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## **Forever and Always**

What happens when we die? Some think of a glorious and poetic end, one filled with beauty and appreciation for a life well lived. Others struggle to see traces of beauty for they are haunted by the past and so utterly consumed by regret. “Maybe I could have done things differently,” they think.

What happened when I died? It was not exactly as they said.

It’s not one or the other, but rather a mix of both. We experience the *remembrance*, as I like to call it, a strange mélange of all that makes life beautiful and all that makes it crushingly painful. Some experience more of the former, whereas some the latter. And it all ends with a trial of sorts, a reckoning.

I laid on a bed of grass, helplessly staring at the evanescent beauty of the night sky. Despite everything that had happened, I was merely gazing. Stars decorated the infiniteness above: their number innumerable, their twinkling splendor indescribable. They came together seemingly out of chance, but to form constellations of such utter magnificence that it had to be destiny. Alyssa used to be fascinated by them. An eagle of stars, *Aquila*, soared below a lyre, *Lyra*, which played to the beat of *Aquila*’s wings. They were almost one, yet not quite. Altair, the brightest star in *Aquila*, inched ever closer to *Lyra*’s Vega. *Aquila* and Vega bathed in the color of the celestial river that separated them, awaiting that which they’ve longed for millennia. It felt like I looked at them for a lifetime, but as close as they were to each other, they never met. They came closer and closer and closer, but to no avail. And then, they finally stopped and stood still.

Next came the *remembrance*. My heart started beating like a drum. *Thump*. Faster. *Thump*. *Thump*. *Thump*. There was darkness now. Everything bled black. There was silence now. It lasted not for a moment, nor a lifetime, but for even longer. It was an eternal nightmare; a nightmare that children hear; a nightmare full of the deepest and darkest fears that they never dare utter; a nightmare so viscerally and painfully terrifying that they struggle to even comprehend it. And I was in it forevermore. All I did was close my eyes, and then it began.

# The Remembrance

I found myself in a dark void, with nothingness stretching as far as my eyes could see. I turned around and saw something that grabbed my eye. A room. Even though the room was completely white, it offered no solace from the dark. The room had no doors or windows, and two walls were missing. It was as if the room existed purely for observation, for the sole purpose of me watching it.

And there they were, a boy and a girl, roughly sixteen years of age, lying on the floor and staring at the ceiling. They were like holograms in the white room, but they looked so real. They also looked familiar, awfully familiar, as if they were from a distant dream. From another life, perhaps. But they weren't, were they? I slowly approached them to get a better view of their faces, and then I saw. I knew. The boy had dark brown hair and black eyes, a stark contrast to the girl's ashen hair and blue eyes. It was a surreal feeling, being there, and I wanted to watch them for as long as I could. I had known that boy once, for he was me, but I had changed so much that he was but a stranger now.

"Don't you think the sky looks beautiful?" the girl said.

"It does...but not as beautiful as you, Alyssa," the boy replied.

"Come on, Nate," the girl said. "You know I love you, but you need to chill with the cheesy comments."

"No can do, miss," Nate said.

Alyssa smiled and let out a chuckle. Nate looked at Alyssa.

"Do you think we did the right thing, coming here?" he asked her.

"We asked my parents, didn't we? And you even promised not to let anything happen to me," Alyssa replied, smiling.

"Of course I won't, babe," Nate said. "But you know what I mean. There isn't that much to do here."

"Except see the breathtaking views," Alyssa said.

"You're the only breathtaking view I need," Nate said.

“Oh my god, you’re too much!” Alyssa said, laughing. She switched her view back to the ceiling, which was invisible to me.

“Do you see those two constellations above? The eagle and the lyre?” Alyssa asked.

“I do,” Nate replied.

“Do you know what they mean?” Alyssa said.

“I mean...they’re just constellations, right?” Nate said. “A bunch of stars that come together and make a nice pattern.”

“But isn’t it incredible that they make that specific pattern?” Alyssa said.

“I guess so,” Nate replied.

“Well, despite your lack of enthusiasm, I find it very exciting,” Alyssa said, rolling her eyes.

“There’s this old Chinese folktale which says that Altair, the brightest star in the eagle *Aquila*, and Vega, the lyre *Lyra*’s brightest star, were actually lovers.”

“Really?” Nate said, gaining some interest.

