whispering over and over while she cried, "I can't do this anymore, I can't do this, I-I can't." My heart sank in my chest, heavy with concern and guilt. How could I have not seen this before now?

I sat up on my knees and wrapped my arms around her tightly. I didn't know what else to do. I didn't understand how she felt; I didn't understand why she destroyed her body with cuts and scars just to feel okay. She sobbed loudly, as if it were the only thing she could do, and it probably was. I laid my head on hers and murmured, "I love you, Cora. It'll be okay. I'm here. It'll be okay."

It was all I could do, and I felt useless for it.

We stayed there like that until she stopped. Her breathing slowed and she pulled back.

"I'm okay, Luke. I'm okay now. Sorry I poured this all onto you." I was baffled. There was no possible way she could be okay but what could I say, what could I do to make her feel like she was? So I let it go.

"It's okay," I whispered, feeling guilty. She wiped her face with her sleeve and smiled at me, my brows knit together in confusion as she slid down the kiddy slide built into the castle. I watched as she lumbered away, grabbing her bag and never looking back. I sat there, bewildered, still not knowing what had caused this, what had made her break so badly, what keeps her from feeling normal. I sit back against the wall of the tiny castle covered in graffiti, and stared up at the sky until dark.

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The Middle:

I lied. I lied to Luke. I'm not okay, I'm the farthest thing from it, but I didn't want him to worry, I didn't want to be a burden. I'm sorry.

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I sat in my usual seat, waiting. Cora still wasn't here, which was weird, because she's always early, she always beats me and even the teacher most days.

Class begins, still no Cora.

It's been a week since the rumors spread. People stared, they whispered as she passed by, some made jokes loudly, some screamed in the hallways, some even came up to her, asking her to roll up her sleeves if she had nothing to hide. She would smile, politely decline and stride away. She was stronger than I ever thought. She seemed okay. She seemed to be better.

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It's been a week since my scars were seen. The poison spread and it was trying its best to kill me. But I still smiled as if nothing was wrong. I still pretended to be fine and every day, every day I became more and more barren; devoid of anything, of everything, and I crumbled faster.

I stumbled into class late, clumsily turning my music down and yanking out my music. I've stopped trying so hard. There's no point.

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"You're late, Miss Cora."

Tabil snapped as Cora sat down next to me, dropping her books loudly on her desk, she looked up and smiled wide.

"Yes, Miss Tabil, I apologize for interrupting class, I slept through my alarm," she explained, smiling wider. The class stared, perplexed.

"Yes, well. Get yourself together," Tabil sneered back.

Cora sighed, looking over at me, she smiled slightly.

"Are you okay," I mouthed silently, pretending to take notes while Tabil droned on about oligarchic attributes and other boring, pointless things.

Cora smiled wider, flashing her teeth at me, nodding her head. She seemed okay.

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The End: May 27th

Three more weeks later. I'm sitting in government, nursing my peppermint mocha with about three extra shots. I was completely exhausted and completely sure the bags under my eyes were darker than the lighting in Hollister. It was 8:05 a.m. Thirty-five minutes into class and Cora still wasn't here. Every week she has been showing up later and later, and every week she would laugh it off, smiling wider and wider. The comments and harassing was finally dying down, now they just silently stared at her. I tried walking her from class to class, even when hers was across campus from mine, but she insisted she was fine, they didn't bother her. She was fine.

Class began and ended with no sign of her. My gut twisted with worry, so I dug my phone out of my backpack and dialed her house.

No answer. The twist in my stomach became a constrictor's knot, tightening around my lungs and making it hard to breathe. Cor was never absent. In all her years of school, the only time she was out was when she caught pneumonia in the seventh grade.

My hands begin to shake as I dial her cell phone.

Ring, ring, ring--click. I hear muffled noises and heaving. Is she puking? She must be sick. She should have at least texted me, god.

"Cora? Hey, hey where are you?" More muffled noises. Breathing. Heaving. Crying?

"Cora? Cor? You there? Are you okay?"

"I'm s-sorry. I'm sick," she mumbled, I could barely hear her. Her voice was hoarse and quiet and there was music blaring in the background.

"Do you want me to come over? I can skip. Come take care of you."

"N-no. I'm ok-kay. I love you. S-sorry," she stuttered; I could barely understand her. I ground my teeth with worry, my hands became tight fists; my nails dug into the skin of my palm.

"It's okay. I love you too, Cor."

Click.

