

I am surrounded by darkness. Obscurity. It's enveloping me, filling me with dread and horror. Everywhere I look, pitch black. I can't even make out my own feet. Where am I? Why is it so dark? Why is there an unearthly feeling filling up inside me?

"Name?" This voice isn't familiar in the slightest. The tone is unmatched to a face and I couldn't even see who it is asking me this. Or why. And I still have no idea where I am.

I hate this confusion. It makes me feel helpless. It makes me feel like I am in math class.

"W-What?" I stammer and a sudden stream of light filled the area I am in. I shield my eyes and nearly hiss like a cliché vampire, protecting himself from the sun. When my eyes adjust I was only filled with more confusion.

I can now make out my surrounding area...and It's a concrete basement. There are boxes and a certain dampness lingering in the air that is weighing me down like bricks. In front of me, a boy. Maybe a little older or maybe my age, it's hard to tell. His hair is long and black and it falls across the top of his left eye. His eyes are a piercing blue and he's dressed in a suit. Something you would wear to a wedding or fancy dinner.

"Your name, what is it?" he asks me, a hint of annoyance in his voice. He doesn't look pleased and I don't know why. At this point, I still don't know a lot of things.

"H-Heather." I stammer. His expression's unchanging. "Where am I?" I ask him, panic is starting to set in. "Who are you? Why am I here? What's going on?" I'm tripping over my tongue, trying hard not to stutter and sound as cowardly as I feel.

"I'm Derek, now slow down, " he tells me. My lips press into a thin line and I look at him, expecting an explanation. "you don't remember?"

"Remember what?" I reply, confused. He sighs, pushing his hands into the pockets of his dress pants, walking in a slow pace around me.

"Well," he begins, continuing to walk around me, "from what I gathered, you jumped out of your apartment window. You tried to kill yourself."

I collect what he's saying and repeat it in my mind a couple times, but it still makes no sense. Upon staring at my feet I realize I have no shoes or socks on. I look up my body and I'm wearing a hospital gown. I'm covered in cuts and bruises on top of it all and it's then I realized how stiff and sore I am.

"You aren't you. You're a spirit. Your body is up on the fourth floor of the Janeway hospital in a coma," Derek explains.

I look at him and I found my eyes stinging with tears that threatened to spill down my cheeks. This is all too much. "Why did I..." I can't manage to finish my sentence. It causes a lump in my throat and it makes my head pound when thinking about it.

"You really don't remember, huh?" He asks. He's standing behind me and I shook my head to show that I don't remember jumping out my apartment window. "Just think about it. Give it some thought."

"Why would I want to give it thought?" I ask, turning to face him. He's leaning against a beam, nonchalantly. "You are trying to tell me I'm dying," I say through eyes that were blurred with tears. "That I jumped and killed myself?"

I want to continue but I'm swept into thoughts and an unforeseen black liquid floods in around us like water breaking through a dam. I'm overwhelmed, trying to avoid it as it crashed against my legs. I look up at Derek and he's as unconcerned as usual. "You're getting your memories back." he says as the black water like substance brought up past our waists. His arms stayed folded as he watches my struggle against it. It's as useless as trying to drown a fish. I wanted to maintain my composure but it was making me panic. "Don't fight it," he tells me. I look at him with wild eyes as it comes up around my neck.

Even though the black water looks like water and feels like water as it connects with our bodies, it's not water. It is rolling off us like we are covered in oil and instead of floating, I'm sinking. Trying to jump is a waste of time because my feet are 50 pounds heavier.

I often thought of how I might die...drowning; I always came to the conclusion would be the worse. Of course, I'm thinking of this now as I struggle to keep my head above the liquid. My mouth is covered and it is quickly spreading to my eyes. Now, it's covered my whole head.

But I could breathe. It's hard at first and I'm finding myself surrounded by the familiar darkness, but I'm not as afraid as before...and now, the darkness is crumbling around me, revealing a familiar room.