“Yup,” Alyssa said. “And Altair and Vega were once one, yet they were estranged somehow. They were forbidden to meet. But every seventh night of every seventh moon, magpies form a bridge between them, allowing them to reunite. A single night of passion and love, in its purest form. And then, once the night is over, they wait. They wait so very eagerly for their next night together, for they are all that matter to each other.”

A silence ensued.

“Wow. That’s beautiful,” Nate said.

“Super romantic, isn’t it?” Alyssa said.

“Not as romantic as me, though” Nate replied.

Alyssa shook her head. This was just Nate being Nate. But Nate felt like he could be Nate only around her. He didn’t feel like himself when he was with anyone else. He had lost both his parents as a child, and so she was the only real connection he had. He slowly leaned in and kissed her. They looked at each other.

“I’m glad we came here together”, Nate said.

“Me too”, Alyssa said.

“Forever and always,” Nate said.

“Forever and always,” Alyssa said.

Before my eyes, Nate and Alyssa slowly disappeared, and the white room was now empty. I couldn’t believe my eyes; they were just gone. Just one more moment with them, that’s all I wanted. Yet, they were gone now. As swiftly as they had come. I wanted the beauty to last longer than it did.

And then something worse: I remembered what happened the day after. I didn’t know if I could experience it again - even once was far too much for one lifetime, even an endless lifetime. But I had no choice anymore. Tears filled my eyes as I saw the white room filling once again. Now, Nate and Alyssa were cuddled up next to a bonfire. I turned around, but the room turned around with me. I tried closing my eyes as hard as I could, yet it was also in vain. They wouldn’t. They couldn’t. I had to watch.

I don’t remember what they said but I only made out a word here and there, something about death and all it entails. I couldn’t focus, as much as I wanted to. As terribly as I wanted to hold onto that moment and never let it go, I knew I couldn’t. At times, I suppose the beauty is too painful. I saw the flames of the campfire slowly dying as Nate and Alyssa yearned for warmth. Alyssa stood up. I could hear what they said now, and I feared I always would. My heart started to beat faster.

“I think it’s about time we head back, my parents told me to be back by tonight,” Alyssa said.

“Come on, I’m sure they won’t mind if you’re a few hours late,” Nate replied.

“But babe, I also have that paper due tomorrow that I have definitely started,” Alyssa said sarcastically.

Nate chuckled slightly.

“Okay, I’ll see you tomorrow then?” Nate replied.

“You don’t want to come with?” Alyssa said.

“Well, maybe I want to get something for a special someone in my life.” Nate said.

Alyssa paused for a second, thinking,

“Could it be the marigolds I was talking about yesterday?” Alyssa asked.

“I don’t know, perhaps, ” Nate replied, clearly doing a poor job at hiding it.

“I cannot wait,” Alyssa said, smiling.

*The marigolds. Fucking marigolds.*

Why did he have to say that? Why wasn’t he going with her? He had to know, I had to tell him. I had to warn him.

“Go with her, you idiot!” I screamed. My heart was beating faster and faster. *Thump. Thump.* My soul was burning with unadulterated rage. *Thump.*

“Go with her!” I said, begging him to hear me. Yet he didn’t. He couldn’t.

He looked at Alyssa.

“You’re sure you’re going to be okay?” he asked.

“Of course, babe, ” she said. “Plus, what good is my new driver’s license without actually using it?”

“I love you,” he said.

“If you love her so much, go with her!” I yelled. *Please listen to me. Please. Please.* I whispered prayers to all the gods I had never believed in, yet in vain.

“I love you” Alyssa said.

Alyssa and Nate disappeared once again. A few moments later, only one of them reappeared in the room. It was Nate.

Nate stood in the middle of a street, flashing lights all around him. A few police cars surrounded him, closing off the site of the car crash from the public. He saw someone getting handcuffed and put into the back of a cop car that soon left the scene. It was a tall, white male with a small scar on his forehead. It was *him*. Nate didn’t see the slightest hint of guilt in him; he just seemed stoic. *After all that, he’s the one who gets away with a fucking scar?* Nate still hadn’t really processed what the officer told him, but he

remembered that drunk driver's name, *William Jeffer*. He turned away and walked towards Alyssa, or what was left of her.

She was more of a body than a person, with her face mutilated and her head crushed in. The cop had said that she didn't die on impact, and only bled out after suffering for a few minutes. Her eyes were wide open, staring into nothingness. But they were still as beautifully blue as ever. He fell to the floor, holding her in his arms. She was gone. And he was alone. There was nothing he could do to save her. He gently caressed her hair, taking in the smell of the marigold scented perfume she loved to wear.