I stared at my phone. My favorite picture of us was staring back at me as my phone locked. We were in eighth grade in the photo, she was wearing a small floral dress and a toothy smile; her eyes

squinted and her cheeks puffed out when she smiled like that. I had my arm around her, and I had the soft look I always had when I looked at her. She melted my heart that day, and every day since.

My stomach flipped as the minutes passed. The worry in my chest fluttered, it just wouldn't go away. I called her mom. She would hate me for it, her mom never paid attention to her; she was always working, but I knew Cora couldn't fight her mother coming home to take care of her.

"Lucas? Why are you calling me at work? Where's Cora? Is she okay?"

"What? What do you mean 'is she okay,' she's sick, I just called her. It sounded like she was puking, she said she was sick, didn't you see her before you left this morning?" Christ, what kind of mother was she?

"Yes, I saw her! She was up and already ready for school, completely dressed. She was smiling as I left, she was fine!"

Something was seriously wrong.

"No. No, you need to go home now. She wasn't okay and she said no to me coming over. I'm going anyway. I'll see you there." I hung up and threw my phone into my backpack and sprinted to my car, I felt like I was going to puke but I held it in; I had to get to Cora.

It takes me twenty minutes to get from school to her house, but her mom was only ten minutes away. She should be okay. She will be okay. She has us, she'll be okay, we're on our way.

I careen around the last corner and my heart drops, I hear sirens. They shouldn't be. No. No, they're not for her. I punch the gas, just another two miles. Just a couple minutes. She'll be okay, she's fine. I slam on the breaks and jump from my car, the front door is open and I hear screaming. Music blaring, and screaming. My legs try to fall out from under me but I won't let them, I sprint through the door and search and find her mom braced against a table, screaming at the phone. Sobbing. And I can still hear the music.

"NO! NO YOU HAVE TO GO, Y-YOU HAVE TO, SHE'S SH-SHE WAS ON THE FLOOR, THERE WAS BLOOD. THER-THERE WAS BLOOD AND VOMIT AND SHE WAS-SHE WAS ON THE FLOOR, SHE WAS ON THE FLOOR CHARLES, YOU'RE HER FATHER, SHE WASN'T BREATHING I-I DON'T KNOW--I DON'T KNOW!"

Her mom slams the phone down and collapses, sobbing. Screaming, she was just screaming. I shake my head, this can't be happening. I was only minutes away, I called her, I called her and she said she was okay, that she was only sick, why didn't I--why didn't I come right then?

My legs buckle as I walk towards the music, the singer was screaming as loud as her mother. And he sounded just as heartbroken and scared. I could hear the lyrics now.

"Third time writing you a letter, getting darker. I'm getting worse and worse," the singer sounded like he was going to cry just as hard as I was. I found myself at Cora's door, it was wide open.

"..But trying to exorcise my demons didn't work.

To try to rid me of the worry and to purge you out of wonder for the future and the hurt..." the lyrics blared from her stereo. I stood, staring. There was blood, smeared on the wood floor. Glass from her broken mirror was scattered around the room, and on her bed was a small, white envelope with the words "A Poem" scrawled onto it. My legs buckled from underneath me and I hit the floor and I could hear nothing but screaming. Some of it must have been mine.

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Cora Day Hale died on March 27, 2013. She died of suicide--of sadness. The following were her last words, titled "A Poem".

Sadness is not tragically beautiful

These scars scattering my body are not symbols of strength

They are jagged testaments of loneliness

Screaming from my skin

And these tears

These tears are not like rain

They are not soft and soothing

They do not caress my skin and calm my nerves

They pour down my face

Coating it in a bitter sadness I can't seem to erase

Not even from my pores

And these demons

These demons in my head cannot be dispelled by prayers, pills, or promises of a better tomorrow

They crawl up my spine

Spitting their poison into my veins

Whispering deceit into my brain

Telling me I'm not good enough, I'm not good enough

I'll never be good enough

And I try, I try to fight

But I'm failing, I'm falling and

I can't get up

Can't you see

I'm drowning while you're standing there screaming at me to "just breathe"

But it's not that easy

It's not that easy

This is not some beautiful tragedy

It is a sickness

A mental disease taking over my body

Can't you see

This sadness is killing me.

(Forgive me, I love you all)

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Depression is a serious illness. If you are struggling, ask for help. You are not alone. Please don't let yourself die of sadness as Cora did.

With Love, Lucas.