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## I Broke

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## I Broke // Liana Saleh

There were four bodies in the rain. Two were alive. I was one of them, but only barely. I was blinking as much blood from my eyes as raindrops and I could not move the fingers on my right hand. Leaves were imprinting themselves on my muddy cheeks and my nose was filled with the scent of the pines that surrounded me.

The rest had stopped struggling a long time ago, and I knew that I was our only chance. Luke was still alive and I was still alive and we needed help or we would both die. I shut my eyes and took a deep breath that brought with it the dirt I was sprawled on and pulled one of my knees under me. I used my good hand to support myself and brought myself to a standing position. I steeled myself and glanced at my agonizing arm and saw a swollen purple mass where my elbow should have been. My breath hitched and I swallowed down my rising panic to turn my attention to Luke.

Despite my efforts to be strong for us, the sight of him forced my chest to start heaving with grief and pain. He breathed with the labor of a dying man and his limbs were bent at angles no one should ever have to experience. And there was so much blood. Blood leaking out of his hairline and blood slowly flowing out of his ankle. I could see his ankle, see the bone peeping out of his mangled skin, and it almost brought me back to my knees. I turned quickly and vomited into the wind blown bushes behind me, then wiped my mouth on my soaking sleeve.

Beyond Luke lay the two bodies of the two people who were my best friends. Mary's dark hair was tangled with dirt and sweat and blood and water ran in rivulets down her still face. An open gash in her chest bragged bright red about the death it had caused. Her hand, with dirt under desperate, broken fingernails, held the pale hand of the boy next to her. A boy with hair red like a setting sun and skin like a newborn baby's. But his hands were strong, and she died with their strength seeping into her heart, even as he hit his head on a rock and bled out.

It was ironic, because Adam had died with hair more red than ever.

I looked at them but stopped myself from seeing them because I knew that would destroy any chances of me saving Luke.

And saving myself.

"Luke." I leaned down and the whisper came out with a spoonful of gravel. I cleared my throat and wiped my eyes with trembling fingers and tried again.

"Luke, please. Please wake up Luke." My voice was not strong enough to pierce through the black of his unconsciousness. I straightened and walked a few steps, raising my head to the frigid pounding rain. I let it wash the mud out of my eyelashes and felt it run down my neck in lazy streams. I could still see the moon through the trees above my head.

"Luke. You have to wake up, or we're both going to die. We have to find a way to get out of here." My voice tore through the heavy night air this time and he stirred, sputtering rain out of his nose and mouth.

"Oh my god. Luke, can you hear me?" I cupped his scarred cheek in my palm and tried to trap his searching eyes with mine. He coughed and arched his back and I placed my good hand behind his shoulder-blades, bringing him up so he could breathe.

Even with his dark hair in knots and his emerald eyes red with pain, the sight of his beautiful face made my heart beat with the good kind of anxiousness.

"Luke." I said it quietly and into his ear and he finally met my eyes.

"JJ, it hurts," he whimpered. "It hurts so bad." Tears rolled into my eyes and I laid his head against my chest, kissing his forehead.

"Okay. I'll get us out of here. Do you have a phone? Anything?"

"Where's Mary and Adam?" His words were slurred. I was silent. "JJ! Where are they?" His eyes unfocused and he began to panic, grabbing my hurt elbow. I bit my tongue so hard to keep from screaming that it began to bleed into my mouth. I turned and spit it out, taking deep trembling breaths.

"They're gone Luke." I was wincing with my sleeve against my mouth to soak the up the blood.

He broke down then, went limp against my frail body and started crying like a child.

It was the first and last time I'd ever see him cry.

"Shh. Shh, it's ok," I croaked. It was harder for me to keep my composure when the boy I had counted on for so long to be my man was curled against my body in a broken, shaking ball. I buried my head in his wet hair for a moment and squeezed my eyes closed, willing back the tears that insisted on leaking out of me. The knot that formed itself in my chest the moment we had started drinking had been tightening as the hours passed by and the empty cans piled up outside the window. It was now a solid, coiled mass in the center of my ribs, pressuring my lungs, making it hard for me to breath, sending guilt and regret streaming through my veins.

"Luke?" I whispered, attempting to infuse my voice with a strength I didn't have. It didn't work, and he knew it because he grabbed my good hand with his, slick with blood.

"Okay. Okay, I'm sorry JJ. Okay..." he said, wincing with a pain I could not comprehend. "What can we do? Where are we? Wait, wait... what even happened?"

