

November 26
2:19 A.M.

Wind rushed past your ears eagerly, tempting you further to the edge: a siren's song you didn't want to resist. If it sung any louder, you wouldn't have been able to resist even if you'd wanted to. But the silver gusts showed images of temptation, freedom, and you would follow to the end of your days. Which, hopefully, were not far.

You raised your trembling hands to your face, releasing humid breaths upon them. This wind was cold in too many ways. Perhaps that would help, however -- to be numb. Were you not already?

The breaths came to meet the shivering air meekly, with barely any life at all. As though they had given up just as soon as they had been created. As if they knew their purpose was arbitrary. Could they have been anything more? If they had tried, would your hands now be less shaky; would your lips be any rosier?

Would you try again?

Avoiding the question as soon as it appeared in your mind, you turned to face the cars behind you. You had been blocking out their impatient sounds, but now you let yourself be aware of all the sights and sounds: the stars, too shy to fight against the smoggy city air, the bridge's support beams, which wavered as if under each new vehicle, they would surely break. As if these warning signs meant anything to those around them. As if anyone cared. And the cars. The cars the sped by, looking but not seeing, in a line with no end, waiting until they got to the next spot, just so they could be sad and bitter there instead of where they'd been. Would it ever stop? And if it did, what would become of the bridge? With no purpose to serve, it would be cast aside -- forgotten and worthless: never seen but always there.

As a commercial truck flashed through your vision, you remembered why you were there. But had you really forgotten? Or was there just a part of you that wished you had?

Which of those parts was you?

Was there any 'you'?

Would there ever be?

You let out a breath. Of course there wouldn't be. As you turned your back on the cars, your hands no longer shook. Were they warmer, or had they just gotten used to the cold?

You looked straight forward. For a sign, or a reason, or a purpose. Whatever the thought behind the action was, at least you were no longer looking back. The moon gazed through you. It was perfectly center to you, as though it were positioned to lure you. Or catch you. Or perhaps it was a coincidence, and the astral being truly did not care for you.

The smoggy wisps of air swirled down your throat and into your lungs, poisoning your body to match your mind. But had you already been poisoned? You couldn't remember.

Had those pills made their way down to your stomach? Or had you chickened out and laid them back to rest in their jar? There was no way to know.

You reached out to grip the smudged railing. Railing meant to keep people from falling. It would fail its purpose today. It wouldn't be the first.

The freeze of the metal attacked your hands, which only gripped tighter in response. The pain felt so satisfying. It sharpened your senses. As you glanced down to the smoky blackness below, you felt more alive than you had in years. The water beneath you did not care. It would listen to your problems, then walk away. It would be better than any person ever had been. A friend you could truly lean on.

It just would take a leap of faith: a little trust that things would go as planned. That there would be no looking back. Just a leap of faith.

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When you woke, you had first been in a void of timeless waiting. You were unsure of what the clock struck, and were not in a mood to care. It was almost as if you didn't even exist. In the darkness, did anything truly exist? Or is it all simply the idea of how things should be that caused faux existence in the dark?

You rolled over for longer than usual before finally giving in and checking your phone for the time. The bright screen flashed: it was just after two. Once again. Could you not get one night's sleep without your mind interrupting? Could you not do anything without your mind interrupting?

Normally, you took a walk to center yourself, which led to you snuggling back into your sheets, alone and unhappy, but alive nonetheless. You always looked forward to the canvas of your dreams. Within them, you were able to do anything you wanted -- be anything you hoped. Meet the stars who were normally so shy and kiss the coy moon. People looked upon you with joy in their eyes, pride and love, and perhaps even the mirror could as well. However, there was very little point to these dreams. If you can do anything you want, why find anything exciting anymore? If you could be anything you hoped, why try? If you could be happy all the time, what was the point?

You dropped your phone back down on the table with a resounding thud, scratching the exterior. Adding another scar to your life and its possessions. Many things were scarred that your life did not care for, too. One such thing being you.

You waited before the sound was fully done ringing throughout the room. Of all people, you knew how horrible it was to cut someone off before they were done. Once it was done piercing the air, you dragged your legs across the bed, letting them flop to the floor limply. Then, you pushed yourself up. Again. Your tired arms wavered beneath the weight, unsure of their strength and done with holding you up over and over again. They begged for freedom.

