I’m unraveled

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by SaltyRedhead

Summary

Addison and Meredith recover together after Derek’s attack, but healing isn’t as simple as they think.

Chapter 1: Memories feel like weapons

Chapter Summary

Whumptober, Day 29, Asking for help | Aftercare | Too little,Too late
“I’m just desperate to stay afloat.”

Continuation of my Day 16 fic, *Can you hear me screaming? (Please don’t leave me)*

Chapter Notes

This is a dark fic, please read the tags.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Addison uncomfortably crossed her legs, a half-finished glass of wine in hand. The radio played a familiar melody, from the night Meredith had sat down next to her at the bar. If she was here, the blonde would pull her to her feet, swaying to the rhythm. Her hand dangerously low on her back, pinky underneath the waistband of her skirt. She’d whisper something in her ear about going home, Addison would pretend to think it over, then take her hand in her own, waving at Joe with the other. Giggles and sighs filling the car, Meredith’s hand steady on her thigh.

I just need to rip off the band-aid of divorce, then I can go home to Meredith—*she thought. It was a repeated mantra in her head, going over and over until she was dizzy with it.*

She felt guilty for taking Derek to what Meredith called their ‘sacred ground,’ but she needed to tell him where there were witnesses. Ever since he’d come back to her, he’d been different, quick to anger and volatile—all directed at her. She’d never known him to lose control of his emotions like this before. She didn’t know what exactly happened to him in the eighteen months he’d been gone, but it had changed him for the worse.

The last time she’d seen him had been after the pregnant patient with a brain tumor had died on the operating table, he’d made one reckless choice after another. He’d come back home, solemn and depressed, moping around the rooms. Then vanished that same night. She’d only heard about the patient the next morning when Mark called her to check on Derek. A search of the house came back empty, she’d filed a police report, hoping they’d find him. But nothing.

And now that he had found her, she wished he’d stayed gone.

The bell above the door rang, dragging her out of her musings. Addison couldn't help it, she automatically glanced at the newcomer and found the woman of her thoughts standing there. She nearly sagged with relief to see Meredith, the carefully concealed mask dropping for a moment as their gazes locked. Her pale blue eyes widened with jealousy and heartbreak. The guilt returned two-fold, she really wished she had picked somewhere else to tell him. Meredith turned, slamming the door behind her. Addison flinched and covered it up by taking a sip of her wine. She foolishly hoped that she'd come back, though she knew in her heart she wouldn't.

A small scoff reached her ears, biting her lip, Addison turned to him. "Yes?"

"Nothing." He leaned back in his chair. "So why are we here?"

Now or never. He can't stay on my couch another night—*she thought, fiddling with her ring.*

"I want a divorce." Her heart thudded in her chest, a mixture of relief and nerves made her jittery.

Derek stared, searching her face for something. He softly spoke, "Is it that blonde whore?"

"Excuse me?" She asked icily, raising an eyebrow, daring him to change his wording.

"Are you leaving me for the matchstick whore?"

She straightened her posture, fingers curling into fists under the table. "Don't you dare call her that!" Her voice rose.

"I'll call her whatever I like."

"You left me, not the other way around. Leave her out of this." Addison changed the subject, they'd only go in circles if they talked about Meredith. She asked, "Where were you for the last two years?"

"Wouldn't you like to know?" He took a sip of his scotch.

"Yes, I would. You scared me, the police couldn't find you. Patients needed you." Her voice broke. "I needed you."

"Clearly not you." He slammed his tumbler down, a scotch sloshed out, spilling onto the table. "You moved on."

Addison flinched, "I thought you died. I needed to move on, I was drowning in New York. No one saw me. *They only saw your widow. Our friends left one by one and I needed a new start."*

"There you go again, I, I, I and you, you, you. What about me? What about that I *was drowning under* your *expectations?"*

"*What are you talking about? I never put any expectations on you. I just wanted to love you and be loved in return."*

“You wanted everything to be perfect, and your parents—”

“No.” Addison interrupted, shaking her head. “You don’t get to bring up my parents. I’m sorry their expectations fell onto you too. But you knew—”

He loudly interrupted. “I did not.”

“Yes, you did.” Addison felt eyes on her and the busy bar quieted, looking at the two of them. Lowering her voice, she said, “Can you just sign the papers tomorrow? I’m done arguing with you. You’re not the man I married, and I don’t want to know the new one that took his place.”