"Forever and always," he whispered, his voice breaking.

For a while, Nate stayed there. He laid beside Alyssa in the middle of the street. How could he leave? The police were understanding and gave him time to say goodbye, but soon enough Nate took a turn for the worse. He switched to a fetal position and started convulsing uncontrollably while whispering the words "*William Jeffer*" over and over again. Eventually, even though he resisted, they had to pick her up and take her away.

As they disappeared, the white room became empty once again. I took a deep breath, a few tears trickling down my cold face. At least it couldn't get worse, right? They say wounds heal with time. But that's rarely true. More often than not, they become scars. They fester and deepen, ripping open the sickly human flesh until the bone is all that's left. Akin to a disease, they take control of our earthly bodies. They are us and we are them.

Nate appeared in the white room once again. He was older now, perhaps in his late twenties. His baggy eyes were encircled with dark shadows. His face was narrower, and wearier. The years had not been kind to him. I wished someone had been there for me all those years, then perhaps things wouldn't have turned out like this.

He was standing upright, his eyes transfixed on a newspaper that he held firmly in his hands.

*"William Jeffer becomes youngest senator to be sworn in"*

*That fucking name.* Nate had heard that name before. He knew it all too well. Nate had been looking for him ever since with barely any success...until now. *That fucking name.* It was him, it had to be.

“That fucking murderer,” Nate whispered under his breath.

His eyes flared and his breaths grew heavier. His heart started beating like a drum. *Thump.* Faster. *Thump. Thump.* Louder. *Thump. Thump. Thump.* His hands started to tremble as he closed his eyes and relived everything once again. The flashing lights, the destroyed cars, Alyssa’s caved in skull, and William. That heartless murderer. And yet, it was him who walked it with naught but a scar and a short sentence from which he was bailed out.

Nate, with a terrifying stoicism, crumbled the newspaper and threw it away. He walked toward his dresser and opened the top drawer. He lifted a pile of clothes and picked up a gun from underneath. He held it in his hand. He stared at it, perhaps as a final act of contemplation. But it was ever so brief, for he tucked it deep into his coat’s interior pocket. He thought he was making things right. *Oh, the folly of man.*

I shook my head. I tried to say something that could change his mind, but I knew he couldn’t listen. This had to happen. My chance to intervene had long passed. Now I was merely an impotent spectator.

I blinked, and Nate was now outside a large mansion. The front door was adorned with beautiful Roman carvings and ivy spirals, reminiscent of great houses of royalty. Nate gave the huge front door a little tug, but it was closed. The windows were locked as well. He walked around the side and found a back door. He gave it a slight twist. It was open. His hand trembled, for he knew he would see Alyssa’s murderer soon enough. Another moment of hesitancy.

“Don’t,” I whispered under my breath, as helpless as ever, as unheard as ever.

He opened the door nonetheless and walked stealthily through the hallways with his heartbeat quickening. He took the gun out of his coat and held it in his hands. The gun was a part of him, an extension of his misguided self. And as nervous as he seemed, he was ready now. William was in the

room behind him, shuffling through a few documents for his new campaign. He got up from his desk and went out into the hallway. Nate heard a voice behind him.

“Hey, what are you doing here?” William said in shock.

Nate turned around and pointed the gun at William. He saw the same scar on his forehead.

“It’s you,” he said.

“We can talk about this.” William said, terrified and feigning calm.

“It was you,” Nate said.

“Who are you?” William said.

“Guess.” Nate said.

“I- I don’t know. What do you want?” William said, helplessly searching for words.

“The car,” Nate said, trembling once again.

“I-,” it almost immediately made sense for William. “It was just an - accident,” he said. His voice failed him after a few words.

“An accident?” Nate said. “You killed her. What monster would do something like that and not feel anything?”

“It was an accident, I-” William said, interrupted by Nate.

“You drove your car into Alyssa’s and killed her,” Nate said.

“I didn’t mean for that to-” William said.

“Didn’t mean to? Really? Anyway, what does that matter? She’s dead either way, isn’t she?” Nate said.

“I was coming back from a party and had too much to drink,” William said. “I didn’t see her until it was too late and couldn’t press the brakes in time.”

“There were no skid marks at all,” Nate retorted.

“I told you, I tried-” William said.

“You didn’t even fucking try,” Nate said.

“I’m sorry- what do you want from me?” William said, on the verge of tears.



“I want to know why,” Nate said.

“I told you- I didn’t mean to. It was an accident,” William said.

