

*Pain. It hurt all over. I couldn't move my arms or my legs. My skin burned. Faint memories of the fall, the hike, trickled into my mind. I pushed them away. I didn't want to remember. I succumbed to the darkness again.*

When I awoke, I couldn't lift my eyelids. They felt heavy, as if someone had taped them shut. A soft cry left my lips but I quickly quieted from the burning pain. I heard someone in the corner quickly rise, and my mother's panicked shout as she called the nurse for help. The familiar patter of her footsteps approached my bed; I heard her quiet sob.

"Annie, please. I know you can hear me. Please wake up. I love you. I am so sorry, but your father would not have wanted this. You need to wake up, honey, *please*. I can't lose you too," her voice broke.

*My father.* Memories flooded my mind. My father had passed away earlier that month; my dad, my everything, was just *gone*. Just like that. A drunk driver took away my favorite person in the world.

I had not been coping well, I remembered, as memories surfaced. I remembered what happened right before the fall. I was sitting up on my bed in my childhood bedroom, the same bed where he had read me my bedtime stories all those evenings growing up. I had my homework lying all around me in a messy pile. Staring at my fountain pen, then at my wrist, I wondered how sharp the pen could cut.

To shake off the dark feeling inside, I had gone on a walk up an old trail behind my house. It was a trail I was familiar with, one I had walked up numerous times with my father. Only this time, he wasn't there. He wasn't around to name all the species of birds or butterflies peacefully flapping around. Bleary-eyed from the tears streaming down my face, I had trouble seeing where I was walking. The next thing I knew I was falling.

That was the last thing I remembered before waking up in this hospital room. My mom sniffled above me, and I heard a heart-wrenching sob escape through her lips. At that moment I knew that I might not survive this. I didn't want to survive this. I wanted to be with my father again. My mom would be hurt, maybe broken, but for once I wanted to be selfish. I wanted to let go.

The world faded to light once more, and it took a moment for my eyes to adjust.

That's when I saw her.

She stood confidently in a large conference room in front of at least sixty older men and women— all vigorously taking notes— dressed in a black pleated skirt and a white button down. She looked maybe five years older than I. Her light brown hair was draped over her lean shoulders in a thick braid. She was the most beautiful woman I had ever seen. She was discussing some advanced science topic that I don't think I could ever understand. Tears leaked from the corners of my eyes as I curled up into a ball in the corner.

Suddenly, the scene dissolved, but the woman stayed behind. Confused, I wiped at my eyes, tucking my legs underneath me as I sat up. I blinked up at her as she approached me.

"Hi, Annie," she smiled at me.

"You... you see me?" I asked, my voice thick from crying. She laughed, and she got a distant look in her eyes for a moment.

"Annie, I need you to get up. I need you to fight. You are stronger than— this," she waved her hand at me as she crouched down to my level, tucking her skirt under her legs. "You are meant for *so much more* that you can even begin to fathom right now. But I need you to *fight* for me, okay? I need you to *fight*."

Sobbing, I shook my head. "You don't get it; you just don't understand."

A choked laugh escaped her lips as she raised a perfectly manicured eyebrow. “Really? *Really?* Annie. You and I both know that I understand better than anyone.” Looking into her twinkling blue eyes, I nodded slowly. She was right. She would know better than anyone. She was me, after all.

I took her hand, and she pulled me up. “What you just saw? This is all waiting for you. But you need to pick yourself up, my dear.” She whispered to me. A burning fire flamed in her eyes. “*Fight*. Make your comeback.” I lifted my eyes to meet the challenge in hers.

And just like that, I remembered.

I remembered bike riding down the Venice flea market behind my sister and her friends, the smell of the salty ocean water and French fries I wanted so bad.

I remembered reading some silly teen fiction book on the couch in front of the television on a Saturday morning as the housekeeper swept around me, the smell of Windex and lemons, the light shining through the glass windows.

I remembered sitting at that colorful kitchen table in our childhood home, eagerly awaiting that plate of Mac and Cheese and chicken nuggets my mom was bound to set in front of me at any moment.

I remembered sitting at the library with my friends at 1 AM, slouching in my seat, until we collectively agreed we could not study one more singular page, and got ice cream instead.

I remembered the woman I could be— the woman I would be— if I fought, if I lived.

I remembered all the good, everything that was worth fighting for.

I remembered, and I opened my eyes.