

2017

Pieces

Brittany Blake
Dominican University of California

Survey: Let us know how this paper benefits you.

Recommended Citation

Blake, Brittany (2017) "Pieces," *The Tuxedo Archives*: Vol. 2011 , Article 16.
Available at: <https://scholar.dominican.edu/tuxedolit/vol2011/iss1/16>

This Short Story is brought to you for free and open access by the School of Liberal Arts and Education at Dominican Scholar. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Tuxedo Archives by an authorized editor of Dominican Scholar. For more information, please contact michael.pujals@dominican.edu.

PIECES

Brittany Blake

She still wakes up some nights in cold sweats with a scream rising like bile in her throat, waiting to fling itself out into the world. Sometimes she's awake enough to hold it back and

sometimes she can even fall asleep again. Sometimes, she can't.

Tonight is one of those "can't" nights.

When she wakes up tonight (or is it this morning?), she's panting and sweat-soaked.

Before she knows what she's doing, she slides out from under the sheets and pads down to the

kitchen.

She leans forward, up against the counter, and tips her head into the sink. On more than

one occasion, the rising scream has turned into actual sick and she's not cleaning that up in her

current state of mind. When it feels like her body's finally calmed down, she lifts her head and

moves from the sink. She stands in the middle of the kitchen, staring at the walls. She doesn't

know how long she stays like that, but by the time she decides to make some sweet tea, her feet

are ice from the chill of the floor.

It's never been easy for her to live with her job. Being a spy isn't something that rests easy on the soul. Too many lives ruined, too many secrets held in, each one like a needle ripping

through her heart. Too much time spent in the service of a job that abuses her. Too much.

Just too much. She tries to forget the faces of the men she's killed, the parts of her life she's

never had time for that feel like they're slowly killing her. At this time of night (or morning, or

whatever it is), regrets are her friends, her angels, her demons. They are all of her. And after the

latest incident... she doesn't want to think about it.

She puts the kettle on and moves to pick up a mug. And suddenly every memory comes

flooding back in such a rush that she drops it with a gasp of pain. The mug shatters on the floor

and she finds herself collapsing against the counter, clinging desperately to it as the faces of the

past haunt her. As the memories subside, she slides down the cabinets and comes to rest on the

cold floor, pulling her knees to her chin and wrapping her arms around them.

It doesn't seem like any time passes between then and when he stands in the doorway,

watching her anxiously. Before he fully processes what's happened, he's crossed the room

and grabbed a towel. As she sits, quivers, on the floor, he picks up the pieces the mug left and

throws them away. The water's ready and he grabs another mug, makes her tea – sweet, just the

way she likes it.

He lowers himself to the ground, holding in the groan of pain that comes from his aching

joints, steaming mug in hand. He offers it to her. On the nights she's woken him, it's become a

sort of ritual. Tonight, she ignores it. He presses her shoulder, gently insistent, with his and she

finally reaches out and grasps the handle. She begins to sip and is just thinking about speaking,

telling him it's good, when her attacker's face jumps into her mind and she cries out in pain.

The mug starts to slip, but he catches it this time and sets it down beside them. He folds

her in his arms and presses her rapid heart tight against his own calmer one. He feels rather than

hears her cry, the sobs wracking her body, warm tears sliding down her cheeks and melting into

his t-shirt. As he murmurs love to her, he strokes her hair, rubs her shoulders, gently kisses her

forehead.

It's another part of the ritual. After that day, she became more skittish about being touched. He tried to brush her hair back and she would take three steps away from him. He

would try to kiss her and she would turn her head. Now, after all the nights he's been soothing

her, she's starting to pull herself together. He still feels her shudder as his lips touch her skin,

but she doesn't physically separate from him. He can tell she's trying her best not to shut him

out anymore, and he loves her all the more for it.

Her face settles into his neck and he can feel her soft kisses dancing across his skin as she

whispers his name. When she pulls her head back, she stares at him and he can see the glimmer

of her tears. He's always hated to see her cry, and now's no exception. He lifts his hand slowly,

like he's taming a wild animal, and softly sweeps the tears from her cheeks.

"Sorry," she murmurs. "I didn't mean to wake you."

"Shhhh," he says quietly. "You didn't."

They both know it's a lie. She knows he doesn't sleep well anymore, not since she moved in. He stays up most of the night to watch her sleep and when she has her nightmares

he can sense even her slightest movements, he's been sleeping so lightly of late. As much as

she knows it's a lie, it's a comforting one, so she doesn't challenge him. She's about to say

something else when he shakes his head and presses a finger to her lips. She falls silent.

He begins his healing one scar at a time. He traces the lines that fall over her eyebrows,

around her mouth. He softly kisses the gash that runs across her nose and moves his mouth

down to touch her split lip. His fingers lightly brush the line of stitches running from cheek to

jaw and he kisses all the way down the line. His lips follow the path down her neck, caressing

the remains of her burns, brushing over her bruises gently, so gently. When he pulls his head

back, her eyes are closed and she's breathing more calmly.

He slowly uncurls himself from her and stands, brushing himself off. She stares at him

from the floor, waiting for his next move. He's too old now for heroics, so instead of leaning

over and sweeping her into his arms to carry her up the stairs, he offers his hand. It's enough,

and she grasps it tight as he pulls her to her feet. He could pull her close and intimate as they

find their way to the stairs, but he knows that's not what she needs right now. Instead, he

entwines their fingers and tugs gently at her hand. She's staring at their hands, two pieces of the

puzzle, and smiles ever so slightly as he squeezes her fingers.

She follows him as he leads her back to bed and doesn't argue when he nudges her under

the covers. She curls up tight on her side and listens to the sheets rustling as he tucks himself in.

She feels his arm fall around her waist, pulling her closer to his calming heartbeat. She sighs and

pushes herself further into his arms. Her eyes close, and she sleeps.