There are some situations that strike the soul deeply and time is the only cure.

9:00 PM
“Mom, open this goddamn door!” Laura roared in between pounding fists on her mother’s bedroom door. “Mom! I’m not kidding! Open this fucking door!” Laura’s pummels grew more insistent the longer her mother remained silent on the other side. Each forceful pound sounding more muffled by the heavy barrier between them.

Karen sat quietly on the edge of her bed, fingers absently tracing the patterns on her quilt. Her daughter’s pleading voice seemed to barely penetrate the solid wood door separating the two of them.

She pulled a notebook out of her bedside drawer. She uncapped her pen and scrawled careful letters across the paper. She began to write: My dearest Laura....

“Shitbags,” Deputy Peterson mumbled under his breath while he watched his fellow deputy take down a witness report from the tiniest old woman he had ever seen. Her frail frame seemed to fold in itself as she hugged her elbows.

Deputy Peterson turned back to his witness. The owner, the very nice old lady- small enough to fit into his pocket, claimed her neighbor saw someone take her UPS package off her porch. The other deputy didn’t need him; but, he liked to help. He listened and took notes while the man swore he saw some unsavory ‘feller’ in her yard a few days ago. “I seen him snoopin’ around here just the other day” he drawled on. Of course he saw an unsavory character, Deputy Peterson thought to himself. He cast a glance at the neighborhood and shook his head slightly. They would never find who stole her package in this neighborhood. Dilapidated houses loomed over him- one swift wind and the jenga towers would come crashing down. Game over.

Deputy Peterson glanced at his watch to write down the time. 9:00 PM. It’s only 9 and he’s already dealt with two home visits for minors on house arrest, a dumbass who thought driving down the interstate at 130 MPH was a brilliant idea, and this theft report of someone robbing this nice lady. Yeah, it’s going to be a long night, he thought to himself as he finished the interview with the ‘witness’. A term he was going to use lightly.

9:05 PM
Laura continued to bang on her mother’s door. She paused and pressed her ear to it. The door felt solid, stable. She traced the grain of the wood with her fingertips while she awaited an answer she knew she wouldn’t get. Tears blurred her vision and the pattern of the door began to drown.

“Mom, I don’t know what to do. Tell me what I can do. Please. Just open the door.” She waited a second- her ear pressed against the heavy door. Silence. She knew something wasn’t right.

Laura started thrusting her tiny frame into the solid wooden door but her size was no match. Regardless, she continued. She could feel bruises forming on her arms and shoulders as she
continued to try to break down through the only stable thing within the house.

Her daughter’s pleas weren’t loud enough to sway Karen’s decision. She signed her note: I will always love you and set it down on her freshly made bed. She was sure she would find it there. She glanced at the ripped corner of the newspaper- a marriage announcement. She clutched the smiling couple in her hands until their faces folded in on themselves. She dropped it on the bed next to the note. She unfolded the old, withered towel she grabbed from the linen closet and laid it out of the floor. That won’t do, she thought. She dragged the towel away from the laminate flooring and readjusted it on the tile in her adjoining bathroom, smoothing out all the corners and wrinkles.

Deputy Peterson returned to his cruiser to type up the report. Protocol has them draft the report on paper and then upload it to their software system later. Although a little redundant, It’s pretty effective. They don’t always have time to immediately type the report and the longer they wait- the more information they may forget. He leaned back in the driver’s seat of his cruiser while he watched his colleague finish up the interview with the victim. He hated that the assurances his colleague was more than likely providing were in vain. He cranked the key. The motor in his cruiser roared to life and he began typing.

9:08 PM
“Mom?” Laura pleaded through the door. She rammed her body into it one more time. Pain spread up her arm and into her neck. How much longer could she keep doing this? She pressed her ear to the door one more time. Silence. Fear and anger continued to radiate throughout Laura’s core. That’s it, she thought to herself. She grabbed her cellphone and made the call.

“911. What is your emergency?”

Laura didn’t know what to say. How could she formulate the situation without breaking down into hysterics? She felt like she was betraying her mom.

“Hello? 911. What is your emergency?”

Laura found a voice that didn’t sound like her. The voice she discovered was that of a little girl. Not a 17 year old about to graduate. “Yes, I need help.”

