

"Earthquake!" The moment the ground started to shiver and buck, she called out a warning at the top of her voice to all the guests and co-workers who might hear. "Get to open ground!" It wasn't her first earthquake, but she was in a particularly bad spot up on a ridge planting spring bulbs for the botanical garden she worked at. She dropped down and tried to shimmy from rock to rock down to flat ground on her butt, a task made harder by adrenaline-shaky muscles and the continued quake. She was almost to a larger rock that would lead to the trail she had used to get up on the ridge when the tray full of seedlings and small terracotta pots that she'd been using smashed into her back, launching her off into open air. She screamed, her vision filled with the alyssums she'd been planting, their yellow petals smearing out into darkness as her head hit the ground.

What followed, she could not understand, for she lacked the capacity to think clearly. It was as if she was being pulled from dreams to reality in a constant game of tug-of-war. Only glimpses of what was around her could be registered.

She couldn't understand what followed, couldn't think clearly, couldn't even tell if she was dreaming or what she saw was real. There were only brief glimpses of her surroundings to hang on to. It was as if she was being pulled from dreams to reality in a constant game of tug-of-war.

She was able to see, but it wasn't what she knew, what she was used to. Something was off, wrong. Instead of viewing the world through her eyes, she did so from outside her body. It was surreal, but at the same time, it was the truth, and undeniable. She had to add everything up slowly and steadily using images instead of words as her awareness was reduced to a fraction of what it was before.

She was able to see, but it wasn't what she knew, what she was used to. Something was off, wrong, terribly horribly wrong. The glimpses were there, but they were impossible, from beside and above her body. It was surreal, but at the same time, it was the truth, and undeniable. She had to add everything up slowly and steadily using images instead of words as her awareness was reduced to a fraction of what it was before.

Only rarely did she possess enough lucidity to understand things, lasting only seconds before it escaped her grasp again.

She saw herself lying in a hospital bed, many tubes and wires connected to her. Some were connected to a vitals monitor at the side, which, among other things, showed her heart still beating. Her body, however, was left ever still, unmoving, in a vegetative state.

During one of the brief moments where she was able to think at least somewhat clearly, she realized she had suffered a terrible injury. As she viewed her own body from a distance, she couldn't help but allow wonder to enter her thoughts. Wonder about how she was able to see, to think without form, from outside the confines of her head.

She was able to ask herself that question, and more as she looked around the hospital room. One of the things she perceived was that one side of the room consisted of nothing but glass. It allowed her to peer outside and see the crown of a red maple.

Red? Why was it red? Wasn't it summer?

She focused on the tree, the color, the question, but they were slippery and hard to focus on. Soon they were gone, impressions of sounds and thoughts sliding into nothingness. The next clear impression was of bare branches and snow, and a haze of confusion about why and where and what was happening

Glances like these were all she experienced, the tree at its center. One moment it had green leaves, the next moment red, only to have lost them the next time she laid eyes upon it.

She knew time passed, but she had no way to understand how much, how fast, how

One time, she was blessed to have a prolonged period of higher awareness, or perhaps it was a curse. She watched as her parents sat at the side of her bed, her mother crying her eyes out, her father trying to console her. She saw just how little he could do and her heart broke at the sight, the gravity of her corporeal situation sinking in.

In one of those lucid moments she watched as her parents sat at the side of her bed, her mother crying her eyes out, her father trying to console her. She saw just how helpless they felt and her heart broke at the sight as the gravity of her situation sank in.

She knew time passed, but she had no way to know how much because of how long she spent unaware.

What if she never woke up again?

It was a terrible realization to have during a rare moment when she was aware of her parents visiting. She watched as her parents sat at the side of her bed, her mother

crying her eyes out, her father trying to console her. She saw just how helpless they felt and her heart broke at the sight as the gravity of her situation sank in.

The question seeped into her mind, wreaking havoc on her sanity. She tried to fight against whatever was there that held her body unconscious. She tried to will herself to wake up, to jump into her parents' waiting arms, just to tell them how much she loved them, how much they meant to her.

The moment was fleeting, as the world blended together again, taking her awareness, thoughts, and regrets with it. The only thing that she could see and find any sort of comfort in, was the tree just outside her window.