Eyes narrowing, his face reddened, his shoulders shook. A dark look passed over his features.

Addison made to move away, not liking the look in his eye. When he lunged, punching her. She gasped, holding her cheek. He wrapped his large hands around her throat, cutting off her air supply. Clawing uselessly at his wrists and forearms, she tried to get away again when he pushed her clean off the chair. Landing hard on her back, air rushed out of her lungs. His hands loosened slightly, she sucked in a mouthful of air.

He straddled her, pinning her to the sticky floor, pupils blown wide as he stared, his grip tighter now. Legs uselessly kicking, her knees caught his side. She tried to roll him off, tears falling into her hairline.

Unbothered by her attempts to get him off, he lowered himself down to her, a dark glint in his eyes. One she’d only seen once before. Breath hot against her ear, he whispered, “I don’t want you anyway, you’re damaged goods.”

She wheezed, her vision starting to darken around the edges. She desperately wished for Meredith, closing her eyes, picturing her wry smile and slumped gait walking to her, hand out in invitation…

Addison woke up, heart pounding in her chest, her mouth open with a soundless scream. Her cheek throbbed, stomach churning, she swore she could still feel the ghost of his touch. She threw the covers off her sweaty body, startling Meredith awake. Not caring, she got up, running to the bathroom, ignoring the dizziness trying to slow her down.

“Addie!” Fast footsteps hurried behind her.

Dropping to her knees, she lifted the toilet seat up to throw up the meager contents of her stomach. Cool fingers gathered her hair away from her face, careful to not touch her any further. Her stomach settled, she grabbed a square of toilet paper, wiping her mouth and sitting on her heels. She flushed the toilet, turning to Meredith, her eyes wet.

Meredith let go of her hair and asked, “Same dream?”

Miserably nodding, she shuffled, needing to be closer to her girlfriend. Addison buried her face in her neck, tightly wrapping her arms around her. She sighed when Meredith embraced

her, erasing the cruel touch with a loving one.

Closing her eyes, Addison saw flashes of the rest of night playing behind her closed lids. Derek's cruel smile. Joe and a regular pulling him off of her. The lights and sirens arrived too late to capture him. Writing down what happened, the shutter of a camera documenting her injuries. Endless waiting with a broken phone at Meredith's house for hours.

It started again.

Meredith. Smile. Pain. Choking. Joe. Police. Flashes. Waiting.

Meredith. Smile. Pain—

"Tell me the story please." Addison whispered, breathing hard against her neck. Desperate to think of anything else.

Choking. Joe. Police. Fla—

"There was a girl at a bar." She started, bringing a hand up to stroke Addison's hair, gently playing with the ends. "She was dressed in elegant clothes, a sad faraway look in her eyes. But when she met the other girl at the bar, their eyes locked and a hundred things were said at once. The other girl sat down next to the first one, neither one wanting to talk about their pasts so they talked about books. All kinds of books from the classics to science fiction to philosophy…"

A small smile played on her lips as she listened, Addison snuggled in, mindful of the stitches on Meredith's leg. She loved this story, it had become her antidote to nightmares. She closed her eyes, clean of images from that night at long last.

They stayed like that for a while until the birds started chirping in the early morning hours. An alarm went off, breaking the spell Addison had been under.

Reluctantly tearing herself away from Meredith, she found Meredith's concerned gaze on her. "I'm just desperate to stay afloat and he keeps haunting me every time I close my eyes. I need him to go away."

"I'm sorry, baby." Meredith cupped her unbruised cheek, rubbing tears away with the pad of her thumb.

"I hate this. I keep waking you up." She leaned into her hand. "I—I'm sorry." Her voice cracked, tears running down her cheeks again. She painfully swallowed.

"Addison." She gently held her face with two hands. "It's okay. I *want* you to wake me up when you have a nightmare. We're a team, you and I. You're hurting right now and your mind is processing it. You *will* be okay."

"Okay." She had a hard time believing she would ever be *okay* again. But for Meredith she'd try.

“I know you don’t believe me. But one day, you’ll go to sleep without thinking about him.” She wiped her tears away with her thumbs. “I love you.”

“I love you too.”

Meredith got off the floor, her low back popping as she stretched. Holding a hand for Addison to take, her palms had healed, it was shiny in places where it had scarred from her run for her life. Gratefully taking it, she got off the floor, her butt and legs were numb, with Meredith’s help, she limped to the sink.

“I’m going to turn the alarm off. Are you good?”

