

All the Bright Places
Jennifer Niven

Ten thirty p.m. My bedroom. I am wearing my Freud slippers, the fuzzy ones made to look like his face, and Target pajamas, the ones with the purple monkeys. This is the clothing equivalent of my happy place. I cross off this day with a black “X” on the calendar that covers my closet door, and then I curl up on my bed, propped against my pillows, books spread across the comforter. Since I stopped writing, I read more than ever. *Other people’s words, not my own--my words are gone*. Right now, I’m into the Bronte sisters.

I love the world that is my room. It’s nicer in here than out there, because in here I’m whatever I want to be. I am a brilliant writer. I can write fifty pages a day and I never run out of words. I am an accepted future student of the NYU creative writing program. I am the creator of a popular Web magazine--not the one I did with Eleanor, but a new one. I am fearless. I am free. I am safe.

I can’t decide which of the Bronte sisters I like best. Not Charlotte, because she looks like my fifth-grade teacher. Emily is fierce and reckless, but Anne is the one who gets ignored. I root for Anne. I read, and then I lie for a long time on top of my comforter and stare at the ceiling. I have this feeling, ever since April, like I’m waiting for something. But I have no idea what.

At some point, I get up. A little over two hours ago, at 7:58 p.m., Theodore Finch posted a video on his Facebook wall. It’s him with a guitar, sitting in what I guess is his room. His voice is good but raw, like he’s smoked too many cigarettes. He’s bent over the guitar, black hair falling into his eyes. He looks blurry, like he filmed this with his phone. The words of the song are about a guy who jumps off his school roof.

When he’s done, he says into the camera, “Violet Markey, if you’re watching this, you must still be alive. Please confirm.”

I click the video off like he can see me. I want yesterday and Theodore Finch and the bell tower to go away. As far as I’m concerned, the whole thing was a bad dream. The worst dream. The worst nightmare EVER.