“Yes, how can we help you?”

“I think,” Laura struggled to find the words, “I think my mom is going to kill herself.” There. She finally admitted it. A new reign of fear caused her limbs to convulse and her voice to shake. A new round of tears raked the sides of her cheeks and her lips quivered as she struggled to make out what the dispatcher was saying.

“Ma’am, we need your address. Where are you?”

Laura regurgitated the address she’s had memorized since she was six. She currently didn’t recognize her childhood home.
“Okay, ma’am, we’re sending help your way. Please stay on the line with me until a deputy makes it to you. Where is your mom now?”

“Um... locked in her room. I can’t hear anything. She isn’t making any noise.”

“Ma’am do you have any guns or weapons in the house?”

Oh, god. Laura’s heart momentarily faltered within her chest. Did her mother have a gun? She shouldn’t. Dad took his guns with him. She honestly didn’t know the answer, “I don’t think so. I don’t know!” Laura fought the urge to vomit.

“Ok, just stay on the line, a deputy will be to you shortly. What’s your name?”

“Laura. My name is Laura”

Karen stood on the towel in her bathroom. She placed a hand over her chest and felt the steady beats of her heart. She closed her eyes and listened to the rhythm of her fleeting life. She knew what she wanted. Her daughter would eventually understand. Everyone would understand once they read the note.

She took a deep breath and reached for the steak knife she grabbed from the kitchen. She had the knife hidden in her vanity drawer for days now. Laura didn’t notice it was missing. If she had noticed, she would have suspected.

Her left hand stayed on her chest, pressing down on bones meant to protect her heart.

She held the knife by the handle and examined the sawed edge. Although dulled with use, it would still cut through their steaks without a problem. Pain was never an issue. Karen hadn’t felt anything is years. This was a long time coming.

Her fingers danced their way down her breastplate, feeling each climb and fall of bone and space. She placed two index fingers over the place right between her breasts. She took the knife and extended her arm out to the side of her body. In one fluid motion, she charged the knife right for her target.

“343, do you copy?”

Deputy Peterson grabbed his radio, “343 copy, over”. He released the tab on the side of his radio waiting for a response. Good. Anything to get him the hell away from this backwoods neighborhood and this sad old lady. The broken streetlights cascaded uneven light throughout the street. Even in the dark, Deputy Peterson could be the decay. The rot.

“We have a possible attempted suicide in progress, over.”

Oh shit.

“343, copy. On my way”.

He signaled to his fellow deputy that he had to go as he turned on his lights and sirens and headed
to another house deeper in the neighborhood. Red and blue flashing lights lit up the houses as he barreled his way down the streets.

9:10 PM
“Laura? Are you still on the line?”

“Yes!” Laura began beating on her mother’s door again. “I can hear her screaming! You have to hurry!” Laura’s stomach rolled as she listened to her mother’s bursting screams continue.

“A deputy is on his way. Make sure you’re standing in the light and wave him down when you see him. Stay out of the road.”

“I can’t just leave her!”

“Laura, the deputy can get to your mother quicker if he knows where she is. EMS are on the way too.”

Laura hesitated while a new fit of wretchedness sounded from the crack underneath her mother’s door. Laura’s hesitation quickly gave way and she ran through the front door, the screen door flying off the hinges and left hanging in the wake of her exit.

She ran to the street light that sat in their front yard and she began to pace.

“I don’t see anyone!” She screamed into the phone.

“I know you’re upset. But I need you to remain calm. They are on their way. A deputy should be there in approximately three minutes.” Three minutes? A lot could happen in three minutes. Laura’s mind raced with thoughts of her mother and what could happen in three minutes. She continued to pace.

The bone protecting her precious organ was proving to be a problem. Karen underestimated the power it would take to penetrate the bone and puncture her heart. Anger flourished in her as she yanked the serrated knife from her chest, blood pooling on her shirt and onto the floor. With a scream of pain, aggravation, and sheer adrenaline, she plunged the knife into her chest a second time. Hoping this time her strength could could get the job done.