“Yeah.” She washed her hands, blood rushed down her legs, sensation slowly returning to her lower body. She was getting too old to sit for a spell on the tile floor.

“Don’t pass out on me.” Meredith winked in the mirror.

“It was one time.” Addison protested, drying her hands, reaching for her purple toothbrush.

Walking out to their bedroom to shut the alarm off, she said over her shoulder. “One time too many.”

Addison brushed her teeth, finally looking at her reflection. Tearstained face, the bruise on her cheek had turned yellow, specks of green littered near the top. The marks on her throat had faded to an ugly shade of yellow, at least she could no longer see each individual finger wrapped around her. If only she could stop replaying that moment in her head.

Meredith. Sm—

No, get it together—she thought, brushing her teeth rougher, her gums protested the motion but it let her think of something else.

Spitting in the sink, blood mixed with spit and toothpaste. She turned on the water, washing the evidence away and set her toothbrush next to Meredith’s. She grabbed a cleanser, carefully washing her face. Soft footsteps behind her made her open her eyes, blinking water away, she saw that it was Meredith coming back—half dressed for the day in a long-sleeve shirt and panties, her bandage needed to be changed. Addison reached for a towel, drying her face.

Meredith reached for her toothbrush when Addison spoke, “Can I change your bandage?”

“The stitches are being taken out today.” She put a dab of toothpaste on her toothbrush.

“Please.” Addison pulled out a hairbrush, running it through her short hair. The style was new, two days ago, she’d gone to a hairdresser and walked out with a short bob.

“Fine.” She arched an eyebrow, staring at her in the mirror. “But I know what you’re doing.”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.” Addison said in a rush. Just because she liked taking care of Meredith did not mean she was ignoring her own problems. She just didn’t

want to open that can of worms…right this minute. Maybe even ever.

“Okay.” Meredith brushed her teeth, dropping the topic for now.

Addison left to go get dressed, she found a green turtle neck and slacks in their shared closet. It was fit to burst with their wardrobes being combined, and it *still* didn’t hold all of Addison’s clothes, there were clear totes in the attic—her spring and summer wardrobe. A few boxes were in the hallway, at least once a day someone stubbed their toe on them.

She took her nightgown off, finding clean undergarments and slipped them on. Putting on the slacks, then the turtleneck—not liking the tightness around her throat, she ripped it off. She’d hide the bruise wrapped around her neck with makeup instead.

Addison swiped through her sweaters, landing on a purple one. It was a higher neckline without resting against her throat. She pulled it on, sighing at its warmth and cozy feel.

Coming out of the closet, Addison smiled, leaning on the doorframe to watch Meredith apply mascara to her lashes. She’d leaned over the counter to get closer, her panties emphasizing her ass.

“See something you like?” Meredith asked. She stood up, turning around, her low back pressing into the counter.

“I do.” Addison moved, walking up to her. “I see my girlfriend in need of a bandage change.” She held her waist, rubbing her hipbones with her thumbs.

Meredith kissed her chin, “I’ll get the supplies out, you finish up in here.”

Addison nodded, letting her go, pulling out her cosmetic bag. She got out her foundation and started at her neck, it disappeared after a few swipes.

Ten minutes later, she walked out, feeling more like herself than she had in two weeks. The time off to recover had been welcome, but she wasn’t one for staying at home for weeks on end. Neither was Meredith.

Hands freshly washed, she found Meredith laying on their made bed with the supplies next to her. She joined her, sitting next to her injured leg, the bandage had already been removed and a towel underneath the area.

Addison smiled, to her practiced eye, the wound had healed nicely, well-approximated edges, no infection or active bleeding. It was a long incision, mid-thigh to just above her knee. A stab of guilt settled between her ribs, if she hadn’t enraged him, then maybe he wouldn’t have attacked Meredith.

Something on her face must have shown where her mind had gone. Meredith spoke, rubbing her arm. “Addie, you couldn’t have known what he was going to do. I’m okay, I made it out alive. *You* made it out alive. We,” she gestured between them, “are alive.”

Addison nodded, she knew in her brain, it wasn’t her fault. Derek’s actions were his own. But her heart hadn’t caught up to it yet. “Your stitches are ready to come out.”

“I thought about pulling them out yesterday.” Meredith admitted.

“I noticed.” Addison said dryly, pulling on the gloves.

