

It happened so suddenly that she didn't even have time to reach out her arms to brace herself for impact against the frozen sidewalk, her mind too focused on what questions she'd missed on the exam. Her ears were ringing; she knew she was screaming, but she couldn't hear her own voice over the pain. A guy she'd never met before—a huge guy she later found out was the basketball team's ace—ran to her side and knelt next to her, speaking into his phone while tears poured down her face. Her cheeks got even colder as the salty water froze against her skin.

The ER visit was quick and impersonal. A broken wrist. Her right one. 6-12 weeks for healing. Physical therapy would probably be needed based on the severity of the break. Kara just blinked at the X-ray that showed the grotesque snap of something meant to stay inside her body. The fall hadn't even been that bad, but she later found out from the basketball guy that part of her bone was protruding from her skin while she was screaming her head off as a light snow dusted them both like donuts.

Her doctor was hesitant to prescribe her anything more heavy-duty than ibuprofen 800s since there were no studies on the effects pain killers could have on trans women. If she hadn't had her incident, maybe she would have gotten a heavier-duty pain killer without any fuss. She was grateful, in a way, but she still sometimes cursed her doctor when the ache became too much at night and she couldn't take another ibuprofen yet.

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As Kara shuffled to class the next week, she glared at the slick spot of sidewalk where she'd fallen. She'd seen others fall there before and get up just fine, but of course *she* had to break her wrist. All her professors were happy to accommodate her, letting her use her phone to

record lectures and her literary criticism professor even provided handwritten notes the next day, knowing how much better she absorbed material when it was written. She was offered the services of a notetaker courtesy of the disability department, but she didn't need that. She could get by just fine on her own.

When Fran saw her as she settled into her usual seat, her jaw dropped.

“Oh my god, what happened?”

“Can you believe I got a terrible break just from slipping on the sidewalk?” Kara asked, trying and failing for a laugh.

“Are you okay?” Fran was hoping to go into medicine, so she spent a few minutes before the lecture started grilling her on whether she hit her head, if she was seeing double, whether the ER doctor went through all the right steps.

Kara wanted to point out that the ER doctor was a *doctor*, not a sophomore in college, but Fran was growing on her, so she answered her questions. All the attention from someone other than her parents was unfamiliar, making her squirm. As Fran fussed over her, helping her pull things from her backpack, Kara thought back to high school, the friends she'd had. They hadn't *abandoned* her, really, but she stopped getting asked to hang out, wasn't privy to everyone deciding to eat lunch in a different place. They still talked to her, were friendly and would laugh at her jokes, but...

“Well, now I can pay you back,” Fran said.

“Huh?”

“For when you took notes while I was out of town,” Fran said. “Unless you’re ambidextrous?”

“I—I’m not, but you don’t have to take notes for me or anything,” Kara protested. Fran’s usual way of taking notes was lackluster, mostly just scribbles of important words unlike Kara’s meticulous recreation of almost every word a professor said. “I have a recorder, I’ll be fine, really.”

Just then, Professor James came in and started lecturing without a word of greeting. Kara turned her recording app on, but was horrified to see that Fran looked much more concentrated than usual, her hand flying across her notebook as she filled up page after page with notes.

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“It’s nice to meet you Kara, I’m Matt,” her new physical trainer introduced himself. Instead of going for a handshake like he probably would in any other circumstance, he bumped Kara’s left fist with his own. “I’ve seen the x-rays for your break; nasty stuff. How are you feeling?”

The studio where she was receiving physical therapy after her cast finally came off was painted a warm yellow, full of equipment and other trainers helping people learn to walk or stretch. It felt personable with all the plants and art on the walls, less like a gym and more like a spa.

“Like an idiot for breaking my wrist from slipping,” Kara answered honestly. “How long do you think I’ll need to be back at full function?”

Matt carefully felt her wrist, noticing the way she winced at the touch. He didn't comment as he asked her to demonstrate her range of motion and her fine-motor abilities.

"I'm not sure," he said. "I don't like giving concrete timelines, just in case something goes sideways."

She sighed and watched a man across the room struggle to walk. She watched how his trainer encouraged him, her hands only reaching out to steady him when he nearly fell. Compared to that, Kara supposed she was lucky.

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"How were classes today, hun?"

"Fine, mom," Kara said, tossing her backpack next to the couch as she fell onto it. She clenched and unclenched her right hand, holding it up to the ceiling and staring at the jagged scar down her wrist.

It was almost dark out already, so the living room was dimly lit, evening light slanting across Kara. She kept staring upwards, watching headlights illuminate rectangles above her as they drove past.