"Is this your bedroom?" Derek asks me. I nod once, looking around before I'm startled by a door swinging open. A version of myself walks in, laying my bookbag down and pacing the room. I look to Derek who isn't at all affected by this. "Just watch." he responds to my facial expression.

I glance back to the figure, who was me, and she's watching the battery sign on her phone, waiting for it to charge enough to make a call because it's completely dead. Her whole manner changes when my front door swings open. We both jump.

"Come on," She was whispering, her whole body is sent into violent tremors and tears build on her waterline.

"I know you're in here and I know you have money!" I can hear the deep, taunting voice of a male coming from downstairs and I'm completely horrified. I spin on my heels to face Derek.

"I don't want to be here." I tell him. He shrugs.

"That's out of my hands. You can leave as soon as things play out. As soon as the memories come back." he responds. I watch myself again.

The phone is still charging. Wickedly loud and heart wrenching footsteps progress up the stairs. One by one, each step was heavier than the last and soon, she's pacing the room again. She looks around

quickly before glancing to the open window. It was a seemingly long 2 second stare as she pondered her next move. The footsteps were in the hallway now, and she's rushing. When she's sticking one foot out the window the door is thrown open.

She responds with a shriek and rushed movements, trying to escape this man, whoever he is. He is tall, muscles visible threw his tight t-shirt, a sports brand stocking cap on with dark jeans. She's completely out the window now but he has a tight grip on her forearm.

"No!" she squeals. "Let go!" She's pulling against him and trying to yank free as she is perched on the window. With one final yank, she's free of his bruising grip...but she wasn't out of the mess that easy. She pulled away with too much strength that set her off balance. I watch myself fall.

In the blink of an eye we are back in the previous room. I stare at Derek and he returns it.

"It's time to go." he tells me. My heart flips. Go? Go where? "You need to let your spirit pass on." My best baffled expression presses itself onto my face.

"Why?"

"Spirit's of the dead have to pass on."

"But I'm not dead."

"Or the spirits whose vessel is one foot in the grave," he tells me. My head twitches to the side, vessel? "Their body," he clarifies. I nod once and stare at the ground between us.

"So there's a Heaven?"

"There is...Heather, it's the best thing you can do for yourself," he advises me. "it's the easiest and least painful." I don't even have to think about it before a response has worked up onto the tip of my tongue.

"Derek, my family thinks I tried to kill myself," I say. "I can't leave things like that."

I can't. Even if I can only go back to my body for a few seconds, it would be long enough to let them know. Long enough to say goodbye. They need the closure...and M.J? What will she think when she hears that her best friend killed herself?

"Sometimes we have to." Derek replies. I sigh heavily and shake my head, tears well up and blinking causes them to trickle down my cheek.

"I won't." I tell him, determination strong in my normally insecure voice. "Just give me a minute, 60 seconds. I need to let them know," I say while struggling to keep myself from breaking into sobs, "that I didn't kill myself, and that I love them." Every word's strained and my breathing is heavy as it's taking so much out of me.

"I can't, Heather I'm sorry. It's too hard for even me to do."

"Can't or won't?" I snap, the tears are ongoing. He won't respond. "Where's my goodbye, Derek?" He peers to his left at the ground in deep thought. "Derek," He looks up to me as I speak up. "Please."

"You know, it's not going to be easy, right? You need to be a fighter." He tells me and it's like he's trying everything to just make me give up and take the easy way out. Not that it's working though, my sorrow is already quickly replacing itself with a new found faith and my eyes are lighting up with courage.

"I don't mind," I tell him. "I can do it if you would please just let me try."

"Heather, this isn't up to me. I can't just snap my fingers and place you in your body. You have to conquer yourself," he tells me seriously. I nod once but don't understand him saying I have to "conquer myself".

"Meaning?"

"Meaning, there are two parts that make up you as a whole right now. You have the part that's fighting for life which is you, the part that's fighting for death and then there's the grim reaper. I guess he is kind of like the boss level." I nod once thinking about it for a second.

