

The Quiet Kind of Hurt

I was about five years old when I drove my foot into a coin-sized screw.

It hadn't been my intention, of course. Like any other kid who lived on the cul-de-sac street of South Quay Drive, I didn't care. I was too focused on climbing trees, bouncing on trampolines, and staying out until the last drop of sunlight. Nails and screws? Not my problem.

My friend Belle had knocked on my door hours earlier, roller skates in one hand, a helmet with her balled-up socks tucked inside in the other. That was the way we did it. Every playdate, party, and please-can-we-use-your-pool began with a tentative holler or a timid chorus of knuckles on wood. We either knocked or walked straight in. No one had a doorbell, but everyone's garage stayed open. That's just the way it was.

We spent the afternoon outside, running from pool to pool, tossing our rollerblades onto the chalk-covered sidewalk carelessly in between. Truthfully, I didn't even like roller skating. I was clumsy and lagged behind Belle, who skated like she had wings. But she never left me. She'd loop around, grab my wrist, and pull me forward.

As the sun set, we threw our sopping towels onto her driveway and sprinted to the lamppost across the road. A tradition. But as I climbed up the bright red pole, my hands slipped. I fell with a rough jolt, heart leaping into my throat as my toes fumbled for the rim of the base. I crashed to the ground, and something struck my foot. I fell to the ground, watching blood mix with dirt like hairline fractures on a sheet of glass.

The lamppost was secured by four bolts, and I had just been stabbed by one.

Pain is a strange thing— Sometimes you feel it immediately, written into the sudden recoil of your arm when you graze your elbow against a brick wall, or the sting of tears when you close your laptop and it nabs the edge of your finger.

Sometimes, though, it's like a big, destructive wave, creeping up on you and pushing you forward ever so slowly. Suddenly, BAM. You're underwater. Heart pounding, ears ringing. The rush of water is muffled but so clear.

When I was seven, my family moved to India. No big fight, no dramatic goodbye. Just cardboard boxes on the driveway and a faded red moving truck. We left in the middle of a week-long flood, after days of nothing but boredom.

As the rain began to subside, we packed the last of our things into five small suitcases and cleaned up the Airbnb we'd been staying at, just around the corner from South Quay Drive. As the vacuum cleaner whirled and whined, I couldn't help but glance out the window. Through the cold mist, I stared at the silhouette of Belle's house, far below where I stood yet so close to my heart. I wondered

what she was doing. I imagined her bouncing idly on the big blue yoga ball we used to roll across her movie room, her dog circling her feet in an eager pitter-patter of claws on tiles.

Goodbye, I wanted to yell. *I'll miss you*. But I gathered my things and walked out the door, watching the trees and motels whizz by through the car window, and I left my friend behind.

Two years later, I was back in Australia.

One afternoon, as I shuffled past the quiet driveways of North Sydney, I saw her. A small girl, a few years younger than me. She sat on the curb, tying the laces of her pink and white roller skates in the same, deliberate way Belle had.

A lump formed in my throat and tears threatened to escape. I started missing things I hadn't even thought about. The way she flicked her long, silky hair over her shoulder. The way she triple-knotted her laces. The way she made sure I wasn't left behind.

At thirteen, when a close friend turned on me, I recognised the pain immediately. The same, slow-building ache—this time, though, I had words for it. Heartbreak.

I learned something else, too, over time. Those ordinary moments—rollerblading, pool-hopping, looking for someone to play with—are what matter most. People leave, but memories stay, stitched into the corners of your life...

Because some wounds don't heal. But they do stop bleeding.