

Kirsty Stuart

Pills

It hurts. It hurts all over. Now you've done it. You've gone too far. You've cut too deep. Blood is pulsing down your arms and through your fingers. The Girl in the Red Dress is laughing. She's small, only a child, but there's nothing innocent about her. Sitting on the bath edge, she swings her legs against your rib cage; left, right, left, right. Your arms are pulsing—The Girl in the Red Dress is spitting acid on them. You watch as the blood drips down your wrists and onto the white tiled floor with a splat. Your brother is pounding at the bathroom door. He's calling your name. Soon dad will have the spare key. No one said it would hurt this bad. The Girl in the Red Dress never said it would feel like this. She said it would make everything better—she lied.

You wake up in a bed and smell disinfectant. You're surrounded by faces—all apathetic. The Girl in the Red Dress is sitting in the corner. She smiles her razorblade teeth and licks her bleeding gums. A doctor walks in and says you were lucky. You weren't lucky, you were foolish—you missed. Your dad tells you enough is enough. He says you're stupid. He tells you you're being selfish. The doctor leaves. Your brother looks at you with dead eyes. You know he's remembering last time. Your dad says he's leaving and he takes your brother with him. He doesn't say when he'll be back. Now you're all alone—alone with The Girl in the Red Dress.

It's Wednesday. Rain hits your window from the west and it distorts your view of the parking lot. It's been two days since you had a visitor—except for The Girl in the Red Dress. She hasn't left you, she never leaves. She just sits there playing with your bandages and picking at

your stitches. The nurse says they're moving you to a specialized ward. You've been there before—you know the drill. The ward smells like rubber gloves. You hear someone screaming in the distance. You ask the nurse who it is, but get no reply, just the tap, tap, tap of her heels meeting the floor. The Girl in the Red Dress is dancing. She's happy now because everyone knows you're crazy. Your pain pleases her.

Your room is cold and empty. Sitting on the bed you feel the tight sheet stretch under your weight. Your belongings are already in the closet—not that it really matters. The Girl in the Red Dress is just going to destroy everything anyway. She always does. The nurse tells you that everything is going to be fine and that she is going to make you better—so naïve. The rain continues to pour outside. Raining cats and dogs, your father would say. But your father is not here. The nurse leaves the room with a smile and disappears down the hallway. The door slams shut after her. You smell The Girl in the Red Dress before you see her. She smells of sulphur. Opening the bathroom door she pops her ugly head out like an evil Jack-in-the-box and smiles. You look back towards the hallway threshold and pray for the nurse to come back. But she doesn't. You crawl into bed and close your eyes. You know she is watching you. Tears stream down your face. You can hear The Girl in the Red Dress giggling but you don't care. You let the tears flow.

A cloud of pain hovers over The Girl in the Red Dress. You first met her a year ago. Cold and alone you found her hiding in your bedroom closet. At first you liked the company, she listened and she never judged. She would just sit there smiling and nodding. It was nice just to know someone was listening. But then something changed. She snapped. Her delicate fingers morphed into sharp claws, her pale skin became rough and covered in scabs. You begged for her to go away, but she refused. She followed you day and night. It was never ending—until she told you how to make her disappear forever. But you failed. And now you're stuck here. Alone.

You sit in your room and stare at the stain on the ceiling. You wonder why your father hasn't come back to visit you. But it's useless wondering, you know why. He's ashamed of you because you don't fit into his perfect world. You were always hidden behind closed doors. He never knew the real you, he never wanted to. The feelings start creeping

back. The bugs are crawling under your skin and through your hair. They're running up and down your arms. A nurse walks in and gives you your pills. She watches you intently as you take the plastic cup of water. The stones swirl around inside your mouth. You swallow.

The Girl in the Red Dress is screaming. She cries and scratches, etching her pale face. She blames you for her pain. You try to sleep but she's pulling at you, tearing your clothes and ripping your skin. Her fingers are barbed wire and entwine around your arms until all you can see is red. Your head is heavy. There are drums in your ears. You try to scream but The Girl in the Red Dress stops you. She steals your voice away. The nurse storms in and yells. You try to tell her it's not your fault but she can't hear you. You tell her it's The Girl in the Red Dress—it's always The Girl in the Red Dress, but she doesn't listen. She fixes your bandages and tells you to take some more pills. You know this will make The Girl in the Red Dress angry, but you do it anyway—in sleep she cannot find you.

The doctor sits down across from you. The leather chair creaks under his weight. He asks you why you feel this way but you have no answer. His deep eyes see right through you. You avoid eye contact. How could he possibly understand what you're going through? You try to tell him about The Girl in the Red Dress. You tell him that it's all her fault. He asks you about her but you know it's pointless. He can't see her, only you can—if only you couldn't. The doctor asks you more questions but you're tired. You haven't slept properly since you arrived. She wouldn't let you.

The Girl with the Red Dress digs her claws into your feet as the nurse gives you your pills. You know she doesn't want you to take them—she doesn't want to disappear. You put the pills in your mouth and swallow the water. The nurse leaves the room and The Girl in the Red Dress licks your tears away. You spit the pills into her hand and The Girl in the Red Dress smiles.

If only you had taken your pills.