

CHAPTER 2

Hundreds of feet above the ground, and an inability to fly. It felt like flying, though. There wasn't much else to call it.

Maybe "falling" would be more suitable. Yes, yes. She was falling.

Which way was down? It certainly couldn't have been below her, as she wasn't falling in that direction. She wasn't falling up, either. Somehow the word "direction" did not seem to apply here at all. Could "out" be considered a direction? Or is it just a destination?

In this "world" - this "tunnel," rather - perhaps there existed no concept of position, or direction, or destination, or being. And perhaps it didn't matter.

She was falling, though. That's what she felt, and that's what she assumed. From one end - the day before - descending into the other end, the day after; the future. Between them, a tunnel; one of many. Outside of them, the rules were clear-cut. Inside of them, even a genius could not begin to predict the consequences of his own thoughts.

She continued to fall. The end of the tunnel was near. And it grew nearer. The light, growing ever brighter, took over.

"Care," a woman spoke. "Wake up."

The door was open, and nobody was there. The woman seemed to have walked off. Of course, it could only have been one person.

A girl was laying in her bed, which lied next to a window and allowed her to stare into the sky. She rolled out of bed and walked out of her room. It still felt like she was dreaming.

"Mom?" she said, speaking into the darkness.

"Yes. Come down," her mother replied, again in a soft voice. She wasn't clearly visible, for it was far too dark.

The little girl walked slowly down the stairs, careful not to trip and fall. The last stair was always the difficult one, so early in the morning - was it indeed the last stair? Was it worth taking the risk of assuming that there was no next stair? What would happen if she were wrong?

Surely enough, she tripped. Her body fell down toward the floor. There, however, was no floor directly below her; only more stairs. She fell flat on her face. Her mother giggled.

"Get up, Care." she said.

Care pushed herself up and made it to her feet. She waited for her mother to continue, but a moment or two passed before this happened.

"So, Care," she began. "I just wanted to talk to you. You can get ready for school after we're done."

"Okay," Care responded, nervous and shaking. This kind of thing didn't normally happen.

Her mother reached into her own pocket and pulled something out. She held it up; it was a watch. It was a green-ish color, and looked complicated. Care tried to make sense of it, but couldn't.

"Put it on," her mother requested, her voice losing its peaceful tone. She handed the watch over to Care, and Care put it on her wrist. She still couldn't quite understand it.

"Why?" Care asked, nervously. Her mother paused for a moment to look around the room.

"Forget about it," she said in response, looking away at a small clock, hanging on the wall at the other side of the room. "Keep it on, though."

"Okay."

Care's mother stood up and paced around the room, thinking of what to say next, and how to say it. She stopped and looked back toward her daughter, still thinking.

"I saw you last night," she said. "By the house."

"When?" Care asked.

"Coming home from school. You were running."

Care didn't respond. There was a long period of looking back and forth, both of them unsure of what to say.

"Don't worry," her mother said, not looking directly at her. "You only caught his interest. I just wanted to warn you about him."

"Warn me?"

"Never let him near you again. Or near this house. I want you to hide next time you see him. Alright?"

The room was quiet for about ten seconds.

"Alright?" Care's mother repeated. "Alright, Care? Are you listening to my voice?"

"Yes. Yes, alright," Care agreed.

"Great," she said. She walked over to the wall and flipped the light switch next to her, bringing happiness back into the room. "Start getting ready."

"Yeah," Care ran back upstairs, still shivering as much as before.

Her mother sat down on an old, wooden chair, next to the window. As uncomfortable as the chair was, it brought back too many memories, and she feared that the act of not sitting on it would be disrespectful. Disrespectful to who? Maybe somebody that she once knew, out there in the past, thinking of whether he would exist in any form in the future - even if that form was an old wooden chair next to a window.

It was scary outside. The window was nothing but a mirror - one that somehow reflected fears, not light. There was nothing out there but pain and suffering, the kind that she didn't want her daughter to experience. But there was little choice for her. There was little choice for anybody.

Maybe she couldn't save her from every bad person in the world, but she could save her from one of them.

She continued to stare out the window.

Care came walking down the stairs, trying not to make a whole lot of noise, in fear of attracting her mother's attention. She sat down on the last stair, the light making it certain that it *was* indeed the last. Looking down on her watch, it appeared to be some time in between 12:00 AM and 12:00 PM, but again, she could not understand this watch, for it was far too complicated.

"He was filming me," Care said, breaking the long silence. Her mother turned her head and gave her a puzzled expression.