Freedom from what? It was a challenge. Two feisty parts of your mind, dead and numb, duking it out, clashing, ripping, burning, killing. Your mind was a war zone. Which side would win? Which side did you want to win? Did either side care for you?

Did you care for you?

Now was not the time for challenges to be issued. All you had wanted was a peaceful stroll to clear your head, and instead you'd happened upon a living cemetery. The coldness of it all soaked through your bones. Or perhaps you simply wished to feel something.

After slipping on the decaying sneakers, you pulled open the door. It slammed shut behind you, reverberating through your bones and stabbing at your senses. You jumped. You shouldn't have been startled. You were the one who had closed it. But alas, your mind would always be afraid of its own horrors. Even the ones that appeared harmless.

The street was silent but very talkative. Instead of the hum of birds straining to live before they died, and vehicles tumbling along the roads searching for their next purpose, a single yellow street light

flickered, struggling to light the entire road with its one exhausted bulb. You gazed at it for minutes, mesmerized, but the pressure was too much. With a final splutter of hope, the light went out.

As you kept walking down the street, you turned in the direction of the city bridge. It would surely be bustling, but it was still nice to search for the stars from there, giving them a chance to shine. You passed another streetlight, which also fought bravely against that night. It would not go gentle. It appeared, however, to be a losing battle. This filled you with a strange sadness, a sense of mourning, and you continued on your way. You figured you could always come back to it later.

Coming to a halt at the start of the bridge, you hesitated. If your eyes could be trusted, a lone figure leaned over the edge of the railing, staring first straight ahead at the moon, then down at the murky water below. It caught you off guard, admittedly. Most people didn't find the bridge a scenic spot, which allowed you to spend your stressful time leisurely there on a normal night.

Your heart started to beat, clawing for escape. It desperately wanted to leave, not face people, not be social, not figure out why something felt so off. The wind howled around the person ferociously, pushed them further and further to the edge. Closer and closer to the moon.

You had listened to your heart too many times before. Let it lead you astray, winding up broken and empty, wishing you'd done nothing at all. It would not control your nighttime walk. So you continued walking.

You planned to strut right by the person. You wanted none of their business, and certainly did not want to tell them any of yours. All you wanted was to prove you could walk by without staggering fear painting your body for all to see. To whom you wished to prove this, any guess would likely be valid. As long as it was proven.

But your plan was cut in two, for you had anticipated your own actions, but not those of the other person on the bridge. As you passed by, they turned and caught your eye. A deep heaviness weighed in them, as if they had been judged inadequate and deemed unworthy. There was a hint of pain in them, just a taste, smothered by overwhelming grayness.

You stopped. You didn't know what to do. You hadn't planned for this.

"Give me a reason," The stranger requested. Their voice was soft. As if afraid to blow something away, it was barely breathed out, just a whisper on the wind.

A reason? A reason for what? This person was obviously not fully there. One would recognize another. Did they wish for a reason to jump, or a reason not to? Did they hope for a purpose, or did they simply want confirmation on the feelings they already had?

And why had they asked you? You, who would be so tempted to jump as well?

The answer was clear. They had asked you because you were there. There was no planning to it, no secrecy. Simply a last uttering before an end.

Or a beginning.

"My reason means nothing. Give yourself a reason," You replied. "Make a decision one way or another, but have it be your decision. No one can make this choice for you."

The person in the mirror dipped their head slightly in acknowledgement, but said nothing more. They simply stood there in the silence, either contemplating life or trying very hard not to.

Finally, they turned back towards the ledge, nodding as if to solidify their own thoughts.

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You turned back towards the ledge, nodding as if to solidify your own thoughts. As if you had thoughts. You had turned to hide the ugly streams racing down your face, falling limply to the ground after having served their time. They were invisible both before and after, making no sound, blending completely in with the blank, marked up canvas behind them.

You finally let your head droop. You had hoped for a definite answer to any of the questions you needed answered. Instead, you had gotten something useless.

Give yourself a reason.

A reason for what? In absolute desperation, you had begged for an answer, a reason, but you didn't know what for.

This stranger seemed to know your questions better than they knew their answers. Should that frighten you?

Should it frighten you that that comforted you?

Frustration seared the edges of your vision: an inferno that poked and ripped at your control. Frustration at this stranger, who acted so wise. Frustration at the cars, for always soaring by but staying blissful and ignorant. Frustration at the stars and the moon, who watched your plight wordlessly and without sympathy, waiting for you to join them. Frustration at yourself. For so many reasons.