The tree outside went through another seasonal cycle, or perhaps it was more? She couldn't be sure. Everything was slippery and nothing remained. Glimpses of green, red, and white passed by until at one point, she was pulled above water and could finally breathe, rescued from the drowning that was not being able to comprehend. A stream, like water, flowed from her body into her incorporeal being. It expanded her awareness and allowed her to see, to think clearly once more.

She registered a night sky outside, laden with stars that shone through the empty branches of the maple outside, just before an odd ~~sense of calmness washed over her.~~

wave of calm washed over her. She appreciated it, but she didn't want to be calm. She wanted to be mad! Her body was wasted and thin and she couldn't even move. So much life left to live, but she was stuck in a bed, and now the feeling of calm just seemed like helplessness."

As she let the wave envelop her in much-needed serenity, one additional star appeared in her vision, but it wasn't where stars should be. Instead, it appeared in her body on the bed, right where her heart was.

She was only allowed a brief moment of confusion before her attention was drawn to the monitor that displayed an incessantly spiking graph. At the same time, a bubble of glass started forming around her, enveloping her, trapping her, but she ignored it because she was too busy panicking as she knew what the screen showed.

Oh no. No, no, no, no. I'm not dying, am I?

The ball around her had solidified, but didn't impair her vision, nor did it lessen her anger. She

tried to smash against the walls, but found that she had no fists to smash with. She wanted to scream, to do anything she could to stop what was going on, but none of it had any effect.

I don't want to go yet.

She watched in agony as the spikes continued for a couple of seconds, before they became less and less divergent, ultimately settling into a flat line, a flatline...

No...

Anger and disbelief flooded through her as the world changed. Everything around her became darker and darker until nothing but blackness remained. There were still the stars in the night sky, and an additional one in her body, but that one was being dimmed, just like the world around here, until it showed one last flicker before being extinguished.

She was still struggling with the question that was repeated in her mind, over and over again.

Did I just... die?

When the crystal ball that encapsulated her began to move, she attempted to fight back, unwilling to let go of her life. She wanted, desperately, for that one spark to reignite. At twenty-five, she was far too young to leave this world.

But her grappling yielded no fruit. Her prison flew to the outside world, going through the glass effortlessly, not caring about the laws of physics, taking her with it as it flew past the maple, its empty branches mirroring the emptiness and sorrow in her mind. It then ascended, its path set, its course unaltering.

Seeing as there was nothing she could do to change the course of history, she finally allowed the tranquility from before to take root.

In the ever-surrounding darkness, a glimmer of hope started growing within her soul. She was still there, she'd not faded into nothingness, but it was quickly tempered when her sphere stopped moving and just remained there, its journey seemingly ended prematurely.

She waited for a good while, and didn't want to think about it, but what if this was it? Surely, things wouldn't just end here, in outer space, with nothing but the stars to keep her company.

The emptiness of space left her in complete loneliness, reflecting on her life, and in particular, her last moments.

Perhaps things were better this way. She knew she'd been in that hospital bed for years, and despite only remembering seeing her parents once, perhaps a blessing, she couldn't fathom just how much they must have suffered. At least her death would give them closure, allow them to

move on.

But to be torn from them in the blink of an eye, to then see their anguish, to be unable to hug them, wish them well, to say goodbye, even if it was for the final time, it broke her.

She started crying. She had no idea how, as she had no body, nor were there tears, but she cried. A certain feeling of discomfort entered her being, but she pushed it aside, wanting nothing more but to roll up in a blanket and shed tears until there were none left.

The discomfort grew as time passed, and eventually forced her to stop her sobs as it started to *hurt*. She missed her parents gravely and wished she could continue, but that was behind her now. Just like her parents should move on, perhaps so should she. She just didn't know how.

Even if she did, there wasn't much she could do. She appeared to be stuck in space, in her crystal ball, cold, scared, and... thirsty?

She'd become increasingly uncomfortable when crying, and now that she'd stopped, it was replaced with thirst. For some reason, she desired water as she was completely parched. It left her confused how that could be the case when she didn't even possess a body, or even a mouth to drink with. It made her regret crying, spilling unnecessary, non-existent water.

Her attention was drawn to the bottom of her jail where the invisible, ... teardrops should have fallen, but there was nothing to be found.

Then, at the same spot, a crack appeared.