She went to work, cleansing the area with water and mild soap, patting it dry. Opening the ointment bottle, she applied a thin layer over the incision. Addison put gauze on top, Meredith handed her the tape, already cut up to save time. Snapping the gloves off, she threw everything in the trash by the bed and turned back to find Meredith batting her eyes.

“Yes?”

“Can you kiss my boo-boo again? For good luck.”

A small smile appeared, bending over, she kissed the center of the bandage—leaving a print of her lipstick. “Like that?” She locked eyes with Meredith.

“Maybe another?” She said impishly.

Addison did it again two more times, traveling up her thigh. Then moving to peck her on the lips a couple times. “How’s that?”

“Just perfect.” Meredith sighed, sliding off the bed and walking to the closet to find pants.

“I’ll be downstairs making coffee while you finish getting dressed.” Addison grabbed her keys, her new phone, and workbag. She stepped into a pair of *Prada* suede pumps.

Meredith poked her head out. “Izzie and George are taking George’s car to work today, they have a 36 hour shift. We don’t have to worry about them.”

“Good, we can take my car then.”

Addison left the room, the last three boxes were stacked against the wall. She’d deal with them tonight after work, it was full of books. The bookshelf from her apartment had been placed in Meredith’s room last night.

Carefully, dodging the boxes, she noticed the bathroom door was closed, a strip of light came out from under the door. She winced, it meant Stevens was in the kitchen—she still hadn’t forgiven her for the quints. Addison sympathized, it had taken her a year to forgive Richard, but it taught her to keep professional distance. Stevens had let it be known, she no longer had an interest in OB and she barely tolerated Addison’s presence in the house.

Addison went downstairs, heels clicking on the stairs. She could hear the sounds of dishes clattering in the sink, the smell of muffins made her mouth water. She’d taken a liking to Steven’s baking and cooking over the past couple of months she’d been dating Meredith.

She set her workbag and keys in her designated spot. Gathering her strength, Addison straightened her posture and moved into the kitchen. Stevens' back was to the door, her tense shoulders and head tilt gave her away. She knew Addison had entered a space she deemed hers. The dishes were set in the dishwater harder, the clinking was louder.

Chocolate chip muffins sat on a cooling rack. Addison eyed them, her stomach growled. She moved around in the kitchen, filling the coffee machine with water and dumping coffee grounds in it. She pressed the button to start it and got four thermos containers out, waiting at the table, eating a muffin and ignoring the growing tension in the kitchen. She'd learned from previous times that small talk went nowhere with Stevens.

The silence grated on her nerves, she tried to focus on the steps of labor.

Contractions, stronger than Braxton Hicks, check dilation. Five centimeters. Ask about if water had ruptured. Ask about the length of contractions. And if they'd like pain relief.

Meredith.

No.

Smile.

No.

Um, they said yes, so I would call an anesthesiologist or get an intern to do it.

Pain. Chok—stop.

It could take hours. But once fully dilated, the baby goes down the birth canal, support the head, one shoulder comes out, the other follows. The baby comes out, red-faced and wailing —it's a boy.

Joe.

No.

Police—no, I place him on the mother's chest, go back down for the afterbirth. No tearing. The midwife clamped the cord when it stopped pulsating and offered the scissors to the father.

Flashes.

Check the placenta, it's whole and intact. No need to go back. Check on the baby, he's healthy and clean, wrapped in a towel. Textbook delivery. Leave the room to let parents bond.

Waiting.

Please stop.

"I don't want you anyway, you're damaged goods."

Leave my head, Derek!

Meredith—

Stop. Stop. Stop.

She roughly bit her tongue, distracting her brain from the memory with pain again.

O’Malley joined them, swiping a muffin he sat opposite of her. “Izzie, are you ready to go?”

Addison breathed out, human interaction would silence her thoughts. She shook the bad memories away, concentrating on following the conversation.

“I just need to brush my teeth.” Stevens said, closing the dishwasher. “Can you put the muffins in the basket?” She said to George and handed him a basket lined with cloth.

“Yeah.” He mumbled around a mouthful.

Stevens held back an eyeroll at seeing Addison carefully watching her, she went upstairs, long blonde hair in a bun.

The coffee machine beeped, Addison got up, glad to be doing something again. She put the hot coffee into each thermos. She made Steven’s coffee first, she filled it two-thirds of the way and then got creamer out from the fridge. Ignoring O’Malley’s eyes on her back, she stirred her coffee after adding the creamer. Then moved on to Meredith’s, black coffee. O’Malley’s was similar to her own, black coffee with a spoonful of sugar. She screwed the lids on and set them on the island, putting the dishes she used in the dishwasher and took the cooling rack from O’Malley’s slack grip.