“That’s not the truth!”, Nate said.

“It is, I promise you,” William said. “Just let me go, please.”

“I don’t think so”, Nate said, adamant as ever.

“Please,” William pleaded. “I know I made an awful mistake. But things are different now, I went to AA meetings for years. I’ve been sober ever since the accident. Please, I have a family. If not for me, do it for them. ”

Nate’s demeanor remained unchanged.

“I want you to feel what she felt in her final moments, and what I felt” Nate said. “Helpless.” It hurt me to hear him say that.

His finger teased the gun’s trigger, pushing it ever so gently. His sight became slightly hazy. A few tears forced their way out of his eyes. *Thump. Thump. Thump. Thump. Thump.* His heart had never beat this fast. This was for the girl he had never stopped loving. This was for Alyssa.

*Bang.* The gun fired, but just then one of William’s bodyguards tackled Nate. The bullet hit the couch beside William. The gun fell out of Nate’s hand and slid across the floor. The bodyguard had restrained Nate. He then punched Nate in the head, as hard as he could, leaving him unconscious. Just then, all of them disappeared. The white room was empty once again.

Moments passed, and Nate was now tied up against a chair in a dark basement. There was no light at all, just him and the chair. Just him and the endless murk. He tried moving his hands, but they were bound. The harder he struggled, the tighter the binds held him. But an idea soon took shape as he saw a solitary shiny knife lying a few feet away from him; it was the only thing he could see. He rocked the chair back and forth, faster and faster. Soon enough, the chair fell onto the floor with a loud thud. But someone heard it from afar. Nate heard footsteps coming towards him. He saw traces of light. Someone was coming. Nate dragged himself towards the knife and used it to cut himself out of the rope. He then blanketed himself in the darkness, hoping it would help hide him. The man finally reached the bottom of

the stairs, holding a flashlight that partially illuminated the room. He looked around for Nate, but he was nowhere to be seen. He grabbed the walkie-talkie from his pocket and tried to speak into it.

“He-,” he said, before being interrupted.

Nate took the knife and stuck it into the man’s leg. The man fell to the floor, writhing in pain. But just as I blinked, the white room changed. It was the same basement, but now the man was tied to the chair in Nate’s place, and Nate was standing over him. He held a metal pipe that was smeared with blood; blood that was not his. A pool of blood, with a strange yellowish tint, had formed beneath the man.

“Where is he?” Nate said, in a spine-chilling tone.

“I- I don’t know,” the man said, sobbing profusely. His mouth was full of blood, making it difficult for him to speak.

“Please...just tell me,” Nate said, calmer this time. He begged him.

“I told you, I don’t know,” the man stringed together the words. “I’m so sorry.”

Nate took a deep breath and mustered a bit of strength.

Nate didn’t trust him. For whom could he ever trust but himself? The fire that raged in his heart that had died so long ago now roared back to life. It spread uncontrollably. *Justice*. This was justice. Perhaps, even if the man told him the truth, he still wouldn’t have let him go. Perhaps, on some level, as much as he hated doing it, it made him - or rather some twisted and pathetic part of him - feel ever so slightly better.

“Please,” I pleaded, perhaps as intensely as Nate had begged the man. I fell on my knees. But Nate didn’t listen. He couldn’t. And with that, he became more of a stranger to me than he’d ever been. Perhaps, he wasn’t deserving of his name, for he was not Nate anymore.

The rest was hazy. But I remember screams fading into silence. I remember the man on the floor, having revealed his secrets, breathing, but just barely. Perhaps, death would have been more merciful. I remember dark red blood staining the white walls. Most of it was the man’s, but some of it was Nathaniel’s too.

Now Nathaniel was alone in the white room. He wasn't in the basement anymore, but outside a cottage far away in the countryside which was one of William's safehouses. He had driven for about two hours to get there. He wielded a gun that he had scavenged from the mutilated body of the man in the basement. He stood resolute before the cottage. William couldn't possibly have been prepared for such an outcome. It was unlikely that he had bodyguards here too. After all, it was a remote place, the nearest city being fifteen miles away. Nathaniel stared at the cottage for a few moments. He reloaded the gun. It would end now. It had to.