"Like in Mario?" I ask him. He chuckles lightly and bows his head.

"Like in Mario." he says smirking. "But if you don't make it, you won't be accepted into Heaven. You'll be stuck in limbo. No purpose, just wandering for the rest of eternity."

"There's no buts, I'm going to do this." I proclaim. He nods and points behind me.

"Make your way up to the fourth floor, you'll meet the part that is fighting for death somewhere along the way."

"O.K." I reply. "So where am I?" I ask him.

"The basement of the hospital," he responds. I nod once.

"I guess this it then."

"I guess so."

We stare at each other for a deep moment before I turn and look behind me and then back to Derek, taking a deep breath. "Thanks." I tell him. He dips his head down and I turn again, not looking back as I make my way to the fourth floor.

I finally find my way out of the basement and began wandering around the first floor, looking for the stairs to the next.

It's weird walking by people like this. You could do anything to them and they would never know because they can't see you. If I were in the right state of mind and a little less anxious, maybe I would

have had some fun with that, but all I could think about now facing the part of me that was fighting life. You know, I'm not a good fighter. The closest I have ever been to a real fight is a heated game of Badminton...but maybe that meant the other part was going to be really bad too, so it would be equal...although that just makes facing the grim reaper even more worrisome. "OK Heather, one thing at a time," I say to myself because I was making myself more edgy than I already was.

Down the third long corridor, I spot the elevator. Relieved, I move my finger to the button. It slips right through. I sigh heavily and someone approaches from my left. I step out of the way and they press the button. The doors slide open and we both step inside. She presses the button for level two. Not bad I guess. I could find the stairs from there I'm sure. When the doors slide open, I walk out and glance around this floor.

Nothing irregular and no one sticks out. It's not long before I am taking that back. Bright red hair, the exact shade of mine, walks nonchalantly down the hall and turns into a room. I follow closely and stick my head in the same room. She's my mirror image leaning against the window.

"So you want to live, huh?" she asks me.

"And you want to die." I confirm. Her expression is unchanging.

"I want to make this easier for everyone." she replies. I shake my head.

"No, you want to make this easier for yourself."

"For us."

"I don't want that." Our conversation's coming out in snaps at one another and then there's silence. She pushes herself off the window and walks closer.

"I'll make an offer, stop here and pass on. Save us both the trouble," she says, cracking her knuckles. How cliché.

"Offer declined." I respond.

She nods and throws the first punch. It's as unexpected as my coma and hits my cheek bone hard. I stagger and the pain is stunning but I steady myself quick enough to throw myself out of the way of her next hit. I hit the ground and then push myself up using the wall as support. She's already lunging for me again...this time holding a scalpel as a weapon. She swings and despite my effort it catches the skin above my eye. Blood immediately flows down from the wound. It was a shocking burn that is a constant discomfort. This made my skills even worse than before. Needless to say, I was losing pretty badly.

I am kicked next and it finally occurs to me that just because I was a bad fighter didn't mean she was as well. With the kick, I land on my back and she sits on my ribs, raising the scalpel high in the air. Just as she brings it down I catch her hands pushing them up to keep the scalpel away from my neck. It isn't working.

Continuously the scalpel got closer until it was centimeters away and I was gasping, sweat pouring off me. I grunted and huffed out before finally taking a risk and planning an offense. I threw my leg up, my foot connected with the back of her head. She's thrown off me and I roll onto my stomach, panting and scrambling onto my feet.

We both are rising at the same time and I again am on defense as she runs towards me. I put my hands out in front of me pushing her wrists towards her as they lunged for me. That's when her eyes widen and she freezes. A sticky warm liquid covers my hands and I realize what I have done. I let go as she pulls the scalpel from her stomach...and it's frightening, because technically, I just killed myself. She drops but I catch her before she hits the ground and slowly lower her.