“You made coffee.”

“Yes.” Addison found the soap already in the dishwasher, she started it and turned to O’Malley still staring at her in shock.

“And you made it the way we like.”

“I’ve been around all of you and lived here for two weeks. I notice things.” She swiped a muffin for Meredith, setting it next to her coffee.

O’Malley whispered under his breath. “My attending knows how I drink my coffee.” He grabbed his cup and a sip. “And she makes it better than me. Thank you.”

Addison nodded. “You’re welcome.”

Stevens came downstairs, jacket on and stepped into the kitchen. She got a muffin and looped her elbow through the basket handle.

Addison held up her thermos cup. “I made you this, Stevens.”

“She made coffee how we like it.” O’Malley said. “And it’s good.”

She stared and took it from her, fingers brushing Addison’s. Stevens smiled, a little thing but it was the first one she’d gifted Addison since Thanksgiving. “Thank you.”

“You’re welcome.” Addison smiled back, pleased with herself for getting two words out of her.

“Izzie, let’s go.” O’Malley said, keys in hand, chocolate smeared across his upper lip.

“Yeah. I’m coming.” She moved away from the redhead, she said over her shoulder. “Good luck today.”

“Oh, um, thank you.”

She nodded and left with O’Malley, the front door slamming behind them.

Slow hesitant steps came downstairs—Meredith. Collecting their coffees and a muffin, Addison met her by the front door.

“I couldn’t find the converse I wanted.” Meredith showed off her black converse and put on her winter jacket, one of Addison’s scarves around her neck.

“Sorry, honey.”

“Don’t worry about it. I like seeing my things next to your things.”

“Good. Cause I like it too. I got you a muffin.” Addison showed her prize and set them on the entryway table, putting on her coat, slinging her workbag on her shoulder. She picked up her coffee. “Ready to go?”

“Yes.” Meredith got her coffee and muffin. “I’ll lock up.”

“And I’ll go start the car.” Addison finished, she went outside, shivering at the nippy air. The snowman O’Malley and Stevens created after their shift on Christmas still stood tall, he was misshapen in the middle. But he was charming to see, Addison couldn’t remember the last time she made a snowman. It had been years.

A gust of wind made her shiver again, she hurried to her *Porsche* and put the keys in the ignition. The engine purred, cold air blasted from the vents. She sipped her coffee, sighing at the warmth on her tongue and down into her belly.

Meredith got in the car, setting her travel mug between her legs. “Are you ready to go back to work?” She buckled her seat belt, a twinkle in her eye.

“Yes.” Addison set her coffee down and put the *Porsche* in reverse, backing out of the driveway, checking for pedestrians and cars. A little girl skipped on the sidewalk, holding tight to her mother’s hand, she waved at them with the other. Addison locked eyes with the mother briefly, her face was blank, dark circles under her eyes told of sleepless nights—something Addison could relate to. They walked past, Addison backed the car out the rest of the way, driving out of the neighborhood.

Work would be a much needed distraction, she’d missed saving lives and delivering babies. In surgery, she could put her personal life in a box and only think of her patient. It had helped in the past, she could only hope that it would help this time too.

Meredith broke the silence after a few minutes. “I miss cutting.” She sighed, taking a sip of her coffee.

“And the smell of the OR?” Addison asked, pulling onto the highway, getting into the middle lane. They were leaving before the rush hour started.

“Yes.” Meredith sighed again.

“Does it…” Meredith trailed off, biting at her lip. “Does it all come back to you after being out of the OR for a while?”

Addison thoughtfully hummed. She had taken a sabbatical after Derek had disappeared and several vacations before. With each one, she hesitated before picking up a scalpel. By the time her scrub nurse handed it to her, she’d take a breath, close her eyes, and it’d come rushing back in a flash and she was ready to start.

“Addie,” Meredith prompted.

“Yes, it’s like remembering how to ride a bike. Muscle memory helps. It’ll come back.” Addison reassured her.

“Okay.”

“You’ll be okay.” Addison reached over to pat her thigh. “Studying will help if you’re really worried.”

Addison set her things in her office, pulling on her white coat. The last piece to her armor, she was ready to see patients now. Her phone buzzed, she dug her glasses out of her pocket, slipping them on her nose. Reading the message, she smiled.

