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Close Your Eyes

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I spend the majority of the time in my room since the blur struck my vision. Time inches along on a clock with no numbers. Imagine. That is all I can do. I could see, once, but clear sight would never grasp my eyes again. The days melt into the weeks. My peers are probably preparing for college now, summer jobs, social lives. I can't see that far into the future, yet.

Autumn rides in a taunting red blur. The color is too much to look at directly. I am reminded of its beauty by the desserts Mom deposits by my bed side, the crunch of the leaves outside my window, the breeze announcing the season's arrival from the outside. Squirrels skitter along my windowsill, inviting me. I turn my head from the window, declining.

The world's breath reaches to find me inside. White lines the ground outside of my fortress. My room is bleak with my fading vision. I lie and my mind soars, latching onto the wind making the trees scrape against my house. I make no progress towards the outside. Emotion is heavy and silent in my chest, keeping me rooted. Change, fear—right now they are the same.

“Are you okay?” My mom says, peeping her head in the doorway. She hovers. I hadn't heard the question in a while. I haven't spoken to her longer than I realize. I answer to the sound's direction.

“I want to go outside...I just can't.” My door does not shut behind me. It sits wide open, but I cannot bring myself to exit. Fear hangs on my heart like moss.

More conversations idly pass along with the months, and my window acts as a fortress from my fears. Dad brings me news of the distant cold subsiding and Nestle hot chocolate. He accompanies me to the kitchen and escorts me back to my room with a tray and soup even though I can do this on my own now. I'm left alone with the soup.

“Macular degeneration.” I remember the doctor half-answering my mom, half-apologizing aiming his words at me. “Your vision will begin to gradually deteriorate. Color will also start to dull. This usually happens in older adults, but since you are so young, you have some time to prepare...”

I focus on his words now, and they are only slightly less painful. My world is going to fade away, and there is nothing I can do to stop it.

After the doctor's diagnosis, tutors came in to help assist me in

“transitioning.” They taught me to remember to count my steps and sense where things were and assign a routine to nearly everything around me. They attempted to retrain me to accept my new reality. I was still in denial despite my vision already beginning to fade by the day.

The memory of the doctor’s message rings louder than any thought ringing in my mind or any of my lessons towards independence.

A few weeks later, an arc of color lines the sky; I try to ignore it. I have not adjusted to the light of spring that spears into my eyes. My gaze dodges the blues, yellows, and greens beyond my square. Mom enters my room and tells me I should use what I learned from the tutors to experience the world again, if only for a minute. Go outside, take a step. Prepare myself for the future. I soak in her words and try to make out the slash of worry of her lips where a smile used to reside.

Family revolves in and out of my door attempting to hide the worry over the invalid that has taken control of my eyes. Black dots dance to a melody in front of me; squiggly lines dividing my view into a grid. Murky water drips onto grass that I remember being soft and warm. One day, I crack open my neglected window and allow the outside in. I smile at my first step forward.

Two, three, four more weeks since my mom’s gentle push towards tasting fresh air, and my feet have still only scrapped against itchy sheets and a worn plush path. My body is anchored to my home, but the restlessness is fighting to lighten me, peel me from the life I’ve trapped myself in. I mutter a promise to myself that I will act in one week. It’s been months—far too long—since I’ve stepped outside, and the sunshine from my window is not enough. The time that has passed in now increasingly weighing on me. I’ve missed too much.

The week passes; my energy is sapped, but I force myself to move. Clumsily, I slide from my bed and revel in the warmth of my floor. Solid, stable, two things I have deemed myself not to be. I stumble twice on my way to the door and pull the door inwards. I manage the path by memory to the front door, sliding my fingers against the wall and counting steps until it is time for me to stop. At the 38th step, I take a left. My fingers slide against the couch before I reach my hand out to the door. I pat the door and to find where the small circle is before the wood turns to metal.

Sliding my palm to find the knob, I get the strength to turn, pull, and enter the world. My eyes blur as I walk beneath birds with tinkling songs and the scent of rain. Fresh air assaults my senses, and the light falls silver, gold, white. There is not too much darkness to shade the colors, not yet. My eyelids slowly shut so that I can remember this image clearly. And I feel acceptance. There is fear that I will lose the beauty along with my sight, but I’m beginning to doubt this idea. I move, unsteady, but it’s better than being immobile.

Mom yells something behind me, and her words swirl along with the shadows, getting caught on my laughter. I dance—no, I wobble, in the dark.