“Where the fuck is this house?” Deputy Peterson breathed into the dashboard. His eyes raked both sides of the street. He turned a corner and found a homely girl with no shoes standing in the middle of her yard. Her frantic arm movements signaled for him. He slammed the cruiser into park and threw his body out of the car.

9:13 PM
“He’s here!” Laura hung up the phone and dropped it in the grass by her feet. She hoped he wasn’t too late.
“My mom! Please hurry! She locked herself in her room! I tried to get in but—”

“Are there any other exits in her room besides her door?” He barked as Laura fumbled with her words. He started heading towards the house.

“What? Yes. Wait. No. Her windows still have shutters from the st—”

“Do you have any weapons in the house?” He yelled over his shoulder as he stormed up the steps on the front porch.

“What? No! I don’t know! I—” Choking sobs cut off her words as she ran after him. She made it onto the first step of the porch before he held up a big meaty hand, halting her immediately.

“Where’s her room?” He drew his gun from his belt.

“Oh my god! Why do you have a gun? You have to go help her!”

“You wait out here. Wait for the ambulance. When you see them, flag them down, yell for me.” He turned to face her for a moment.

“Ma’am? Did you hear me?” He stared into her dirty face but her eyes were wild with fear.

“Ma’am?”

“Yes, I heard you. But—”

“Stay. Out. Here.” He commanded as he silently ushered his way through the front door. Laura was left outside by herself. Without the comfort of the dispatcher on the phone, she felt vulnerable in the dark. Her body shuddered uncontrollably as she continuously repeated her directions. “Wait for the ambulance. Flag them down. Yell for him. Wait for the ambulance. Flag them down. Yell for him.”

Karen faded back into consciousness. She was now on the floor. Blood pooled around her midsection and the knife was sticking out of her chest. Only a few inches of the blade concealed by her meaty flesh. Her strength failed her. She couldn’t break the bone.

The pounding on the door had stopped moments before she blacked out. She thought she heard a man’s voice but the ringing in her ears made it hard to tell. She must have hit her head. She couldn’t help but wonder how long she was out. Not long enough to bleed to death, she answered herself.

Realizing her method was failing, she grabbed hold of the knife once more. Her head was foggy and her vision was cloudy. The handle slippery with blood. She yanked it out of her chest, tearing flesh and shirt away with it. Karen cried out in pain but her cry was pitiful and weak. Shallow gasps of breath consumed her. She knew she had to act quickly.

The pounding on her bedroom door began again. This time harder, more forceful. Before she lost consciousness again, she thrust the knife upward through her stomach, just below the breastbone. She hoped the upward angle would be enough. Blackness swirled around her and before she fell back into the black abyss she longed for, her bedroom door came crashing open.
Deputy Peterson gripped his gun, the barrel facing the floor. With situations like this, he could never tell how it would play out. Mentally unstable people were the most dangerous cases. Their actions unpredictable. If she had a gun, he needed to be prepared. He inched his way across the living room. The house was small, dark, dirty. His boots were sticking to the laminate floors with every step. When he got deeper into the living room, he could see the door to the master bedroom.

He rapped loudly on the bedroom door. “Ma’am? I’m Deputy Peterson with the Maycounty Sheriff’s Office. Can you hear me?” He waited for a response. He pressed his ear to the door frame and stilled his breathing. He listened. His trained ears told him it might be too late. He knocked again, this time more forcefully. He listened again. A strange gurgling sound hit his ears and that was all he needed. He backed up a few feet away from the door and used his booted foot and strength in his legs to force the solid wood door open. It took one, solid kick and the door crashed open hitting the wall with a loud thud. He surveyed the room, seeing nothing. It wasn’t until he turned to see the bathroom that he realized he may have been right about his timing.

“343, requesting backup, over.” He released the lever on the radio and cleared his mind. Training and experience started to take over.

“343, backup on the way, over.”