"You really want to live, huh?" she asks me weakly. Life was slowly fading from her tired eyes and I nod once. "Then do it." And it's then that she begins to crumble, from the feet up her body disintegrates into small grains before a draft takes it up into the air.

I am mystified, I have never seen anything quite like this...but as she fades, it seems like I'm beginning to become, me. I am filled with new found strength and a determination even more powerful than before. It was like the part of me that she was, was joining me. Making me a whole if that made any sense.

I stand, knowing I shouldn't linger any longer. I had to find Mr. Grim Reaper.

I was on the fourth floor now, peering in room after room until I saw a man. A cape was draped over him and he was back on. Peculiar.

"Hello?" I ask. If he turns, well this is probably him. If not, probably just a human with an interesting cape. Slowly, he was reacting and turns to face me. "You must be the grim reaper." I say flatly. His hood is in the way of his face until he takes each side and it recoils. I'm stunned.

"Hello Heather."

"Derek," I murmur.

"I'm sorry." he tells me. I shake my head sadly and look into his vibrant blue eyes.

"Don't be,"

"I'll make it quick,"

"I didn't say I was giving up," I state.

"I don't want to cause you any unnecessary hurt."

"It's too late for that. If I'm going down, I'm going down swinging." I assert. His head drops slightly and it shakes a few times. I was about to object more, about to give another reason to fight, when he cuts me off.

"Not this time," he declares.

With the flick of his fingers, I'm on the ground in an unbearable laceration. It's felt throughout my body along with a sting and irritation. I gasp, tears trickle down my cheek.

It's really over. My eyes blur and there's a heavy weight on chest, but I feel a presence to my left. I turn my head and Derek is looking down on me.

"I'm sorry," he claims. I nod weakly.

"I know."

"Is there any way you could let them know?" I wonder, tears of defeat wet my face. "I love them. I love them so much." I murmur and bite my tongue to cover my sobs. I take a few shaky breaths. "What a way to go."

"I'm sorry," he reminds me. "Heather, I'm--"

"Don't say it again or I might slap you." I tell him, coughing and then trying to pull a smile. It was crooked, obviously painfully and it broke when blood filled my mouth where the saliva belonged. Another cough and it comes out of my mouth and streams down my chin.

"I'll see you around," I shake my head.

"Such a dreadful thing to hear from a grim reaper." I respond and he laughs lightly.

I feel it now. The pain of breathing. This was all an ongoing war that after everything, I was finally losing. Pain followed the bittersweet memories of my past life. The ups and the downs, the laughter and tears shed.

In a sudden flash of release, my eyes began to close against my will and I was being engulfed in a familiar darkness.

I take a deep breath in, bright light draped over me like a warm blanket. My eyes flutter open and brown hair framed a dejected face that was watching over me. Bright green eyes and a sudden toothy smile took over soon as M.J saw that I was conscious. She wrapped her arms around me quickly,

"You're an idiot," she cried into my shoulder. "you're a stupid, stupid idiot." I couldn't help but chuckle, even with the ache all over my body.

Next to smother me with a hug was my mom and older brother who were both crying heavily. I let them have their embrace and there was an unimaginable relief floating in the room. After the relief though, came confusion. Why am I here and alive? Derek explained to me that I would be trapped in limbo if I didn't make it...so why am I reunited with my family?

From the corner of my eye, I catch the familiar face in the doorway. Our gazes lock before he smiles warmly.

"Good luck Heather." Derek says, giving a small wave of his hand. My heart thumps loud.

"Thank you," I whisper, my eyes polished with tears again, but this time they reflected the gratitude I had for him. He nods in my direction before disappearing. There is no gentle crumble of his body. He didn't turn to ash and float away in the wind. It's a simple flash and he is no longer in the doorway.

Even after he's gone, I find myself staring where he had once stood until my mom snaps me out of it with a gentle kiss on my forehead. I look up to her, M.J and my brother and realize then how grateful I am to be back where I belong.