

Hues of red and pink swirl across the sky as if painted with watercolors. The sun flecks a splash of orange across the horizon in farewell, and, as she sinks, smudges of purple start to dance among the other colors. I watch the sunset from my balcony, content melting away all other thoughts. I braid my long hair absently, absorbed in the beautiful sight. There is an inch of sun left on the horizon. Half an inch. A quarter of an inch. . .

And then footsteps interrupt the silence, and someone lays a soft hand on my shoulder and speaks. I hear the words, the sun vanishes from the horizon, and the rest goes fuzzy and blank.

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Vague figures with faces I cannot place come to comfort me. I am brought meaningless bouquets of flowers. I am sent a continuous stream of notes that contain only empty words. I find my sense of time has deteriorated; it could be hours or it could be days before I find myself surrounded by people, all speaking in hushed voices, looking mournfully at two elegant wooden caskets amidst a pile of roses.

I feel strangely disoriented. Who are in the boxes? They are not my parents. They could not be. My parents—they couldn't die. They would not leave their daughter like this. This was a mistake. Of course, that's it, someone must have misunderstood the situation. Someone else must be in those caskets. I near the caskets and the world seems to spin dizzily. Each step brings more confidence and yet, at the same time, more apprehension. I am close enough now. Part of me does not want to look, but I have to know. I just... just have to peek at the names engraved on the lids. That's all I have to do. And then I can skip back home to my parents. I see, through unwilling eyes,

Arnold Jayson and, next to it, Juliana Jayson.

A dim horror floods my heart. It is like losing them all over again.

Unseen by the distracted and melancholy gathering, I slip away and my feet direct their steps towards home. I feel disembodied. My feet know the path, past the school and around the bookstore, but my mind knows and feels nothing. It only vaguely perceives when I have reached

home. Home? No, this is not my home anymore. Home is where one's parents are, there to comfort you whenever you need them. I am not at home. I don't know where I am. I cannot think. I cannot eat. I cannot talk.

It seems as if it were only a day ago that my parents and I had cooked dinner together. Joyously, we had chomped down on burritos, laughing at our pitiful cooking skills. Afterwards, we had trekked upstairs and spent a good half hour tearing apart the room in search for the remote. Then I had fallen asleep half-way through the movie, and I dimly remember my dad carrying me back to my bed. I felt happy. Content. Protected. And now... they were gone. I will never see their faces again. I do not understand how that could be. I cannot feel anything.

After some time, certain feelings gradually come back. Grief is the first and foremost, and it floods in to fill the vacuum in my heart. It oppresses my spirit, making even the simplest tasks cost tremendous amounts of effort. Days, then weeks go by, and the only new feeling I have is a dim pang of annoyance at the quantity of people trying to enter my room and talk to me. I don't even know what they want, but I know I want to be alone. I have to get away.

It is now a month after the day my life and heart plummeted to the floor and shattered like glass. I stay up late into the night, and then, hardly aware of the path I am taking, I slip out and head into the woods. Before I know it, I am already penetrating the depths of the forest, where it is dark and pleasantly quiet. I wander aimlessly through the trees, enjoying the peace. Then—I do not know what makes me do it—I suddenly reach out my hand to a thick tree trunk and haul myself into the fork with a vigor I did not know I had. My body at once recognizes the sport, and my hands and feet take over, expertly traversing and ascending the thick branches.

I feel a sense of satisfaction as the wood scrapes against the palm of my hand. The bark is cool and firm, with excellent notches that my feet find with ease, even in the pitch black of night. This is how it's supposed to be. For the first time in weeks, I feel a brief sensation of security. A rush of wind blows across my body, making the hair swirl around my head. My vision is a blur of hair and the calming scent of leaves and wood wafts around me. I pause to take in the sensation until the wind subsides.

My restless feet urge me on, and I climb higher up into the thinner branches to get a better view of the moon. The crisp leaves hanging from each bow enclose me in a den of calming, dark walls, and there is a little open patch in the black canopy that is like a window into

the night. The moon is shining soothingly down on me, and all around it her bright children are twinkling and laughing playfully with each other. It's a beautiful night.

Then a stronger gust of wind sways the branch I'm resting on, and I lose my balance. Slipping dangerously, I manage to catch hold of the branch for support. I take a short, shaky breath. *Everything is all right*, I think feverishly to myself, clinging to the branch. *Nothing bad happened*. I hear the wood creak under me. And again. And then...

Cr—Cr—Crack!

There is a prolonged sensation of falling, a loud thud, and a moment later, exquisite pain.

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My chest is screaming. My body is cold. But I don't want anyone to come. I don't want their help. I lie there, barely breathing for the pain in my chest.

It feels like hours have gone by when I see a tint of purple and orange light at the very edge of my vision. I do not make an effort to get up. A few minutes pass, and the sky is becoming gradually lighter. Yellow and pink are faintly added to the myriad colors in my peripheral vision. But I don't want to see them. My chest is still throbbing with pain.

Suddenly, a ray of light shoots from the horizon to the forest floor. Trying not to tempt myself, I still can't help imagining how beautiful the sight must be right now. And in that instant, as the sun first peeks above the horizon, I a realization dawns on me, as blinding as the sunlight. I do want to see the sunrise. I really do.

Slowly, carefully, I roll myself over and crawl to my knees. I still feel a stab of pain in my chest every time I move, but it is getting just a little easier now that my sun has come back. On my knees, I watch the sun rise on the horizon through the trees. I rest there for a long time, letting my pain subside.

After a little while, when I think I can, I ever so gently support myself with my hands until I can stand. My chest still pangs, but the beautiful sun rising over the forest has distracted me. I feel lighter. Stronger.

It's like the black veil over my eyes has been lifted and I can finally see clearly again. The memory of falling from the tree flashes through my mind. I think about the pain that it

brought. I remember how I stayed motionless on the ground for hours. Now I see clearly what has happened to my life. And I also see what a new day could bring.

I decide it is time to go back home. On my way out, I pass by the tree I had fallen from hours before, and when I'm next to it, I pause. "Thanks," I whisper. And I move on.