

wake me up when this wears off

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wake me up when this wears off

by [immolxtion_stxtion](#)

Summary

Three times a day, he takes his pills, swallows vitamins and medicine and water filled with bitter powders, lets them wrack his stomach full of cramps and his head full of clouds, watches his hands start to shake even though they didn't do that before. He takes the pills that are supposed to make him feel better, and watches how his body feels worse, aches and shakes and tremors swapped for different issues, different ways for his body to fail.

“Feed me poison, fill me ‘till I drown.”

Flare | Water Inhalation | “Just hold on.”

Notes

The plot for this is medical trauma, and medical trauma is the plot. It's a little bit nonsensical, a little bit exaggerated, and is meant to convey the medical system through the eyes of the people it is meant to help (but only ends up hurting).

Title is from Tentacles by Blame My Youth.

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

“You want to get better, don't you?”

Leo's familiar with the question. He knows what it means, what it entails. His body is wrong in

ways he can't explain, in ways doctors are still trying to fix, and if he wants to be fixed, then he has to want to get better.

They make him recite the answer like a prayer, like a litany. *I want to get better.* He has to want it, or he is not worth helping. He has to want it, or nothing will work.

The hospital is as much his home as his bed is a prison, lead lungs and dead limbs pushing him to places he doesn't want to be. He sleeps twelve hours one day, gets told it's bad the next, stuck inside another machine where he can't respond, because it'll ruin the results. Leo wants to get better, but they don't even know what's wrong with him in the first place, and that makes things hard.

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It's because he's not taking the pills right, he doesn't believe in them enough. He's not taking them on a sharp enough schedule, isn't eating before some and fasting before others. His research is lying to him when it says that these two pills counteract, that he needs this supplement with this med, and that supplement with that med. He needs to exercise more, exercise less, do yoga every morning and pretend his muscles don't feel like crackling ice.

Appointments fill his calendar, once every two weeks at the minimum, phone calls and tests and physicals, days where he sits in an office and answers the questions he's asked, swallows down the complaints that come with more meds, more solutions, different treatments. *You want to get better, don't you? You can't fight us, we know what we're doing. This is how you get better.*

The doctors know how to treat him. He says yes to their meds, swallows pills like candy and grins whenever people ask how he's doing, because he's on meds. He'll be fine eventually, they just have to have time to work. It's a game of patience, writing down symptoms and handing in carefully-logged charts so that specialists can dig their teeth into their newest problem, prod around in his guts until they find the missing piece.

They cut him open on operating tables, give him enough anesthesia that he goes under, deep enough in the haze that the screams are all mental. They pick at his organs, lift blood-covered hands in and out of his sight, swapping sterile metal for sterile metal. His chest doesn't hold the answers they want, so they put him back under, stitch him up and put him back together like a puzzle missing a few pieces.

There is Leo, and there is the ruin of his body. There is Leo, and there is the puzzle that nobody knows how to solve. There is Leo, sitting at the centre of seminars about him, an unwilling participant.

It doesn't matter if he wants to be there, though. He doesn't *have* to want things. He just has to have the unsolvable issue, the one that can only be fixed when all of the best minds come together, wrack their brains and play guess-what's-wrong on him like a life-size medical doll.

Cold hands here, cold hands there, bend this joint and unbend that one. Present yourself bare, weak, willing. Sit on the observation table, and let them poke and prod, deal with the disappointed frowns every time you flinch.

Leo knows the procedures. He knows what he has to do if he wants to get well. He has to let the

doctors examine him, listen to the snap of gloves and the rush of water, all of the protections taken to make sure he does not become contagious. His disease is his alone, and they cannot fix him if he is not suffering.

He can't help but wonder why suffering is the necessary prerequisite to feel better. Why can't they just take him as he is, take his useless limbs, and find a way to fix them? Why does he have to hurt worse before he hurts better, stuck with remedy after remedy that refuses to work? Is his pain not good enough? Is he not trying his best?

But Leo is not a doctor, and the doctors know what's best. He has to want to get better, and doctors are the ones who ask the questions. Leo simply answers them, takes the pills they offer and tells them what things work, and what things don't.

And if they don't work, then he just doesn't want to get better enough. He has to exercise, because it will thaw out the lakes of his muscles, even when they freeze up worse afterwards. He has to trust in the mindfulness, has to keep trying it until it works, because mental stuff only works if he believes in it, and the doctors know best. Mindfulness when paired with medication *helps*. It *works*.

