

Can a man determined to die and a child doing her best to stay alive save each other? Kyle survived a spaceship crash, but now hes hooked on the deadliest drug ever invented. He wants to die but cant face the pain. One night on a job to earn a few credits, hes attacked and left for dead. When Laenei, an orphan, discovers the man whose pale eyes tell her hes hooked on soo-juice and dying, she wants to use her hands to take his pain away. But her mama told her never to let anyone know about her hands. Neither has hope. Neither has a future. All they have are each other and time is running out for both of them. **BONUS:** After the short story, find an **ADVANCE EXCERPT OF TIME RIDER**, coming soon. **THE HEALING FACTOR:** Excerpt: Kyle dragged himself out of bed, licking dry lips, tasting the sweet aftertaste of the pseudorphin. He splashed water on his face and cupped his hands to rinse out his mouth, the ghost of hollow need still pressing like a stone against his breastbone. He shuddered. He never wanted to wait that long again for a dose. In the kitchen, he drank coffee and stared at the vial on the table -- so tiny, so expensive, and so demanding. Worse than a mistress, he thought, twirling the vial between his fingers. The great research physician Dr. Sander Morrison had explained about half-life and renal clearance, but all Kyle knew was that the liquid inside this glass tube owned him, and every three days she would tell him so. Suddenly his mind betrayed him with a flashing vision of the night before. He vaulted out of the chair, barely reaching the sink in time. He was violently, brutally sick, heaves so forceful he was sure he would vomit up blood and tissue. When his stomach no longer rebelled at the images in his mind, he turned on the tap. Cool clean water eased his burning eyes and sluiced the sour fetor of vomit from his mouth and nose, leaving him drained and saturated with self-loathing for what he had done to earn the money for the drug. It had been harder than usual to satisfy the ghouls this time. The pain and degradation had been more than hed thought he could bear. He poured more coffee and carried it into the bathroom, clinging to the hot cup with both hands. Maybe he could get a job repairing the infrastructure, he thought, looking in the mirror. He leaned in close and stared into dilated pupils that threatened to consume clear, blue-white irises. If it werent for his eyes and the faint needle pricks on his neck he could easily pass for an ordinary fellow looking for work. He gulped the hot coffee then reached for his dark glasses. Couldnt hurt to try. ~Viscous fog shrouded the alleys, the streets ran with filthy water. A few fires in drums burned weakly but there were too many huddled around, and Laenei avoided crowds. It hurt too much to be close to so many people. If she moved quickly, before the scavengers tore themselves away from the warmth of the fires, she had a chance to find some good food. She crouched behind a concrete arch and peered up and down, then dashed toward the giant garbage bins lined up like sentinels guarding the alley. She found half a chicken and several stale rolls in a greasy sack, more food than she had seen in days. Swallowing acrid saliva she scrambled out of the bin. She considered the next one, but a glance back at the huddled group told her the hardier foragers were already drifting away from the fire, so she slipped into the shadows, the savory weight of the sack tantalizing her as she crept toward home. Suddenly, she was violently jerked backward. The material of her jacket ripped against her throat, gagging her. She clenched her fingers around the sack as another hand encircled her neck. Hey, Laenei, what you got? Eh? Come here! She pivoted, dropping the sack, her arms and legs swinging wildly. She peeled back a finger of the hand squeezing her throat and bit into it. Exultant at the taste of blood she ground down with small, sharp teeth...

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