

HERBAL TEA

by LUKAS NÜNNERICH

A little girl lies on the cold, metallic table of the examination room. She cries, all babies do, right? She's meant to cry. Her mother isn't surprised she does; her father isn't surprised either.

There's already a bandage on her small hand and on her right arm.

"I thought a herbal compress would do."

Her screams resonate through my body. The molecules in the air dance to the rhythm of her pulse. I inhale them. They riot inside my lungs. Bursting, bursting out.

But my scrubs are heavy, my white shoes stick to the floor. I won't move.

"Can we go now?" Her mother's voice is calm. While speaking, she takes three steps towards the door - leaving her baby alone. She is ready to sign whatever needs to be signed to go.

"Can I go now?" Her mother's voice is indifferent. She wants to go home, no matter what.

The bandages are removed. Her skin is soft and delicate, the way baby skin is meant to be, right? But it clings to the cloth, and layer by layer, it is peeled away.

I see the fat, trying to envelop her. I see the muscles, trying to defend her pure soul. I see the bones, trying to outgrow her helplessness.

Large blisters from burns cover her hand and arm. They swell and grow. They form a barrier between her indifferent family and her fragile fingers, reaching out for a new world.

She is hurt. She has been baptised in boiling water.
Open skin is vulnerable to indoctrination...

Welcome to your new home, little girl.

My cousin has two little boys. Well, they used to be little.

I remember collecting herbs with them to make homemade tea. I remember how they dug deep into the earth, pulling up the roots of every single plant, freeing the herbs from the dirt as they dragged them out of their green home. I remember how they both reached for a dazzling blue stone - a leftover shard from a cheap liquor bottle - slicing deep into their skin and flesh.

I bandaged their hands, pressed crushed ice against them. I blew on the covered wounds and drove them to the hospital.

Nowadays, they explain to me why teabags float when you set them on fire. The molecules move faster as they get warmer, the warm air becomes less dense, and with the updraft, the teabags begin to fly.

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A little boy lies on the cold, metallic table of the examination room. He cries, all babies do, right? He's meant to cry. His father isn't surprised he does; his mother isn't surprised either.

There's already a bandage on his leg.
"I thought a herbal compress would do."

His screams resonate through my body. The molecules in the air dance to the rhythm of his pulse. I inhale them. They riot inside my lungs. Bursting, bursting out.

But my scrubs are heavy, my white shoes stick to the floor. I won't move.

"Can we go now?" His father's voice is calm. While speaking, he takes three steps towards the door - leaving his baby alone. He is ready to sign whatever needs to be signed to go - ready to sign whatever needs to be signed to silence it.

"Can I go now?" His father's voice is indifferent. He does not want to be in the same room as his baby.

The leg is X-rayed. I see the thighbone, made to carry him on exploration tours. I see the thighbone, made to carry him on escape tours. I see the thighbone, bent like a flimsy stick until it snapped.

He is hurt. His nappy has been changed by rough hands.

...broken bones cannot withstand pressure.

Welcome to your new home, little boy.

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I inhale your screams. But I can't exhale them.

I run - out of the room, out of the hospital. I want to take you with me. I want to rescue you.

Open skin is vulnerable to indoctrination; broken bones cannot withstand pressure.

My fat, and muscles, and bones become chopped-up herbs. Collect them! My skin becomes cloth and paper. Set it on fire!

I feel the molecules in my lungs move faster as they get warmer, the warm air becomes less dense, and with the updraft - I begin to fly. High above, I don't have to feel the pain. I can exhale.

Far away, I can scream.

I can answer you.