

The Path

It was only six months after we started dating, and only eight months after I arrived in a city just outside of Osaka that we decided to go hiking. It was a mountain to the north of Osaka's center, and the July humidity had already caught us by surprise after many months of temperate air and savage rain, which seemed more akin to the howling thunderstorms of Southeast Asia than the more temperate regions in that area.

We were moving at a quickened pace with occasional stops. I noticed her hair was tied up, which it hadn't been when we started. Yuka's hair was usually a good weathervane for the vicissitudes of her variegated moods. Of course I had my moments too, and I had caught her off guard with my nonsense that I would reveal on occasion.

The path swung left after a few steps and then shifted right again. At this point it had come very close to the edge of a cliff, which was not far away from the path. Yuka was perhaps seven feet in front of me, and I took that moment to look up at the hazy blue sky. The sunlight poked into my eyes. I put my hand up in surprise at its sudden assault and subsequently lost my balance. Turning slightly to my left, I felt my left ankle give way, and I collapsed right. Before I could compensate by shifting my weight left, I felt my right shoe catch on an exposed root. I stumbled forward at an angle that brought me down, rolling once because the angle was steep, moving dangerously close to the cliff's edge. I was on my back at this time, and I tried to pivot by swinging my left arm over, but I noticed it ached far more than it should have from the usual falls that I had experienced far too many times in my life.

I laughed at my stupidity. I had broken my arm during the fall for the first time, and I knew I was not in a pretty state of affairs. I could only imagine what Yuka would say when she realized that I was not just behind her anymore. My smile vanished soon after because the ground underneath me turned out to be less firm than I had imagined. I had only my left arm to save me, but it was partially pinned underneath my body weight.

I felt my body slowly sinking towards the edge. I wondered why anyone hadn't made the path safer by installing some kind of barrier, but then I knew that there were many places the paths were not kept well because the government did not keep the parks service people that my home country used to enjoy. Here I was, in the early part of my adulthood, about to go over the edge of an obscure mountain outside Japan's second largest city.

With renewed effort, I rolled my body over onto my left arm. The pain hit me like none other. It felt similar to the electric tingling of a limb that has been "woken up" after having its oxygen reduced for a long spell.

While my body twisted back and forth to catch the contours of the tree roots. My mind, drunk with pain, was focused on the task of bringing my weight over enough to keep the slow momentum to my doom. My left foot moved and caught a root or stone—I wasn't sure which, and I felt the situation stabilize a bit. I couldn't tell if I had stopped completely because there was dizzying movement in all my senses due to the pain and adrenaline.

It was at that point that Yuka's voice came to me.

"What's going on? Why are you lying down there?" she said in her sarcastic voice. I looked up at her once with a painful gaze, and then rested my head back down.

I didn't answer. I knew that I must have been out of danger because her keen eyes would have sensed anything that might have been unusual. I asked her to come down and join me.

She did this thinking that I wanted to pull some kind of spontaneous trick on her, but when she sat down next to me I cried without any explanation. She looked at me as a doctor would who was examining a patient for a serious wound, first checking my eyes then looking at my body more carefully. After that, she saw that there must have been pain in my body due to the way I was holding my arm.

She didn't ask me any questions, but quietly helped me up after making sure it was OK, and took me back down the way we had come. We got back, and later I apologized for running our date out together.

She said not to worry about it, and eventually I told her the story. She had never asked before that, but I knew she was curious, and immediate after that I asked her to marry me because I knew I would never find someone as good to me as she was.