He hastily moved over to the lifeless body on the bathroom floor. He surveyed the scene before taking action. He had seen something like this before. A man pretended to be dead, only to try to steal his fellow officer’s gun when he reached down to check for a pulse. Deputy Peterson reached to the back of his gun belt and took out his rubber gloves. Deputies always have gloves, just in case. Once his hands were protected from the blood, he checked for any other weapons besides the knife protruding from the woman’s abdomen. When he was satisfied he didn’t see any, he checked for a pulse. Although faint, he could feel life hanging on in the arteries in her neck. Within seconds he had towels around the blade and he was applying pressure to the wound. He learned not to remove weapons until EMS arrived to ensure the weapon didn’t hit any vital organs. He didn’t need her bleeding out internally when a fair amount of blood covered the bathroom floor already. He applied pressure and he waited for backup. He thought back to the girl standing in the front yard, counting on him to save her mom. He looked down at the woman sprawled on the floor. This one was going to haunt his dreams for awhile. They always do.

9:16 PM

“They’re here! Hey! They’re here!” Laura screamed through the front door. Laura was about to run into the house but remembered she was supposed to show them the way. Wait for the ambulance. Flag them down. Yell for him. She needed them to get there quickly so they could help her mom. Despite the swirling lights of Deputy Peterson’s patrol car, she ran back to her street light and waved her arms frantically, hoping they saw her. “Flag them down” she repeated to herself.

A young man jumped out of the passenger side before the ambulance came to a complete stop. A team of men routinely gathered gear and a stretcher. Laura watched in awe as the red lights repeatedly illuminated her face, momentarily blinding her with each pass.

A man was running up the driveway and headed for the steps. She retreated into the shadows of the lawn. He was met by Deputy Peterson and they briefly exchanged words before the EMT slipped into the house followed by the others and the stretcher. The gravity of the situation caused Laura to fall to her knees. She buried her face into her hands and released heavy sobs.
Deputy Peterson could hear the wailing of the sirens as they rounded the corner and pulled closer to the house. He waited. He counted to fifty before releasing the wound and running to the front door. His job was to secure the scene and he needed to explain that the only weapon was still lodged in the victim. He needed to time it just right so the pressure wasn’t off the wound very long. After fifty seconds, he released his hold on the woman and reluctantly went out onto the porch.

After briefing them, the men ran past him and into the house. Deputy Peterson carefully took off his gloves, careful to use the innards of one to remove the other. Although his uniform was soaked in her blood, he preferred his hands to stay sanitized.

He moved his way over to Laura and stood by her, blocking her view of the house. Careful to remain in the shadows so she wouldn’t notice the state of his uniform. He needed to keep her separated from her mother.

9:20 PM
Laura peered up through her fingers to see Deputy Peterson standing by her. The pain that she had been ignoring now licked its way up her arm and throughout the top of her back. Her arm felt too thick in her shirt sleeve. The EMTs were still inside. It seemed like a long time to be in there. Too long. She cried out in pain from her arm, from her mom.

A light blinded her once more as Deputy Peterson shined his flashlight on her arm to inspect.

“We need to have your arm looked at too.” He said matter of factly.

“Where’s my mom?” She questioned. Her voice faded away as exhaustion and pain overcame her.

Her questions were soon answered as a man came out on the porch, towing the stretcher with him. Another man ushered the head of it out the door and down the steps. Deputy Peterson was holding Laura back by her good arm. She didn’t even know she had stood. She didn’t realize she was trying to run to her mother.

In less time than it took Deputy Peterson to tell her she needed to stay back, her mother was loaded in the ambulance and hauled away. Sirens blared down the road. Within moments, the only sound was Laura’s ragged breathing.

Deputy Peterson released the hold on Laura’s arm. He didn’t mean to grab her so hard but she didn’t need to see what he saw. The mangled abdomen of her mother looked like something out of a horror movie. The image of torn flesh running on a circuit in his mind.

“Laura, I’m going to take you to the hospital to have your arm looked at. I’ll be there with you so we can over your statement.”

“Is my mom...?”

“You did the right thing, Laura.” He guided her to his cruiser, careful not to touch her injured shoulder. His hand absently fingered the breast pocket of his uniform. He could feel he crumpled up
newspaper and letter he swiped off the bed on his way out. Protocol says this should be in evidence but he knew Laura would need this someday. He didn’t have the heart to tell her now that her mother’s note was in his pocket, or that the EMT shared a knowing glance his way when he exited the house, confirming his suspicions that he did- indeed- feel the life slip away from her right underneath his blood soaked hands. For now, she needed to focus on healing. Her wounds are ones that would take a while to heal.