"What?" her mother asked.

"That guy," Care said, after first clearing her throat. "He had a camera, and was using it on me."

"Using it on you?"

"He was chasing me, with the camera in his hands. Like some sort of camera monster."

Her mother stood up.

"Care," she began, pausing to think about what had just been said to her. "Really, I mean it. Hide."

Two short chubby men sat down on the bench.

The first one had a newspaper in his hand. He pretended to read it and looked around at the people surrounding him, possibly waiting for somebody to arrive. The other man fell asleep the moment he made contact with the bench, perhaps never having noticed the man next to him.

Marvin walked silently to the bench. He tried not to look disappointed after finding it completely occupied with little fat men, one of which was making poor use of its services.

He stood behind the bench, focused on the school.

To him, the school was a greedy little bastard with no appreciation. There it was, filled to the very brim with beautiful children - the smallest, the cutest, the very best on Earth - and yet, what was it thankful for? Nothing, it seemed.

He grumbled there, standing by the bench, wishing for a different life. A life with a different body, and a bench to sit on. Maybe he could talk to that young girl, have a conversation with her, and come over to her house. Then sleep next to her, forever.

Maybe he could laugh with her, and all of her friends, in that pleasant little school. Maybe he could learn with them, play with them, live his childhood. Maybe he could stay like that for the rest of his life, and never be unhappy again.

Marvin tried finding a comfortable position next to the bench; even if he could not sit on it, he could pretend.

One of the fat men stood up, putting down his newspaper.

"Hey, you," he said, looking over the bench at Marvin.

"What?" Marvin replied, standing up. He wasn't very used to talking to people, and he always sounded like his throat was destroyed in a marvelous explosion years ago. All that was left was a cough that wouldn't go away and a voice that you could never fully understand (or comprehend).

The fat man glared at him.

"Get away from the bench," he said.

"Alright, alright," Marvin responded, and stepped away. The fat man sat down and returned to his newspaper, a smirk on his face.

Marvin peeked at his watch, hoping for good news. Only a minute until three. He stood uncomfortably for that slow minute.

The bell rang from inside of the school.

The buses had pulled up, but from this view they didn't bother him in the least. He noticed the entrance to the school, as the door opened and the kids ran out. Marvin felt like he was floating, like

there was nothing above or below him, only in front of him.
Fantastic.

Those little boys and girls were not recognizable. Marvin didn't bother to remember them; he could barely remember himself. However, there was one recent exception.

A small girl came walking by, alone again, among groups of children that continued to laugh obnoxiously. Not unlike any other day. She was different from them; she was special. There was something right about her, that perfect little child, that caught Marvin's attention for the second day in a row.

He couldn't bear to do it again. He could not come up to her for a hug, as he did the day before. That was humiliating. To go through that again would be far too much.

He had to do something with this energy.

The children were running off; almost gone. Almost invisible. Not much time left. All the happiness, every bit of it, was about to go away once again.

That one little girl was watching, though. She was interested. She continued to stand there, looking in his direction.

The fat man was watching. He knew.

This was Marvin's chance. He didn't want this to happen, but it was indeed happening. The energy was taking over. This had only happened once before, but this child, this horrible child - she clearly had something planned!

Marvin was shaking uncontrollably. He couldn't stop. He didn't want to stop.

"Uh, hey," the fat man said. He looked up at Marvin with the most terror-stricken, concerned face you could imagine. "What's wrong with you?"

"What's wrong with me?" Marvin replied, angrily. "What's wrong with *me*! Do you really want to know that? Was that a serious question?"

The fat man stood up.

"I don't think it's safe for you to be around here. Why don't you go home?"

"Home?" Marvin asked. "I came here for this bench, and didn't get it; then I went to relax next to the bench - didn't get that, either; and now you're denying me the right to *stand outside*?"

"Please, it would be better ifâ€¦!"

"You're all the same. Why can't you be more like *them*?" Marvin said, pointing toward the children behind him, all watching intently.

He gained confidence after looking at them.

"But," Marvin continued. "I'm going to be the better person here. I'm going to leave, right now."

"Oh," the fat man said. He almost sounded disappointed. "Thank you."

He attempted to shake Marvin's hand, but Marvin ignored it.

Marvin walked off, waving to the kids while doing so. They waved back and cheered for him. That one girl was still silent, though, just as she had always been. The fat man laughed awkwardly, sitting back down in his seat and picking up his newspaper. He continued to pretend that he was reading something interesting.

