

I WILL FOLLOW YOU INTO THE DARK

I would like to apologize beforehand, so you don't feel upset at the end of this confession. You see, I'm not much of a storyteller. I was not blessed with a silver tongue. But I would like to pour my heart out to you, dear stranger, so please bear with me....

I was a plain person. Light blonde hair that hung limply at my shoulders, green eyes the color of mold. You know, the kind you always cringe at when you see it covering a piece of bread. My pale skin was decorated with scars and bruises. By nature, I guess you could say I'm a fighter. I enjoyed the rush of giving someone a bloody nose.

He was my opposite. Kind and bright; my personal sun. His hair was a sandy blonde, and his eyes were a piercing and clear blue. It seemed there was always some type of smile on his impish face, whether it be kind, apologetic, or sincere.

I'm not sure when he left, or how long he's been gone for, but it's for him that I'm out here, in these dreary Washington woods.

The trees are tall, and I would probably be able to tell you what kind they were if I paid more attention to the ramblings of my mother. Deep scars mar the trunks, but they reach for the sky anyway, oblivious to the world's sadism.

The sky is cloudy; I know because they bathe the ground I walk on in shadow. Light does not majorly contribute to my journey, but temperature does. With every dot of shade, the cool air becomes cooler, and soon I find my frame shaking.

Then again, I probably shouldn't be traipsing around the forest mid-November.

Dead leaves, having lost their beauty and glow long ago, crunch under my Chucks as I walk.

A flash of dark fabric catches my attention. From so far away, it looks like satin, or maybe silk; deep down I know better.

My breathing halts and my eyes widen. "Juh..." I whisper. The figure comes totally into focus. I shout, "Jayelle!"

One of his arms withdraws from his front pocket, and he waves. I can't help but flinch. His hand and face, the only visible flesh of his body, is bluish, and swollen. Dark purple veins stand out on the little of his body that is exposed.

As he smiles at me, his skin stretches tight and droplets roll down his face from his hairline. He's got to be freezing.

"Jayelle." His name by itself makes me smile, and I force myself to run at him; to him. When I am close enough, I jump at him, confident that he will catch me before I fall.

His figure shatters before me, moisture pouring to the earth, and I hit the ground in a roll. I am immediately dizzy, and look around the ground. A rock a few feet away is

now suspiciously smudged with blood. There is the idea that I have hit my head, and then there is nothing.



I met him during summer, at the pool. He was a lifeguard; I was an idiot. The pool wasn't quite as deep as I thought.

Jayelle pulled me up from the bottom after I hit my head. There was a lot of blood, and afterward the back of my head had to be stitched up.

Even now, I can remember it clearly, from how cold the water was to the wail of the sirens as I was loaded into an ambulance. But most of all, I recall the burn of the chlorine in my cut, and the way Jayelle's brows knit together when he looked down at me after he brought me up.

There was an apologetic smile on his face. He blamed himself for awhile, especially after he really started to get to know me.

It had taken me three months - the whole summer - to get an honestly joyous grin out of him.

I remember that day, too. The week before school started, we were at a large department store, power sliding down the long, concrete aisles and playing air guitar. This became one of our favorite past times. Still, though, every smile said, I'm sorry.

Until I managed to power slide right into a pile of school supplies.

The first thing he did was laugh, of course, and run over to see if I was okay. Luckily, I had collided into a cardboard box of book covers, so the only damage done was us getting kicked out and me skinning my elbow.

“Idiot.” It hadn’t been an insult, and a chuckle had accompanied it. He’d ruffled my hair, and his smile touched his eyes; sweet, simple adoration.



It is dark when I wake up. Not that that tells me a whole lot, but I imagine it has been hours since I blacked out.

The side of my head pounds and is colder than the rest of my body. As I stand, the world pirouettes, and I find myself on the ground once more. The stars glow, and I see everything around me. This small blessing, though, does not change the suffocating blackness of my surroundings.