They cut him open on surgical tables, touch his arms and his legs and his muscles and his bones, even when it hurts. Nothing is wrong, not under touch, not under scalpel, not under examination. He should be fine, but he isn't, and nobody knows why.

The medicine gives him heat stroke, pushes his stomach to the ends of its capabilities until he can't take pills without gagging, without nausea settling in his chest. Leo bites his tongue and lets the blood in his mouth chase horse pills down, because the iron of it tastes better than the bitterness of the medicine.

Cradled in his palm at three points a day are too many pills to count, varying shades of white and red and pink and orange, sterile, clinical things. There are more pills in his hand than there is food in his house, more money spent on medicine than leisure.

It feels like hell. It feels like he's dancing a losing battle with a dead-weight partner, carrying everything on his back in a game of endurance that he is never meant to win.

But he wants to get better, has to want to get better, so he rolls his complaints up into tiny little pills, and swallows those too. The doctors know better. The doctors know what's best for him.

The doctors bundle him up in straightjackets, because he's not doing enough, not trying his best, not giving his all. He needs to work *harder*, to try *more*, to let them strap him to a wall and x-ray every bit of his chest until they can find the tumour he's been hiding from them. He needs to be the marionette they put into every pose until they can find out the ones he can't do, and then work on him until he can do them just as easily.

He needs morning runs, more pills, less back talk, more trust, more faith, less doubt, a willingness to give everything he has to the hospital. He needs to pull himself out of bed, sleep from eight-till-six and not a minute more, ignore the exhaustion and the pain and the way his body is failing him, because it's as simple as mind over matter. If he wants to get better, he has to believe in the people making him better.

Leo is the illness, and the hospital is his host.

Leo swallows the pills, and watches them distort his body into unfamiliar shapes, bloated and contorted and so unfamiliar to him that he has to cover every mirror in his house before he snaps and breaks them. His face isn't *his*, just a mimicry of shapes and angles, handsome features that

just look wrong.

It's dissociation, derealization, depersonalization. He needs more therapy, needs more medicine that helps him cope with the loathing his body makes him feel. It's okay to feel upset, see, but he can't let it consume him. He has to learn acceptance, come to terms with the sadness and then put it to the side, because it won't help him.

He has to want to get better. This only works if he wants it. You want it, right, Leo? You want to feel better again?

He wants to feel less like an alien, is what he wants. They should just stamp hospital property on his forehead, make sure everybody knows that all he's good for is tests and medications and trials, promises that this will work. He's a curiosity, a question mark that just so happens to walk and talk and feel.

There are eyes watching him when he moves, making sure he doesn't smash things to pieces and turn them into weapons, because he's a flight risk, a danger to himself, he's just so upset that he needs to take it out on others. He isn't worthy of relief, because he isn't hurting bad enough for it; skates the line of unwell enough to not deserve help.

He's not deserving of painkillers, because his pain isn't bad enough for them. He wouldn't need them if he just made sure to get enough sunlight, give his all to work and during therapy and make sure to follow the advice they give him to the letter. He just needs to staple on a smile and pretend to be swell, because pretending is half the battle. This is how he gets well. He wants to feel better, doesn't he?

Intubation, IV drips, pills and pills and pills and serotonin syndrome, stomach pumps and more surgery, being strapped down to tables and forced into machines that give Leo headaches and make him claustrophobic. No piercings, no belts, no drawstrings. Just smile and play along, and answer the questions, because this is how you get better. Prove to them that you are deserving of their help and their time, the perfect medical mystery.

Doctors are kind, they are caring, they help. Leo looks at eyes that have no emotion behind them, faces blocked by masks, and he just feels trapped. He's a moth with the wings pinned down, a roadkill corpse stuffed and reanimated. He goes against the nature of things, of how bodies work, so he just has to be kind, and helpful, and sign the forms sign the papers sign his consent away.

Leo vomits blood and pills into the toilet at home, and wonders if getting better is worth the hell he has to live in order to do so.

End Notes

I'm not even going to lie, I cried a little writing this. The medical system often leaves disabled patients feeling like nothing more than a specimen and an experiment who is wrong, and simply needs to listen to the doctors who know their body better than the patient does, and this fic is my whumpy tribute to anyone else who has had to go through that.

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