Meredith: Izzie is going to take out my stitches and Bailey has put me on scut. She said she expected me to be distracted. Some first day back.

Addison: I can always try to ask for you tomorrow.

Meredith: I wish, I’m on general this rotation.

Addison: Maybe next time.

Meredith: Gotta go, Izzie is asking a question. Love you. :*

Addison: I love you too.

Putting her glasses away, she’d checked her schedule with her charge nurse, there were no surgeries until later in the morning. She was free to check on the NICU. Most doctors avoided it, but to her, it was a safe space.

Walking the halls, she nodded at several nurses and OB residents who welcomed her back after her time off. It felt odd. Her soon-to-be ex husband came and wrecked her life apart, now he faced charges and time in prison. She chewed the inside of her cheek, she wasn’t nervous talking about that night, it was the murderous stare that had taken over his dreamy eyes.

Addison shuddered, firmly locking that thought behind. Rounding the corner, she opened the door to the NICU. Nodding at the nurse rounding on their patients, she read over the charts—there were a few ready to go home, a new one came into the unit last night. She donned on a pink gown, checking on the ones ready to go home.

Thirty minutes later she came across the new one, born at thirty-one weeks with respiratory distress syndrome. He was hooked up to a CPAP machine, his skin still had a grey tinge but he wasn't grunting right now. His eyes were closed, Addison hoped he was dreaming. She sat down, sticking her hand in the isolette and putting her finger within his hand. A soft smile formed when he reflexively grabbed her finger, his grip tight.

She desperately wanted to have a baby with Meredith, but it wasn't the right time. Nor was it something they'd talked about in depth. Meredith had that deer in the headlights look she got when talking of the future. Addison didn't want to tie her down with even more responsibilities. Maybe in a few years when the time was right, they could have that discussion again.

She knew what it was like to be scared of the future and babies, all of her twenties had been like that. Bizzy, the Captain, Derek…

Strangely enough, she'd never had that want with Derek. She had put it off for years because she wasn't ready to be a mother to someone yet. She'd dreaded big family meals with the Shepherds, not that Carolyn really wanted a grandchild from Addison. The Shepherd matriarch had never approved of her, and over the years it had gotten worse—she blamed her for Derek's disappearance and assumed death. There was no reasoning with her. The apology after she called to inform her that her son had come back to life had been too little, too late.

The baby cooed, his blue eyes fluttering open a couple times then closing again. He let go of her finger.

"Go back to sleep, honey." Addison whispered. She stayed there a few more minutes, watching him settle back into sleep.

Reluctantly, she checked the time, sighing, she had to get up. Karev had not found her yet and she needed a snack. The single muffin wasn't enough to get her through a surgery.

Addison ripped off her disposable gown, tossing it into the trash. She left to go to the surgical floor. The vending machines had the better granola bars in the whole hospital. She caught the elevator, it filled with people chattering as they went up.

Finally, she got off and went to the waiting area. Her wayward intern was chatting to someone at the nurse's station. Rolling her eyes, she continued to the vending machine, rummaging around in her pocket for some spare change. She fed it into the machine, punching in the code she knew by heart and the granola bar came out. Addison bent over, grabbing her prize, tearing it open she bit off a chunk and nearly spit it out. It tasted off.

Addison sighed, she'd picked the wrong one. Blueberry was not what she wanted, the person who filled it had switched the two flavors.

Familiar footsteps reached her ears, she turned to see Meredith with a stack of charts. Her gait was better, her limp was barely noticeable.

Meredith said. “I had my stitches taken out.”

“Good for you honey.” Addison smiled, taking another bite, she grimaced at the taste.

“What’s wrong?” She started walking to a free spot by the nurse’s station.

Addison followed her, smiling at seeing Karev’s grumpy stare when he noticed her. “I got the wrong flavor. Did you want it?” She offered.

“Sure, I’m still full from breakfast. I’ll eat it later.” She gestured for her to put it in her pocket.

Addison moved closer, setting the granola bar in her right pocket as they moved. Meredith set the charts down, they landed with a loud thud on the desk. Several nurses and loved ones whipped to the noise.

Wincing, Addison tried not to think about the chair falling to the floor when Derek knocked her off of it. Voices around her became muffled.

It’s a noise. Not everything needs to go back to that night—her rational brain tried to reason with her nervous system as her heart sped up, feeling ghostly hands wrapped around her throat. Addison tugged at the neckline of her sweater, holding her bruised cheek with the other.

