

Bouquet

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A reworking of the classic fairy tale "Sleeping Beauty" set against depression, self-mutilation and suicide. This is most certainly not a fairy tale. All characters are fictional, and this story has nothing to do with my feelings on medicine.

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Chapter 1 of 1

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She was meant to be the light in the lives of those she knew, but all she had ever known was darkness. By all rights, she should have been a happy child; she was the apple of her parents' eyes, the sun their world revolved around ... but there was a streak of melancholy there, some strange presence that kept her from the life she deserved, the life she never lived.

She was born a strange child: pale blonde hair framed her chubby face, her eyes black as coal. There was something different about them though, a fire in them that one never usually saw. She was named for her eyes: Opal.

Opal awoke to a blank cell each morning, but she never noticed. She no longer cared, hadn't cared since she was a little girl, living far away in a pleasant enough house, living a pleasant enough life.

When she lived there as a child, she would wake up to another day and gaze into the mirror, pinching her cheeks and checking her waistline. Opal wasn't large by any means; her frame was small and willowy. She wore a black dress and ballet flats each day to hide her bony body from the rest of the world. Before she went downstairs to skip breakfast again, Opal would stare into the mirror again and run her hands over her sharply whittled cheekbones, sighing to herself whenever the long sleeves fluttered down the length of her arms to reveal the scars she had carved the night before.

It all collapsed the day her mother found her notebook on the eve of her fifteenth birthday four months before.

"Opal," her mother began, laying the book on the table and sliding it in front of her daughter, "we have to talk about this."

Opal looked at her mother, her eyes dead; her body slumped down in the chair. She said nothing.

"Opal, please," her mother begged, tears shining in her eyes. "You're scaring me ... please, Opal."

Her daughter remained obstinately unresponsive, flicking her eyes to her mother's, then back down to her lap. Opal stroked the veins in her pale wrist; she would have another story to carve there and another page to fill in her book. With an eagle's eye, her mother reached across the table and grabbed her left arm, yanking the sleeve up to her elbow.

"You've been cutting?!" She dropped into her chair, sobbing and leaning into Opal's father for comfort. Her father glared at her, and Opal knew he was right: it was her fault

that her mother was so upset. It always had been, after all.

That was when she had entered counseling: awkward hours where some man tried to dissect her as she twisted her fingers in her lap. It failed; she never said a word anymore, just sat and wrote in her spiral-bound gray notebook. It was where she kept her writings, her doodles, everything that was the sad little tragedy she called a life. Everything Opal felt was worth remembering, she would write. She couldn't write in her book anymore, though. Her mother checked both it and her arms daily, snipping away her last two threads of sanity.

Before long, her parents ran out of options. They could either keep her hidden away in her room and watch day after day as she withered away, or they could ship her off to some asylum and forget the pain of having her as a daughter.

The day Opal arrived at Juniper Hill, she was immediately stripped down, weighed and measured, receiving a gray patterned hospital gown to wrap around herself for her trouble. Her four doctors then filed into the room, each bearing a clipboard and a black medicine bag.

The first looked over her physical charts, making little sounds of disapproval as he read. He looked at her critically, analyzing the immediate problems. "For you, I think a weight gain regimen as well as sleeping pills and perhaps a bit of sunshine. That'll bring some color to you, make you pretty again."

Opal didn't say anything, but she knew he was thinking the same as she was: no one will ever want you again; you're crazy, worthless, a waste of time and space.

The second eyed her cautiously, flicking his eyes between her charts and her. She gazed back at him evenly, knowing what would come. "I think what would be best for you psychologically would be a good dose of anti-depressants...shock therapy if you need it, and I got this out of a storeroom for you." He produced a black composition book from his bag, handing it to her with a pen. "I trust you with this, okay? Don't do anything you shouldn't, or you won't be getting a new one."

Opal nodded dully, screaming in her mind about the condescension lacing his voice as he said it. She took the book and twirled the pen through her tapered fingers experimentally, remembering the feel of holding a pen.

The next doctor merely flicked his eyes in the direction of the fourth angrily, as if disgusted by feeling Opal's gaze on him, as if he was too good for an alleged lunatic to glance at. The fourth cleared his throat and spoke softly, giving Opal the feeling that he saw her as a frightened child or a startled animal.

"My dear, I do not expect you to remain in this dreadful place for too long. I should hope that you will be out of here soon, and it is my duty to see to it that your schooling should continue while you are here. I am also to help guide you in this dark time for you, to help you live a better life than you were. You would like that, wouldn't you?"

Opal remained unresponsive and was escorted to her cell by a young intern. He smiled before he left, leaving in her an odd feeling, a cross between hope and loathing. She hated it, scowling as she sat cross-legged on her tatty bed to begin writing again.

That was where the third doctor found her on her sixteenth birthday. He hadn't spoken to her during her incarceration there, and she hadn't spoken to anyone since the beginning of her psychological treatment. He wrenched the book from her hands, tossing it across the room.

He cupped her chin under his hands roughly. "Look at me. Speak to me! Why don't you speak? Speak!"

Opal couldn't fight the hand clasping her face, instead allowing her eyes to flutter shut.

"Open your eyes and look at me."

Opal did as the man asked, raising her eyes to meet his slowly. Upon meeting the unforgiving blue, she swallowed, trembling slightly.

He started a bit at the lifelessness he saw in her eyes and asked softly, "You don't want to live, do you?"

He released her, and she shook her head, slowly. Sighing, the doctor opened the bag he had brought with him, showing her a syringe. "Do you know what this does?"

Opal shook her head again, refusing to hope it would be what she wanted.

"If I injected this into your bloodstream, it would kill you in less than five minutes. But I can't do that; I swore to save lives, not take them." He took her hand and wrapped it around the needle as she watched, mesmerized by the power he had given her. Tears welled in her eyes and Opal quirked the edges of her lips upwards, giving the doctor a shy smile. He squeezed her hand and left.

Opal snatched up her journal from the dirty floor and scribbled in it furiously, the swirls of ink twisting across the snow white page. She checked over what she had written and, satisfied, arranged herself on the bed: her head resting on the pillow, her feet pointed to the ceiling, the needle hovering over her left arm.

She pricked herself, feeling loving warmth spread through her arm slowly. Opal rested the needle on her chest, clasped in her hands, a makeshift bouquet. Her eyes slid shut, the embers in the pitch dying quietly.

That was how the intern found her when he brought the evening meal, a smile gracing the bloodless lips. He laid a hand against her cheek, stroking it with his thumb. The intern saw the notebook out in the periphery of his vision, opening it where the pen bookmarked her final entry.

"Weep not, dear heart, for she only sleeps. Beauty will awaken at the end of this time of times, and all will share in her happiness."

Author's Note: This is in no way a cry for help. I am not anorexic, depressed or suicidal. I am, however, fascinated by these diseases and intend to work with sufferers upon graduating medical school. My demons have been exorcised; this story is based on my idea of reworking a classic fairytale into something that would be unexpected. I merely wrote what came into my head, the same as any other writer. The character is in no way a fictionalized version of me or of anyone else I know. I merely wanted to make the point that these are very serious issues, and depression, self-mutilation and anorexia (as well as other eating disorders) must be caught early on in order to prevent a tragedy like this. Reviews are appreciated, as I am considering writing this story as a play.