"Your father made another huge sale today," her mom said, wiping her hands as she stepped into the living room.

"That's great," Kara said, still resting her head as she stared at the ceiling.

The sink was being filled with water, no doubt to rinse the freshly washed dishes. Or maybe she was doing another batch.

“You can tell me if you’re struggling again,” she said, her voice barely audible above the water pouring in the sink.

Kara laughed. “I’m just tired, okay?” She turned her head so she could meet her mom's tired gaze.

“Well, I’m going to start making dinner soon, would you mind helping me?”

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Even with her cast off, Fran was still dutifully taking double notes; one set for Kara, and one for herself.

“Fran, please, you don’t need to keep doing this, I can write again,” Kara protested, scribbling her own name into her notebook to prove herself and ignoring the pain that came with it.

“I want to,” Fran said. It was hard to argue against something so simply said. “Plus, I’ve been doing better on the homework and tests since I started taking notes for the both of us. Think of it as a favor for me, not you.”

Grumbling, Kara settled into her seat as the professor entered the lecture hall and Fran began taking notes for her once again. Though she could see her taking the notes, she still subtly turned her recorder on, just in case Fran changed her mind.

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“How have the home exercises been?” Matt asked. He was almost as old as her dad and treated her like a daughter during their sessions.

“Painful,” Kara answered honestly. She winced as she showed him what she’d been doing at home, the stretching almost more painful than the first few days after the break.

He frowned at the grimace on her face and gently held her wrist as she continued the exercise. He hummed. “Have you gotten an x-ray since you got the cast off?”

She shook her head.

He clicked his tongue in disapproval, but he still smiled at her. “As someone going into training for this, you should know better.”

She sighed. “It’s a lot of money for an x-ray, you know.”

“It’s more expensive to need surgery years down the road to fix an improperly healed wrist,” he said easily. “Now, let me show you some modified versions of those stretches; they might hurt less while you wait to get in for an x-ray.”

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“Well, it’s healed properly, but one of your nerves was damaged,” her doctor told her. She was much kinder than the impassionate ER doc, but Kara still felt the same disconnect she had when she first got her cast.

“And what does that mean?”

“More physical therapy, mostly,” she said, holding up her fresh x-rays to the light. “I want you to avoid writing and other fine motor skills as much as possible until your physical therapist clears you.”

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With a broken (*healed* she kept telling her parents, but they never changed how they referred to it) wrist, Kara was basically forbidden from searching for jobs.

“You need to focus on physical therapy, hun,” her mom had said.

“An injury like that could ruin your life, but it doesn’t have to,” her dad had said. “Plus, don’t you get credit hours for working with a physical therapist or something?”

It was just like after her suicide attempt again. Everyone always wanting to help her, even when she could do things herself. She was in the middle of complaining about all the babying she was receiving to her physical therapist when he guffawed, leaving her shocked.

“Kara, you broke your wrist,” Matt said, gently pushing against her palm as he helped her stretch. “Your *right* wrist, no less. People care about you.”

“But I’m not incompetent!”

He shook his head and gave her a sly grin. “Is that how you’re going to think of your future patients? Incompetent for needing help like this?”

Kara stewed. She didn’t want to give him the satisfaction. But he was right. “No, of course not.”

“You don’t get mad when I help you out like this,” Matt pointed out.

“Well, I’m paying you,” she said. “It’s your job.”

“I’d do this for free if I didn’t have to put food on the table,” he said. He showed her a new stretch, nodded happily when she didn’t wince in agony. “Let people help you. Let people care about you.”

Kara was annoyed when she got home after her appointment. She hated when other people were right. She hated needing so much help. Once she and her high school friends ‘grew apart’, Kara had decided she would never rely on someone again. It had gone well for her so far; she’d been on the Dean’s List twice, all without making a friend to help her through the more difficult material. Her ‘incident’ had been a bump in the road, but her parents weren’t treating her like she’d fall apart any second anymore.

But Fran was helping her without expectation of anything in return. All because Kara had agreed to share phone numbers and happily emailed notes when she had to miss so many classes.

She slammed the door shut, wincing at how loud the sound was in the house. Her mom welcomed her home warmly. She wasn’t offering to help Kara undo her winter boots anymore after a screaming match a few weeks before.

But... Her wrist ached. Matt had pushed her hard during their session.

“Mom?”

“Yes, honey?”

“Could you... Come help me with my boots?”

Without even hesitating, her mom stepped into the front entryway, swiped the snow from the tops of Kara’s boots, and undid her laces with practiced ease.