Once I gain my footing, I am travelling again. It does not take long for my sight to exaggerate everything around me. Trees are taller and more crooked than they’d be in daylight. The moon, fat and orange, seems to descend unto me. Shadows swim through the leaves on either side of me, and for some reason, I feel threatened.

A loud crack to my right makes me freeze and turn my head slightly. At first, there is nothing to see but the unrealistic trees and spindly branches. Then, there is a screaming in my ear, to my left, and I spin quickly, eyes wide and chest starting to heave.

“Jayelle?” I whisper urgently, stepping forward attentively. The screams echo in response, all around me now. I find myself begging, “Please, Jayelle. Stop playing.”

Something brushes my arm.

I smile and turn. “Jayelle!”

A tree branch is hooked to my arm instead. A gust of wind tears the skeletal fingers from my flesh, and chills me to the bone.

Hope drained from my body; I slide through the woods. The noises have stopped, but I can feel something surrounding me; nothing but sick pressure.

There is a presence that I think might be my imagination, but the cold and paranoia isn't allowing this rationality. I scream accusations at my surroundings, turning round in panicked little circles.

With slick leaves underfoot, I lose my balance and go tumbling down another rocky embankment. A whistle pierces the air as I breathe, this noise being accompanied by the chatter of my teeth as the temperature drops. The pain I feel is irrelevant to the numbness at my core, and out of utter exhaustion I close my eyes. I feel unaccomplished as I go, but I also believe Jayelle is just at my fingertips; he is waiting for me.



I awaken to the sun rising. There is a soft layer of frost on everything, but I am not as cold as I expect. For a moment I am confused, unsure as to how I wound up on the ground. Then I remember Jayelle, and I stand without hesitation.

Almost immediately I stumble and fall back to the earth, a seemingly forgotten pain coming back full force. I am scared to look at the region of suffering, but I need to know exactly what I've gotten myself into. So, breath billowing in front of my face and tears pricking my eyes, I look toward my legs.

Protruding from my shin is a bloody stick, a reminder of my tumble the night before. And now, fear intensifies within me. My first thought is to pull it out, but the logical part is begging me to leave it in. There is agony I have never known before, staring at the impalement. This agony is quashed when his voice tumbles down on me.

"Fell down again, huh?"

His voice is powerful in the quiet; it is flat but wrought with emotion. It is the only voice burned into my memory: Jayelle.

"I tripped," I tell him, looking away from my leg and up into his crystal eyes. "It was an accident."

He nods, looking away from me and up at the sky. Despite his seemingly thin garb, he appears to be maintaining his body temperature. He does not shiver and shake; his teeth do not chatter. "Of course you did."

"Jayelle, I..." I cannot find words to speak as he smiles at me, the corners of his eyes crinkling with laugh lines. Tears freeze on my lashes, and it takes a moment for

my brain to catch up with my mouth. "Let's go back home, okay, Jayelle? Everyone misses you, so let's go back home. Everything will be perfect this time! It won't be like...."

Jayelle's expression had shifted through my plea, and it makes me stop. He looks as if he is in worse pain than I can imagine, even worse than the injuries I've sustained searching for him. His agony is not physical; it is white hot and emotional.

"It won't be like before," I finish, voice cracking and tears boiling hot over my eyelids and slipping down my cheeks.

"You have to move on," he whispers, refusing to meet my gaze, "I can't go back with you."

"You have to, Jayelle!" I shout, thoughts spiraling in my head like falling maple tree seeds. My leg burns bright for a moment, and I know it is my grotesque ace in the hole. Placing a hand on my thigh, I look up into his eyes before saying as clearly as I can, "What would you do if I died out here, Jayelle; all because you wouldn't help me get back?"

Silence ensued, and along with it a horrible realization. Tears blur my vision, and when I wipe them away he is gone. He had never been there in the first place; I hadn't come to bring him back. I'd come to join him, and thick denial had kept me from the less than honorable truth.