Meredith. Smile. Pain. Choking. Joe. Police. Flashes. Waiting.

Meredith.

Stop. Stop. Stop. Please, stop.

Smile.

Pain.

Cho—

Stop. I can’t keep reliving this.

Joe.

“Addie, are you okay?” Meredith asked, touching her elbow.

Addison jerked, awareness coming back to her, she fiddled with her ring finger, the tan line still present on her pale skin. “Yeah.” Her voice cracked, clearing her throat, she asked, “Um, who’s service are you on?”

“No one.” She frowned, pointing at the unopened charts. “I’m on scut. Are you sure you’re okay? You’re looking paler than normal.”

“I’m fine. I forgot you told me you were on scut.” She pushed her hair back behind her ear. “I’m okay. Just—I’m okay.”

Meredith arched an eyebrow. “Don’t push yourself too hard on your first day back.”

“I’m not. I have a surgery and paperwork I need to catch up on. I promise, I’m good. It’s an easy day.” Her pager buzzed, she pulled it off of her hip, reading it over. “And a consult in the pit.”

Meredith perked up. “Do you need any extra hands?”

“I do. But not by yours. I wouldn’t want Karev to miss on something pink and squishy.” She turned to find Karev still hanging nearby.

Meredith huffed, opening a chart. “You just like punishing him.”

“It’s fun. I’ll see you later.” Addison patted her shoulder. “Karev, you ready?” She arched an eyebrow, tilting her head for him to go with.

“Isn’t this getting old?” He complained, following her, two steps behind her.

“Nope. Makes my whole day.” If only that was the truth, she wasn’t getting any enjoyment from it today like she normally would.

He sighed, but kept quiet.

Despite his protesting of her crusade in keeping him in OB, she knew he liked her as much as Alex Karev could. He’d tried to crash on their couch which Meredith said no to because Derek wasn’t being released. Then he helped move Addison’s furniture and boxes out of her apartment and into a storage unit. Karev cared whether he wanted to admit it or not. It was sweet, underneath that gruff exterior was a soft teddy bear who would do well in pediatrics.

Stepping onto the elevator, she pressed the button for the first floor. Karev settled behind her shoulder, still quiet but she could feel his eyes on her. She ignored his concern. She was fine. Just a little jittery, it was normal.

The elevator door opened, and they walked into the pit. Organized chaos was the word for it, Leslie, the charge nurse directed staff to the correct patient.

The bay doors opened, a woman on the gurney screaming, “It’s too early.” Her significant other on one side stumbled, a guilty look on his face.

The EMT on the other side had a professional mask on. “Megan Daley, 24, 16 weeks pregnant, fell on her back, BP 140/96, HR 120. She needs OB and Neuro. Possible head injury, complaining of a headache.”

Addison hurried to them, Karev fast on her heels. “Thank you, we got it from here.”

Megan gave her a watery smile. “Please save my baby.”

“We’re going to check on your baby.” Addison gave her a reassuring smile.

Karev asked, “And you are, sir?”

“Her husband, Tim Daley.” He said, his grip tight on rails. The scotch on his breath washed over Addison’s face.

Holding back a gag, Addison asked. “Can you tell me what happened?” She breathed through her mouth, trying to stay here in this moment. Not in her memories, she slipped Addison behind her Dr. Montgomery title.

“We had an argument about my drinking. I didn’t,” his grip tightened on the rails, tears falling down his face. “I didn’t mean t—too push her. She fell and landed on her back. I called 911 and she started to feel something in her belly. Please, you can save them right?”

Keep it professional, Addison. No spiraling—she thought, feeling her heart pick up speed again, rapidly thumping in her ribcage.

Addison pressed her lips together. “We’ll do what we can.” She glanced down to find Megan staring at him. No fear of him behind her eyes.

Leslie said, “Trauma room 1. I’m paging Neuro again.” Locking eyes with Addison, she nodded that she would take care of the husband. “Sir, if you can go with me to the waiting room, we’ll send somebody soon with an update on your wife.”

“Okay.” He let go of the gurney, color returning to his hands. Leslie wrapped an arm around Tim to guide him away.

“Would you like a coffee?”

“Yeah.”

They steered the gurney to trauma room one, two orderlies opened the door for them. Parking the gurney, Alex got on the other side to a different gurney, several other nurses came in to help transfer her over.

