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A Reality Once Lived

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Author Bio

Passion is important; without having passion as part of what you're striving for, there is no purpose to what you're looking to obtain. Aspiring poet and novelist. Art-in-all-its-forms enthusiast.

A Reality Once Lived

The smoke was thick. I was breathing in a wall of dust. I could feel my lungs running out of space; the fire was eating away at the oxygen in this confined office. When I opened my eyes for an unbearable millisecond, dark grey clouds, outlined by a fiery, pulsing orange light in the distance, surrounded me. This space was transformed into a vast hell. My body shrieked, crumpled on the ground in a contorted form. Planks of wood and rock were scattered over my body. My head pounded and when I raised my head, I could feel bits of glass plastered to my face, cutting away at the skin I powdered so carefully this morning before work. There was a warm trickle down my left temple. My fingers miraculously found the liquid trail, and terrified, they quivered before me, covered in my blood. It got hotter now. The monstrous fire raged through the side of the room where the door was twenty seconds ago. It engulfed the entire doorframe and crawled against the navy carpet while licking the ceiling with its lethal tongue. I tried to begin an escape on my hands and knees when I realized I had no command of my lower body. Instead, my two extremities lay limp and covered in debris. My anxious hands could not wait any longer. They extended before me and gripped to the unforgiving carpet: needles, pins, wood chips, glass shards, and metal pieces all bit violently into my palms. I dug into the ground and pulled my aching body toward the shut window. My fingertips cried as they were sliced by my painful attempt. My elbows collapsed into sharp angles underneath my weight; an excruciating shooting pain radiated down my arms. A moan escaped my bloody lips. Sweat pooled in the crevices of my worry wrinkles. My arms glittered with exhaustion and specks of burnt paint stuck to my sticky body. But before I could reach anywhere near safety, I screamed. The fire began to eat away at me.

I gasped, panting in fright. I sat upright in bed, grabbing the down comforter mercilessly. I tried to orient myself. I'm in my room. I pushed my hair out of my face, wiping away the small beads of sweat. I untangled myself from the white covers and swung my feet over the edge of the bed. I quickly moved to the dark bathroom, my feet making tiny taps against the tile. My light purple satin nightgown rubbed smoothly against my bare thighs, making whispers against my flesh. I flicked on the light and leaned over the counter, hovering inches away from the mirror. I pulled my auburn hair back and turned my face to the side, exposing my pale temples and my smooth, unharmed cheek. My brow furrowed as I tried to imagine the damages I thought I had. But the harder I thought, the further away the image drifted. Just a dream. Must be those new vitamins. I sighed and quickly hopped back into bed.

There was a light knock on my bedroom door. I briefly glanced to my left and realized the bed was empty, covers ruffled and left unfilled. My husband peeked in with a beautiful smile and the rest of his body followed with grace. He was carrying a silver tray; the aroma of scrambled eggs and mozzarella cheese was comforting. He leaned against the bed and placed my morning meal paired with dark coffee and fresh flowers from the market on my lap.

“Happy 30th Birthday, Jenna,” he grinned, and all of my worries momentarily disappeared.

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The car woke up, muttering and groaning its morning disapproval to head to work. I turned the heat on high, and curled in a ball in the front seat. My elbows hugged my sides and my wool-gloved hands made one giant fist that huddled beneath my chin, begging for any bit of warm that collected at my scarf-wrapped neck. I watched the windows slowly defrost, revealing the smooth snow that coated the lawn.

I was grateful that Joshua had already shoveled the snow earlier this morning, a task that my poor fingers ached thinking about. After a few minutes, I finally was warm enough to take off my gloves and place my bare hands on the frozen wheel. I exhaled and saw my breath inside the car. Charming, this weather.

The hospital was only twenty minutes away from my home in Waltham. The Boston Medical Center was in the heart of the populated city where old sturdy architecture still stood as magnificent as the day it was created some 200 years ago. I was offered a job to work as the lead pharmacist seven years ago when I still lived in Georgia, a job that I could not refuse. Of course, winters still have me bitter. The lovely first of January has come upon us and has not left any disappointments – except mine. Regardless of my dissatisfaction with the weather and last night’s haunting, I was determined to make my birthday better.

My days at the hospital are usually quiet.

Today was different.

I took the unusually congested I-90 into the city. Honks were thrown from car to car and flickering brake lights were not pleasant to the seizure-prone. I hit the horn myself, beginning to get frustrated with the infinite stop and go. It was 7:45 am. I had only fifteen minutes to be at my desk in the pharmacy, so I squeezed my car in the tiny shoulder and zipped over the rumble lines. My car shook - along with angry driver’s fists - but I exited and headed into the apex of the city.

At 8:04, I pulled into the garage and struggled to find a spot. One was tucked away next to an unmarked employee elevator that would take me straight to the service hallways near the Emergency Department on the first floor. I slid my lab coat on with ease. The elevator shot up and as the doors opened, I was grabbed by surprise.

I was tugged in every which direction. Stretchers with bloody, crippled patients were sprawled on their white beds. White lab coats ran furiously at my side. A million mouths spat with anxiety their urgent matters.

“Dr. Fitzgerald! We need you now,” one shouted.

“There has been an emergency! You have been recruited to the Rapid Response Team! The team physician will explain,” another rushed breathlessly.

“At approximately 6:30 this morning, there was an explosion at an office building off of Newbury Street, cause unknown. Two died on scene and ninety have been badly injured. We called a mass disaster alert at 6:50 and these patients were rushed here for urgent medical care. However, these patients have obtained a variety of burns, some with frostbite,” the physician clicked.

“Wait... frostbite?” I piped up, curious of the unsettling issue.

“Yes, some victims had jumped out of windows to escape the fire, but ended up with multiple breaks and fractures as well as hypothermia,” the nurse manager remarked.

“We are struggling as a hospital to provide care since we are not a specialized center to treat burns but we are in communications with the Burn Center in Vermont and they are organizing methods to transport patients across state lines. Our job is to keep them stable,” The physician looked down and bit his lip, flipping nervously through a handful of patient’s charts.

“That is why we have called upon you. We need your expertise to help these patients stay alive.”

“Just tell me what I need to do.”

“Let’s go inspect the damages, shall we?”

We walked into the trauma wing. The smell hit me like a freight train. Burnt skin had a distinct smell that made my living skin crawl. It was rotten and crispy like slaughtered livestock left out for a few days, then put over an angry flame. The victims were scattered in the hallways, keeled over their own blackened bodies. Skin slipped off of the bone like butter and raw pink flesh sat exposed. Faces were unidentifiable; everyone looked the same except for their tattered clothing that stood as the last remnant of themselves. I moved out of the way for a new patient that had come through the sliding doors from the ambulance. I stopped in my very tracks and watched in slow motion a woman with a cut on her temple that ran down her cheek. Her eyes scrunched together in pain, her legs were scorched to a purple-red hue, and her palms lay at her side facing the sky, slices deep into her skin. I did not know this woman, but I recognized her scars. In my nightmare, I lived her reality.