The rational part of me begins to beg and scream as I bend to grasp the limb in my leg. Before pulling it out, I tug my collar up and bite down on it. Blood pours hot

down my shin once the stick is removed, and sweat pops on my skin. I am exhausted from pain and an empty stomach, and I fall back.

I close my eyes, and feel his fingertips touch mine.



“I’d follow you into the dark,” Jayelle comments, his face smooth and serious. When he sees my expression, a bright grin breaks across his face and he laughs. “I would! Don’t look at me like that.”

“Death Cab for Cutie binge?” I ask, speaking around the straw in my mouth.

“No,” he answers, smiling a little bit and drinking from his own ICEE.

We sit on the hood of his car in silence, staring at skaters skinning their knees and taking pulls off our fruity slushes.

“You know I meant it, right?” His hand finds mine, cold and rough.

“Meant what?”

His voice rose to a falsetto, and an inkling of a melody plays out in the words he sings. “I’ll follow you into the dark.”

Before I can react to the words, he kisses my cheek and throws his arm around my shoulders. His smile is so glaringly bright that I can feel his love radiating off him, and I have to swallow the lump in my throat.

“Me too,” I tell him, smiling, “I’ll follow you into the dark.”



I open my eyes purely out of disbelief and disappointment. I am cold, wet, and bloody, but I am also alive. There is so much pain at this revelation that I nearly cry out, and it is then that I realize it is raining, and my body is numb. My throat closes as I look around, and I feel heat in my leg. In passing, I think it is infected, but I also have come to the conclusion that it doesn't matter.

I should be dead.

Through the dull annoyance at this point, though, I manage to see a thrill of beauty in my final moments. Everything is a hazy shade of gray; glistening with the rain. It is an amazing sight to behold, but it does not help. All I can think about is Jayelle.

There is the temptation to stand and wander once more, but the thought makes me tired. Instead, I close my eyes again and strain to feel his fingers at mine. I get one even better.

He whispers my name, and lifts me up into his arms.



With the first sensations, my fists clench on the cotton sheets that cover me. My eyes open, and I stare for a moment at the ceiling before understanding I am still alive. I want to scream and rage; pound my fists against the mattress and kick my legs until I'm too exhausted to move.

“You’re awake.” A doctor enters into the room with a false smile. He explains that I’ll live, but my leg will never be quite the same. He says there is a good chance I’ll always walk with a limp, and I tell him I’m fine with that.

Once he leaves, my parents come in and throw angry curses. They are happy I’m with them now, but enraged that I would make the decision to leave in the first place.

“What were you thinking?” my mother asks, her voice shrill with accusation.

I have no answer for them, and this only makes things worse.



Upon my release, our first stop on the way home is to the New Hope Cemetery. My final meeting with Jayelle had jogged all the loose memories, and now I travel through the headstones with relative ease. From where we parked, he is ten rows down and three in coming from the left. His name, birthday, and date of passing are carved into pretty blue-gray granite.

Jayelle Samuel McCarthy

January 17, 1993 – August 15, 2010

Beneath these was his epitaph, something so impersonal and generalized it almost makes me gag.

Loved by all / The light in the dark / He will be missed

I bend down and clear away unruly grass, taking the time to rub away grime that covers his name. Careless, I swoop down and place a kiss on his death date, feeling a tiny bit whole again as I do so.

From the car, I hear my name being called. Glancing over my shoulder, I see worry and impatience on my family's features. For a moment I wish suicide were simple, and then I shake the thought and stand. I know now, straight from his lips, that he wouldn't have wanted that for me.

"I'll be back soon, Jayelle," I assure, dusting myself off and turning to go. I pause, sure I feel his fingertips at mine, and I finish, "Until the time comes that I'll follow you into the dark."

I turn, and limp back to my family. Without him, I move on with my life, as I know I should. As I know he wanted.

