

## When We Fell

“Go along and play now, but be careful!”

I had barely heard my mother's parting admonition as I barreled off towards the slide, kicking up clouds of dust as I went. It was a Friday, and on Fridays, my mother always took me to F&M park after school. Usually, I played on the large wooden train, marauding through it like a desperado and stealing money from the poor damsels. But today was different. Today, I had a mountain to climb - an everest expedition to embark on. Today, I would conquer the slide.

The slide at F&M Park was the biggest one I had ever seen. Looking back on it now, I'm not quite sure what the builders were thinking when they installed it. It's made completely of metal, and it rises up six or seven feet off the ground. That may not seem high, but when you add young, rambunctious children to the recipe, disaster is a near certainty.

And that's what happened to me, but not before I looked it in the eye in straight defiance.

As I tore toward the slide, I only had one goal in mind: climb it. I had seen older kids doing it the week before, clambering the wrong way up the slide portion of the slide (with some difficulty as their worn shoes had slipped on its shiny surface). I was determined that I was going to climb it too and show the playground kids that I was the king of this hill.

My approach was perfect, and as I leapt onto the slide, my light up shoes found purchase. I pumped my legs like pistons in an performance engine, powering myself up in record speed. I could hear shouting behind me. Knowing that I had fans cheering me on helped me find another gear entirely, and I pumped my legs even harder. I glanced ahead for a brief moment and could see the peak of the slide looming just beyond my reach. I'd be there in a moment, as long as I could stay focused.

But just then, I stumbled, and my momentum carried me over to slide's right edge. I only had a moment to panic before my face struck one of the metal support bars. I heard a sharp click. Then, my body crumpled against the earth like a bag of stones as the air was forced from my lungs.

Pandemonium ensued.

I lifted my head in time to see my mother running for me, her face contorted in anguish. Her screams pierced the Friday afternoon air in a way that made the whole world around her stop and stare. She grabbed me, saying “Ian! Ian! Ian!” over and over like a CD that won't stop skipping. She held my face in her hands and buried hers in my shoulder as her body wracked with sobs. I coughed as her hair caught in my mouth and mixed with my blood. She grabbed something from the ground, picked me up, and began to run across the park.

A man stopped her. “I saw what happened! My car is just there.” He pointed to a green Ford nearby. “Let me take you to the hospital.” My mother’s only answer was a change of course. She ran toward the Ford, and within a few moments, we were moving, the man driving us, my mother rocking and clutching me in the back seat.

Hours later, I awoke in a hospital bed to a doctor shaking my foot. “Ian,” he said. “We’re going to bring your mother back now.” I nodded groggily as he left the sparse, white room. He was back moments later with my mother in tow. “We were able to put his tooth back in just fine. He’ll need to eat soft foods for a few days, and you can give him Tylenol for pain.”

My mother nodded. “Thank you, doctor.” She then swept past him and wrapped me up in her embrace. I tried to push her away, saying, “Mommy, don’t. I’m all bloody, and your shirt’s going to get bloody, too.” She pulled away, and sure enough, her shirt was stained bright red.

“I don’t care about my shirt, buddy. I’m just glad you’re okay.” She began to sob.

It was the first time I had ever seen my mother cry. Here was the woman who had raised me, had taken me to parks, rented me movies, bought me ice cream, cooked me my favorite meals, and washed my favorite shirt at midnight just so I could wear it again the next day. Here was the woman who cared for me more than anyone I had ever known. And she was hurt. Her tears were welling up from the deepest part of who she was. She needed me to be there for her now, just as she had been there for me so many times before.

“It’s okay, Mommy. Don’t cry. I’m okay now.” I latched onto her neck and hugged her as tight as I could. Through her tears, I could feel her smile briefly. “Thanks, buddy” she hugged me tightly back.

As we walked out of the hospital into the evening purple, covered in tear stains and my blood, we held each other's hands. In that moment, an understanding flickered in my young mind. I had seen my mother at her most vulnerable, a sight I had not yet seen before. She had needed the help, support, and love that she so willingly gave me every moment of every day. She wasn’t impervious to hardship. None of us are. The one *true* absolute is that, no matter how strong we are, or we think we are, it is always welcome to have someone there to lift us when we fall. She had lifted me that day when I had fallen. And in doing, she taught me how to do the same for others.

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#### Highlight

- Narrative lead in yellow
- Thoughts and feelings in green
- Make a Movie in pink

#### Underline

- Dialogue

#### Put a Box Around

- The “So What?”