Nathaniel approached the front door which was, to his surprise, unlocked. He stealthily walked on the wooden floor, trying his best to avoid creaking floorboards. He looked past the wall to his left and saw a couple slow dancing in the living room. It was William and his wife. A phonograph in the corner of the room played Frank Sinatra's "*Fly me to the moon*". They gently swayed to the tunes holding each other close. Nathaniel held up the gun towards them, albeit slightly hesitantly. The way they danced. The way they held each other. The way that they looked at each other. It reminded him of him and Alyssa. His eyes welled up. Maybe he didn't have to do this after all. Maybe he could let them love each other till the end of time, just like he and Alyssa had planned to. He slowly lowered the gun. Maybe, just maybe, it didn't have to be this way.

Nate turned around and began to walk away. Suddenly, his hand shook violently. Not again. Something overtook him. Something irrational. Something foolish. Something despicable. He couldn't do it. He couldn't walk away. That twisted and pathetic part of him fought back with all its might. The visceral pain that had burrowed deep inside his soul yearned for relief with an intensity so great that it overtook all else. As much as he tried to walk away, it wasn't a choice for him. He fought tooth and nail, he really did. He tried his damnest in that moment. Yet he lost. That moment is all that mattered. And there was no coming back.

His eyes filled with an inexplicable wrath saw William turn his back from his wife for a mere moment, yet that was enough. He grabbed William's wife and pointed the gun to her head. William, in complete shock, looked around in panic. Words eluded him.

“How the hell- ” he said.

“Tell me what happened that day,” Nathaniel said incoherently. “Or she suffers the same fate as Alyssa.”

“You don’t have to do this,” William panicked even more than before.

“Tell me!” Nathaniel said.

“I told you before, it was an accident.” William said, his heart beating faster and faster. “Why do you think there’s something more than that?”

“I don’t believe you,” Nathaniel said, unrelenting.

“I’m sorry,” William said. “I know she meant a lot to you. I really do.”

William noticed a gun placed on a countertop close by. He slowly inched towards it.

“Meant a lot to me?” Nathaniel said, angrily. “Meant a lot doesn’t even begin to cover it!”

Nathaniel said, tears seeping into his anger. “She was the only thing worth living for.”

“I want to make things right, I always have,” William said. “Just leave Alice be. She’s not a part of this.”

“I can’t,” Nathaniel said.

“I’ve told you everything you wanted,” William said, almost having reached the gun.

“It’s not enough.” Nathaniel said, his tears intensifying. “It’s just not. I don’t want to live feeling like this.”

“You don’t have to do this,” William said.

“I do,” Nathaniel said.

“You don’t! There is so much you don’t know. Do you know how painful it is to have that guilt eat at you day after day?”

“Painful for you?” Nathaniel retorted in disbelief.

“It was a nightmare that I couldn’t escape,” William said. “I killed someone. I made a bad decision, and I destroyed the lives of so many people with that single decision. And you know the worst

part? I still can't escape it. I think about her every day. I didn't mean to do what I did. I just made a mistake, and I am so utterly sorry. Everything was too much for me too. I was just a teenager, Nate."

Nathaniel didn't say anything.

"You know why I drank so much that day?" William said. "I had lost my mom a few days before. I thought I'd go out, that it'd make me feel slightly better, but it was hard. And I just needed to drink to survive that night myself. And that isn't me making an excuse, I just want you to know I'm not a monster. If I had a chance to put myself in Alyssa's place, I would."

Nathaniel took a deep breath, trying to suck all the tears back into aching eyes. And William knew that Nathaniel would not show mercy. He wanted more. It was never about the reason behind what William did, was it? It was just an accident. He needed more. I needed more. And there was no coming back. Maybe William was not the monster, I was.

Just then, William grabbed the gun with haste and shot Nathaniel in his stomach. Nathaniel started to fall to the ground, but just before he did, he shot Alice in the chest. William rushed towards her, trying to save her.

"Stay with me, baby girl," William said. "Stay with me."

Yet, blood rushed from Alice's wound, and her breaths grew few and far in between. William's breaths quickened, his tormented heart noticeably beating quicker to fight for its survival. *Thump. Thump. Thump.* He carried her in his hands and rushed her out of the house. But they were in the middle of nowhere. *Thump. Thump. Thump. Thump. Thump. Thump.* She died in his hands, but he didn't lose hope. He kept walking, further and further away, until he was out of sight. *Thump.*

"Nathaniel killed her," I scream. "*That fucking murderer.*"

*I killed her.*

All the while, Nathaniel laid on the floor. He just kept staring at the ceiling, as the blood slowly and painfully drained out of him. He dragged himself out of the house, to the field outside, where he fell still. He deserved what was coming to him. *That murderer.* I break down, falling to the ground. What monster would do something like that and not feel anything?