“On three.” Addison said. She grabbed the sheet she was on. “One, two, three.” They lifted her up and onto the hospital gurney. The EMT took the ambulance gurney, rolling it out of the room. Another nurse came wheeling the ultrasound in.

Addison put on gloves, “Megan, I’m going to lift your shirt up, the gel will be cold.” The nurse turned on the ultrasound, shaking the gel to the bottom, handing it to Karev.

“Okay.” She nodded, wiping at her cheeks. “He’s never done that before, you know.”

Making a non-committal hum, Addison lifted the bottom of her shirt revealing her small bump. Karev squirted the gel on her lower abdomen, Megan winced, pulling away from him. Addison took the wand from the nurse, pressing it over her womb.

“Never laid a hand on me in anger. But he just had a different look about him ever since he lost his job. He’s been drinking more. Then we got pregnant, bills started piling up. I had to go back to work as a waitress, my balance has been clumsy. And it just hurts to see him not himself…”

Addison breathed in deeply, looking at the monitor, she saw the baby’s hand move. She changed the angle to see the baby’s head, no signs of a head injury.

“He’s been searching for jobs but they take time to get through all the résumés—oh, it’s that pain again.” Megan gasped.

“Where?”

Megan pointed near on the right side, Addison moved the wand over, the baby kicked.

“There.”

“Have you been feeling the baby move before this?”

“No. Is that what this is?”

“Yeah, your baby is moving around, letting you know he’s in there.” Addison assured her, she tried to smile but it felt fragile and forced, her cheeks pulled uncomfortably.

Dr. Nelson and Yang hurried in, scrub caps on. “I heard you have a head injury, may I check you out, Ms—”

“Megan Daley.” Karev filled them in.

Nelson pulled out a pen light, examining her.

Addison continued to check for a placental abruption, pointing out some things to Karev while she did so. He nodded and paid attention.

“Good news.” Addison said, “No placental abruption and no injury to the baby.”

“And I’m not seeing any signs of a head injury. You are good to go.” Nelson smiled, patting Megan’s shoulder.

“Oh that’s such a relief. I thought I’d have to yell at my husband. My balance has—”

Addison swallowed heavily, anxiety pooled in her belly. Her vision started to tunnel, the edges of the room disappeared. The ghost of large hands wrapped around her throat, sweat trickled down her back.

Meredith. Smile. Pain. Choking. Joe. Police. Flashes. Waiting.

So much waiting, so much pain.

Wrapped in memories, tying tighter around her neck with each pass.

Meredith. Smile. Pain. Choking. Joe. Police. Flashes. Waiting.

Her hearing became muffled, feeling like she was underwater, singular voices just became background noises. Breathing became hard, she couldn't get a good breath and the air felt thinner.

Meredith leaving with hurt and jealousy in her pale eyes.

His smile, turning dreamy eyes to one's with no remorse, he wasn't her husband anymore.

Sharp pain on her cheek, the shock of someone other than her mother hitting her.

Scotch wafting over her face, hands once gentle were now a weapon, no air, gasping and wheezing.

Joe and people pulling him off, air returning to her lungs, it hurt to breathe and crying made it worse.

The police asking her to recount what happened, her hoarse voice barely filled the room.

The white lights of evidence go off with a click, blinding her once again.

Waiting, pacing the living room with no one else in the house, scared of her own shadow.

Meredith. Smile. Pain. Choking. Joe. Police. Flashes. Waiting.

"I don't want you anyway, you're damaged goods."

Stop. Please, someone help me. I need someone to get me out. Please, help me. I don't want to die. Not when I have so much to live for.

Addison paled, blood humming in her ears, vision quickly disappearing. Her knees wobbled, she grasped blindly for something to hold on to but she couldn't move. Her feet were stuck to the ground.

"Dr. Montgomery." Nelson's smile disappeared. "Grab her, she's about to—"

Strong arms wrapped around her waist, she screamed, fighting against their hold. "Let me go!" She kicked her captor in the shins.

"Addison."

Someone touched her face, she winced, expecting a cruel touch. But they only held her, tilting her head back.

"Cristina, page Meredith 911."

Addison felt weightless, vision going completely black, someone secured her arms to her body and lifted her up in the air. “Let me go!” She begged, losing her fight and fell into darkness.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you, Plegg, for everything, including every encouraging word you told me when I was having a mental block with wanting to write this.

I do have other fics, I’d like to get back to writing. I wasn’t expecting this fic to become something dear and precious to my heart. But I will come back to this one, stay tuned for more.

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!