Marvin felt better. One step closer to earning the respect of kids.

However, something bothered him. He couldn't get that one girl to cheer for him, or even wave to him; the only one who was actually important didn't seem to care. And yet she did care - why else would she have stood there, staring at him?

This was too much to think about. There was one big choice here: wonder for the rest of his life what could have happened, or follow that girl home tonight?

"Pft." Marvin said to himself. How silly an idea. Why in the hell would he do that?

Looking behind him, he could see her, in all of her beauty. There she was, walking home. She was looking around, seemingly in fear, as if some horrible monster was going to come up out of the depths of nowhere and attack her. What kind of *monster* would be around here?

Without thinking, he began walking toward her, trying not to be noticed.

Every light in the house was off. The television was off, the radio was off, the plug had been pulled on everything. The darkness filled the room, creating a depressing atmosphere to add to a house previously thought depressing enough. All of the walls, floors and ceilings were purposely painted black years ago, the windows were purposely broken, the entire house looked like it could have fallen apart at any moment - on purpose, of course.

The windows were wide open - so were the doors. The cold settled into each and every room, adding to the depressing mood, but also forming a chilling one to add to that.

Stepping into this house would have made you cry.

Care's mother did this to prove a point. She did it to gain attention. To feel powerful. To make any one else feel as if they were stepping into a horror movie. A horror movie in which she was the evil one - the murderer, the one true horrible person, the woman to be feared. Nobody dared start an argument in this house, or they would soon feel her wrath.

And it wasn't just an act.

She moved slowly toward the living room window and checked outside, for the eleventh time in the last ten minutes. Nothing.

Looked around the backyard - nothing. She wasn't hiding from her, then.

She looked over at the clock. Three eleven. Much too late.

Finally, she sat down on her old wooden chair and watched the front yard.

Three twelve. Great.

At least the house was prepared for her. Care would know, right away, that there were going to be problems. Out there, in the cold, coming inside to even more of it. And it was darker in the house than it was outside - she would notice that.

Her mother continued to sit, worried sick. Waiting.

A shadow came into view. It was Care - calm as ever, ignorant as ever - a fool to be here so late. Three thirteen. Perfect.

Care could see her mother through the window, standing up from her chair, glaring at her with that familiar face. The lights were off, the door was open, and from out there, the house looked trashed. Not again.

Care walked inside nervously, and reached for the door knob.

"Don't you dare close the door." her mother said intimidatingly. Care walked away from the door and leaned against the wall, looking down at the floor.

She waited for her mother to continue.

"Do you have something to say, Care?" she asked.

Care looked up at her.

"W-what did I do, Mom?" she said, quietly and anxiously.

"You tell me what you did." Mom responded, then pointed at Care's arm. "Look at your watch."

Care looked down at the watch. All she saw were a bunch of little lines - ones that meant nothing to her. It was like a clock, but the numbers were incomprehensible. She looked up.

"Iâ€¦ I can't read it." she said.

"What do you mean you can't read it?"

"I can't. It's a stupid watch."

"A stupid watch, huh? That's all it is?" she began. "Okay, yeah. Forget it."

She started walking around the room, pacing back and forth, looking around.

"Look at the clock on the wall. You do understand this one, don't you?" she asked.

"Yes."

"What time is it?"

"Like, three fifteen."

"Three fourteen." her mother said. "Now, tell me, when do you leave your school? When does the day end for you?"

Care sighed, realizing what this was about. She looked back down at the floor.

"Three." she said, with a guilty voice.

"Three." her mother responded. "It took you close to fifteen minutes to walk home. It should have taken five less than that, at the very most."

"I stayed for a little. Just a little. Something happened."

"Oh, really? Yeah?" her mother said. "I bet something 'happened' between you and this 'camera monster', am I right?"

"No, I didn't see him."

"Yeah, sure! Didn't see him!" she yelled. "I'm sure that's what happened. 'Didn't see him.' Who did you see, then? His evil twin?"

Care looked angry and puzzled.

"Oh, yeah," Mom continued. "I forgot. *He's* the evil twin."

"I didn't see him!"

"Go to your room, Care. I don't care about your filthy lies."

Care grumbled, then ran up the stairs, stomping her feet hard on the way up to show her anger.

Mom walked back to her chair and sat down, not bothering to close the doors and the windows. She continued to look outside.

"*Camera monster.*" she whispered to herself, in sort of a mocking manner. "What a silly, silly kid."