

This is Not Catharsis

By Anna Feldman, Winner of the Claudia Ann Seaman Award for Literary Non-Fiction

You should know right off the bat that this is not catharsis. I've talked and cried about it more than I care to. So I'm not getting it all out; don't feel like you're doing me a favor, because I'm writing this for you. All I ask is that you put aside your judgments and listen.

There is a moment when you hold that pill bottle in your hands. There is an instant when you decide to die and everything's in place. You were once indifferent about living or dying; now you actively desire death. All the suffering, all the tiredness, all the headaches will go away. You'll be at peace. You are at peace. The cutting and starving, that was out of loathing, desperation. But this is something else, something peaceful. It's merciful.

It took you six months to get to this moment. It started out as a whisper coming from the edge. The edge where monsters roam and dangerous girls play. At the beginning, the edge has its glamour. It tells you maybe you shouldn't eat so much. Start counting calories, at least. Work out just a little bit. And you listen, because you want to be sexy and dangerous. You're just a girl. You want special. The edge calls and you don't any know better but to take a step forward, toward your whisper. Toward your personal monster.

The monster is your friend. It keeps you hungry and empty. It makes you strong. But disobey: eat, stuff your face, bloat like a puffer fish. It doesn't like that. And you're closer now, so close that it can reach your arms and stick your nails into your stomach. Ugly stupid fat bitch, it says. Ugly stupid fat bitch but this makes up for it, just a little bit. And you release your nails and wipe off the blood. And you smile because you're so close to the edge, to destruction. Days later your fingers burn because you want more, more. And then you find a shard of glass.

Ugly stupid fat ugly stupid bitch. Its words give you fuel, rocket power in your arms to slice up your hip. That's another moment, when you reach it. A checkpoint, if you will, on our journey to the end. The high point of the cut, the gasping pain, the icy euphoria. You tingle all over and your vision sharpens. Your body is so cold. It's frozen desire, the purest form you've ever felt. And the monster croons hate words and praise words simultaneously, ugly stupid fat yes strong fat pure bitch strong. Because it's proud of you. It's in your blood now.

Before long, you don't sleep well. You lie in bed in the late hours of the night and the monster creeps up your veins and into your head. You're so close to it, you can taste it. This is the first murmur of death. Because you can't live on the edge anymore. It's calling and it takes so much to fight it. So much. The monster has lost its glamour and stares at you with its distorted face. You lose desire and now you're just afraid. Afraid, tired, and alone.

Shake the pills, one two three times. Turn the bottle upside down and hear the rush.

This is for you. You who says that everyone gets sad sometimes, who says that you don't sleep sometimes either. This is for you who says that you just need a couple of pills and you'll be okay. This is for you who can't understand and doesn't want to, for you because you need to understand me. This is for you who wonders if I'm crazy, a lunatic, if I hear voices. This is for you who wonders why any sane person would ever want to end her life. This is for you, for thinking that I'm making this up. Who says, of course you're not ugly or fat. Can't you see? Can't you see? Depression is real. Suicide is real. Ugly stupid fat bitch is my reality. My monster, the edge, the call, they're all my reality. And I learned I'm not the only one fighting them. Suicidal roommates, suicidal friends all playing Uno in the common room. So don't call us crazy, because something went wrong in our heads. Don't shun us or doubt us or think we're weak, because we're so strong. We wake up every day and we fight. We fight for our lives and our sanity while you're worrying about what you're going to eat for lunch. We're stronger than

anyone can see.

So this is not catharsis. This is me taking you through my fight. And I fight it every fucking day. I fight the ugly stupid fat bitch ugly stupid from the moment I open my eyes until the moment I finally fall asleep. So don't you dare think I'm exaggerating.

Don't you dare criticize me or the rest of us. Because we are just poor, desperate, tired, and strong beyond imagination. We are alive.

All I ask is that you put aside your judgments and listen.