The white room was empty, hopefully for the final time.

## **The Reckoning**

Guilt overwhelmed me, stealing the peace I had always wished for. It was far too much to bear. I lay on the ground, closing my eyes and rocking back and forth.

“It’ll be over soon,” I told myself. What had I done? What was I thinking?

Then, my dark surroundings became grey, and the white room was no longer the only thing I could see. I felt a tap on my shoulder and looked around. It was a woman in her twenties, with ashen hair and blue eyes. She seemed awfully familiar. It was her. She came close to me, albeit hesitatingly, and spoke to me.

“I thought we’d be together forever and always” Alyssa said.

“We will, my love,” I said.

“No, we won’t,” Alyssa said.

“But I’m dying... I’m almost with you.” I said.

“I’m not going to be there.” Alyssa said.

“Why not, my love?” I said.

“Because you killed her. ” Alyssa said. “You failed your reckoning.”

“My reckoning?” I said.

“Yes, that’s how it goes.” Alyssa said. “We see our lives unfold in front of our eyes and only if we’re deserving do we become free of all our suffering and start afresh.”

“Deserving?” I said.

“And we ourselves, no god nor higher being, decide that. We’re judge, jury, and executioner. And deep down, you know what you deserve,” Alyssa said.

I looked down in shame. She was right, I knew what I deserved.

“You know what happened when I died?” Alyssa said.

“You passed the reckoning, didn’t you my love?” I said. “You were always the most amazing person I knew.”

“I did,” Alyssa said, a hint of a smile forming on her face. “After the reckoning ended, my breathing slowed and became softer as I could finally see again. I could see for the first time. The colors of the cosmos burned brighter than before. The stars and constellations came back once again: beyond number, beyond forgery or imitation, beyond words to do it justice.”

“That sounds beautiful,” I said.

“It was,” Alyssa said. “The atoms of my body started to disintegrate. Some of them jumped onto the street rubble underneath me. A few flew to the oak tree that stood by the bridge to my right, and the gushing river that flowed next to it. And some rose far, far high into the night sky. Even as my breaths grew fainter, I traced the specks that kept rising. I wondered where they were heading, for they never slowed, nor tired, they kept flying upwards.”

I stared at her in awe, she deserved such beauty and so much more.

“Suddenly, my eyes fixated on a solitary light up in the sky that was glowing ever brighter,” she continued. “I didn’t think it possible for something to stand out in the endlessly luminescent jade, yet it did. Its intensity waxed, with no sign of ever waning, as if its destiny was to light up the entire universe. And that is when I saw them again, Altair and Vega. Their perennial longing would finally be fulfilled. They touched softly, gently, and became one. And the little specks of me merged into that blinding ball of light.”

“I saw them too, but they never met,” I said.

“I know,” she said. “I wish you got to see that too.”

Alyssa’s demeanor changed quickly to one of disappointment.

“Why did you have to do that?” she said.

“I’m sorry, my love...I thought I was doing this for you – for what’s right,” I said.

“That’s never what I wanted,” Alyssa said.

“I know,” I said. “I was wrong.”

I had never seen Alyssa so heartbroken; I didn’t know what I could say or do to make things right. I guess I couldn’t do anything at that point.

“What’s going to happen to me now?” I said.

“We get the mercy that we give,” Alyssa said.

She took a deep breath and closed her eyes.

“I must get going now,” Alyssa said.

“Stay,” I said.

“I can’t.” Alyssa said.

“But I love you-” I said

Alyssa paused momentarily, as if she was mustering the courage to say something.

“I *loved* you,” Alyssa said.

My heart broke into a thousand pieces with those three words.

“I love Nate...but I think he died with me in that accident, ” Alyssa said hesitatingly. I was a stranger to her now.

She walked away.

“Alyssa, my love, come back!” I pleaded.

She kept walking.

“Alyssa? Please,” I cried.

She didn’t look back.

“Alyssa,” I said.

She was gone.



Suddenly, sixteen-year-old Nate and Alyssa appeared in the white room once again. They were lying on the ground, just like before.

“Don’t you think the sky looks beautiful?” young Alyssa said.

It was happening all over again, and I didn’t think I’d be able to escape. And so, there I laid, and there I will lay, stuck in an eternal hell of my own making, forever and always. Yet, I smiled just a little. At least Alyssa finally got to see the sky in all its true, unmitigated beauty. Maybe, just maybe, that’s enough for me.