"I don't really know. We were all so drunk and then we decided to drive somewhere, I think. I don't... I don't really remember. But we were driving, we were in the car and Adam was driving and we were all singing and drinking more and then I think Adam turned around to tell me something. But then it was really bright all of sudden and everyone was screaming and my drink, it spilled all over us. But then, then the brightness turned all black and I don't know what happened after that except for when I woke up, and I was in the mud and everyone was quiet. And I knew you were alive because I could hear you breathing and yelling that it hurt. And I could hear Mary whispering at Adam to stay with her." My voice dropped to a pained whisper. "I couldn't move. I tried, I tried but I couldn't and then I heard Mary start crying and I knew Adam was gone. I blacked back out then. When I woke back up, you were quiet and Mary was quiet. She was too quiet, and she was laying in a pool of her own blood. It was running in the rain, running over my fingers. I was laying in her blood. I thought you were dead until I saw you breathing."

"JJ, why are we so stupid?" he said. I didn't answer him. I didn't have an answer. His fingers had locked themselves in mine.

His hands were so cold, and I wanted their warmth more than anything. "What do we do now? I think my leg is broken. I can't... I can't feel it." A substantial fear laced itself through his voice.

"I'm sorry. I can't look at it. I can't fix it, and it'll make me too scared to think," I told him, untangling my fingers from his and trying to stand.

"Where are you going? Don't leave me," he said urgently.

"I'm just going to see if I can find the car or the road or anything. Maybe the police? Accidents get reported right? Someone at least has to be wondering where we are?" I began to stumble through the overgrowth, feeling the rain begin to slow slightly, the storm beginning to pass.

My toe suddenly ran into resistance, something other than the dripping greenery. I bent down, ignoring the protests from my battered body, and felt with cautious fingertips for what had met my toes. It was metal, a ragged edge. I could not see the details in the dark, but I took a step back and saw a large form covered beneath the blackness in front of me. It was then that I began to smell the wreckage and I knew I had found the car. Now that I knew the stench was there I could not stop smelling it. It was burning my nose, winding its way up to my head and making my eyes water with the sourness of it. This was the machine that had killed Mary and Adam and bruised Luke and I for good. We would forever have the blood of this night pulsing beneath the first layer of our fragile skin, threatening to spill over at the slightest prick of a fingernail.

I broke down then. I dropped to my knees and hid my face from the crying sky and let my tears join the falling rain. My fists fell on the innocent metal that had once been roaring with life and I knew it was our fault and it was young and childish to blame the car. But I could not stop my anger from cascading down onto this hopeless heap that had lost its life too.

It was then that I heard the sirens. The blaring noise that had so many times woken me up from a nap in the backseat of a car or made me curse with frustration at the interruption it had caused to a phone call. But now, it was a sound sweeter than any I'd ever heard, despite the throbbing it brought to my tender head. I stumbled up to the side of the road and watched numbly as the

police car came closer, my tired arms hanging limply to my sides. I could imagine what I looked like then, to the police man stepping out of his car. A rain drenched teenager, caked in the blood of her friends, her own blood still escaping her wounds. Helpless. Utterly helpless and lost. Dropped so quickly from the intoxicated vigor of indestructible youth to a cowardly shaking wreck of a young girl.

“Miss, what happened to you?” The police man came closer, a large grizzled slab of a man. His hand was habitually inching towards the protection on his belt. I could not speak, so I could not tell him that everything had happened to me. Everything that everyone always assures themselves will never happen to them.

And so I stood there, shoulders hunching in around my frozen heart, sobbing.

“Miss, I can’t help you if you don’t tell me what-” He stopped mid-sentence. “Is that a car?” I nodded miserably, bringing my soon to be scarred hands up to my face.

“Oh.” And that was all he needed to know. He sped into action then, speaking quickly and urgently into his phone. When he had finished, he took me by the arm and spoke vehemently, directly into my ear. “Was there anyone else in this crash?” And the clouds in my head temporarily cleared to let a sliver of moonlight shine in my eyes. Luke.

“Yes. Yes, Luke is still alive! He’s still back there, but his leg. His leg is broken I think. I could see the bone, it was so scary and horrible. You have to save him, you have to, please. And Mary... Mary and Adam. I think they’re dead. I mean, I’m pretty sure... I’m pretty sure they’re gone. They’re back there too,” I rambled, finally able to speak, to do something to save Luke’s life. I would have said more, spilled more raw fear out in words, but the police officer told me to stay where I was and ran back towards the woods I had come from.

More sirens. And the lights began to blur into each other, becoming one solid mass hurtling towards me. It was like the sun had fallen out of the sky and was determined to consume me in all it’s heat. I threw my arms up in front of my face to protect myself. And then everything went black. Again. This time, I welcomed it.