You took a step closer to the edge of the bridge. Another step forward. Or was this backwards?

The wind coaxed you closer and closer, enticing your demise. The stars looked down upon you, waiting for your decision. The moon gazed through you, daring your soul. The cars whizzed by, not letting even a glance fall upon you. And the stranger behind you. They stood still. They were going through their own troubles. Perhaps they had come here for the same reason you had.

Why had this person caused you to question the sole purpose of your trip out here? How had this person caused you to question the sole purpose of your trip out here? You had been so sure before. You had finally decided to take action.

How could such indifference mean so much?

You closed your eyes, forcing everything out of your brain until a stalking silence settled within. You had felt your breaths speed up, your chest become frantic. Now was not the time for panic. Now was the time for a choice.

Thoughts swirled through your mind, some delicious, some bitter, and some completely bland. You were taking your time poking at each, letting them set on your eyes as the images spun through your head, when a sense of urgency suddenly cracked through, prodding away the useless feelings. It stoked the flames of your mind, searching for the kindling. It wanted answers.

Didn't they all?

Another step.

Were answers impossible? Was there such a thing as surety?

Two more.

In the end, only one thing was sure. One final end.

One final step.

You waited for a cry to sound. You hoped for resistance.

The stranger behind you said nothing. They simply watched, waiting for your answer.

A choice you would have to make, all on your own.

One tiny step was all it would take.

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Fear had started to creep into your mind. It fed on the fears that had already lived there, overpowering them and shocking the rest of your brain into silence.

This could be the end.

As you watched the stranger take two steps closer to the ledge, you froze completely. Your muscles were tensed, as if they would actually take to the air to save this person. But they wouldn't. You feared too greatly.

One tiny step was all it took.

And yet you felt helpless. You felt as if you were the one about to jump off a 750 foot bridge.

Perhaps you were.

Move, you told yourself.

Go grab them.

Make them listen.

Do something.

Do anything.

Go!

But you couldn't. You closed your eyes. You couldn't watch, though you'd done this a million times in your dreams.

You braced for the sound of a soul dying. You could never be ready, but you were at least prepared to not be ready.

No such noise filled the world, however. Did the world not care to listen or retain the sound, or had the soul already been dead?

Should you look? Should you go pay your respects to a stranger?

As you opened your eyes, the deflated stranger turned back around. They faced you, staring deeply into your eyes. It made you slightly uncomfortable.

You'd never seen someone look so alive.

"Does anyone care? Does anyone care that I don't even have the strength to die anymore?" They asked, this time with a sureness to their words. As if they knew what answer you would give. It almost wasn't even a question.

"Strength to die?" You questioned. The action had always been painted as a sign of weakness. Did they feel like some sort of sick hero for saving everyone from themselves? Did they hate themselves even more because of this?

"There is no strength in death. There is no weakness in death. It is simply death. And to Death, everyone goes. Why must it be politics?" You stopped yourself before you began to preach.

But you knew there was more to say. The poor creature in front of you still did not bare its teeth.

"Do you care?" You replied without hesitation. The question hung in the air, bouncing back and forth between your hard eyes and theirs. Neither of you were going to let the other walk away unchanged. You knew you had done it.

Their teeth had been bared, and survival instinct triggered.

The challenge had been issued.

And then they caved. They began to bawl, falling to the ground in a crumpled, broken mess. As you bent down to hold them and provide some sort of comfort, they called out to the stars.

"How could I not? Don't you?"

What an odd question. Even after coming the closest they ever would to their death, this stranger still looked for approval, or even acknowledgement, from another. They were not of a healthy mind. That wouldn't change in one night.

But it would change.

And then you realized you didn't care. You hadn't cared for a while. You were on the other end of the spectrum, still without a healthy mind. And yet, sitting there, on the sidewalk of a bridge with cars passing by a hundred a second, embracing a total stranger while they cried for the pain they'd felt for years, you wondered if you could care. Maybe it was possible. Maybe you could both get better.

And maybe this wasn't a stranger.

November 26
2:26 A.M.

Returning to your sad little house to finish off the night, you passed the previously struggling streetlight again.

It shone boldly, daring the world to fear it and its magnificence.

But as it shifted from in front of you to behind you, it flickered once again.

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Before settling back onto your plastic mattress, you pushed aside your curtains to stare out at the stars.

The streetlight was still fighting.

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