

The day I realized I was no longer alone anymore did not arrive with fireworks or trumpeting. It was not the type of moment that other people would ever understand, but for me, it simply felt like the world had finally decided to walk with me rather than against me. I had carried loneliness on my back for years, dragging it day after day, with each exchange, every forced smile, and every mirthless laugh. No one felt its weight, how I'd found a way of getting away from the silent pain through the slicing of a blade—a thing which, in a flash, had turned the numbness into something tangible. I had determined that no one would notice, that I could carve my sadness into my skin and let the scars tell the story I couldn't. But then, on an otherwise ordinary day, someone did notice. And that changed everything.

I was sitting by myself in the school hallway, my sleeves pulled down over my wrists, my head low enough that I didn't have to look anyone in the eye. It was just another day—another day of pretending, another day of praying no one would catch me looking at myself the way I caught myself. Around me, laughter and conversations bubbled reminding me of everything I wasn't a part of. I'd become an expert at being invisible in plain sight, at shrinking myself down into being invisible. But then she sat down next to me.

I thought that she had just stopped to tie her shoe or look at her phone, but she stayed. She just sat there, her quiet, unhurried presence. Then, after what felt like an eternity, she said the words that broke something inside me: "You don't have to be alone." Four small words were spoken softly, but they hit harder than anything I'd ever known. I should have brushed it off, laughed and said "I'm fine". But rather, for the first time in many years, I let myself believe—for a single second—that maybe she was right.

I didn't know what to tell her. My initial reaction was to retreat, to ward her off with a false "I'm fine". But in her voice—low, unyielding, completely free of sympathy—the words jammed in my throat. I sat, then, my eyes on the floor, heavy with the weight of all that I had kept inside.

She didn't ask why. She didn't ask what was wrong or demand that I explain myself. She just sat there, as though she understood that silence can be more powerful than words. And then she said, her voice so gentle that I did not even quite catch it, "I see you."

Tears pricked at the back of my eyes. No one had ever told me that before. I had been invisible for so long, like shouting into a void and no one could hear me. But suddenly, someone could. Someone noticed.

I wanted to tell her everything—about the nights of staring at the ceiling, the sting of metal against my skin, the suffocating isolation that had no end. But all I could do was nod, my throat too tight to speak. And she understood.

She did not push. She did not try to fix me. She just sat there, beside me, reminding me that I was not by myself. And that was enough.

I cried for the first time in what felt like forever. Not the tight, secretive kind where you bite your lip and hope nobody notices, but the kind that shakes your entire body. She didn't flinch when

my shoulders trembled, didn't recoil when I brushed my sleeve across my face, ashamed to weep in front of another. Rather, if anything, she edged closer, not to invade my space but to make sure I knew she wasn't going anywhere.

After a few minutes, my breathing returned to normal. The tears didn't repair anything—they didn't remove the scars on my body or the weight in my heart—but they did something I hadn't experienced in a long time. They made me feel lighter.

When I finally met her eyes, she smiled—not a big, happy grin, but a gentle, knowing one, the kind that says I get it. And then she did something I never anticipated.

She rolled up her sleeve.

Thin, silvery lines marked her wrist, but just visible. My breath was frozen in my throat. All those years I'd thought I was the only one, that there was no other person to understand what it was like to be like this. And yet here she was—evidence that I wasn't alone in this. That maybe, just maybe there was an escape.

"I know how difficult it is," she said, her words barely above a whisper. "But it does get better. I swear.