

Life from Light

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We float. I am trapped here inside of her, but that's okay. I like it here, and she does too. It's nice, dark, and warm. We grow bigger and stronger every day. Suddenly, a small speck of light pierces our pitch black reality. The invasive light grows bigger and bigger, until the darkness vanishes and florescent white light floods the new world around us. As the brightness washes out over our new world, I take my first flight. I stretch out of her, out of the embrace of the woman holding her and onto the pure white bed where I finally land. It is not like where I came from, but it is warm and bright. The room is very crowded. Everyone is crying, but no one is sad. She is passed along from person to person with me right by her side. Here, in the arms of those who love us, we have a reason to be, we have a purpose. She exists. I exist.

We run. As the two o'clock sun hangs in the west, we play tag at recess with friends. While she runs through the trees, I burst in and out of existence, only given freedom through the cheery sunshine. We are so fast. Faster than any creature to roam the earth, even the cheetahs that we learned about today in Mr. Allison's class. Our feet barely scrape the worn down wood chips as we fly across the playground. She shrieks with joys as we run past the swings, then the slides, then th- SMACK. Our free-for-all comes to an abrupt halt as we run into Thomas. Oh no, it would be okay if it were anyone but him. His hulking figure towers over us. She mumbles a quick apology. He asks her who she thinks she is. Do her eyes work? She is just a dumb girl who needs glasses. I feel her shudder inside. She musters together every ounce of bravery she can. I know this is hard for her, and I want to help. I let the afternoon sun fill me, and I pour out onto

the playground. I grow tall, dark and menacing behind her small frame. I will be big and powerful, everything she can't be. As I swell up, I feel her confidence growing to match my size. Together, we stand proud. She tells him that he is being mean. She said she was sorry, and he shouldn't make fun of other people. We watch a look of shame come across his face as he stutters out an apology. She wins, I win.

We stare. In the cramped public school classroom, the hideous fluorescent lights turn off as the beat up overhead projector turns on. The only light in the classroom comes through the sunbeams streaming through the dirty windows. These dingy rays cast me out into fourth period calculus. Ugh, math. Who needs math? And how could math ever be more interesting or attractive than the boy sitting two rows ahead of us? He has dark, curly hair and he's slouched over his desk taking notes- notes that we should be taking as well. We've been trying to get his attention all year with no luck. When will he notice us? The way the light hits her, I fall to her left and mimic her mannerisms. Our feet are crossed, and our left hands rest under our chins as we both stare at him. As she leans forward, the light casts down on her so I grow long and slender. I do what she dares not to do. I reach out and touch him. He notices that something is blocking the light, and turns around. She and I quickly slouch back into our desks and pine for him from afar. Unfortunately, our daydreaming doesn't go unnoticed, and Mrs. Forney gives us a stern look. Quickly trying to make it look like we've actually been paying attention, we scramble for paper, and accidentally knock our pencil off our desks. The noise causes him to turn around. He smiles. She smiles. I smile

We cry. I mean really, how are we expected to do anything else? This is the day all girls dream about since childhood. Nerves flood our system, and we straighten out the non-existent wrinkles on our newly pressed dress. Dad grabs our hand and squeezes it, reminding us that we'll always be his little girl. Suddenly, the doors to the chapel open, and the warm glow of candlelight ushers me out into the aisle next to her. Marching down the aisle in perfect unison, we look around, and the love radiated from the people around us is almost enough to knock the two of us over. The cozy room is filled with smiling faces, but the most important one is at the front of the chapel. We never thought that his stupid grin would look any better than it did in math class, oh God we were wrong. She's walking way too slow. I let the candle light take over as we walk further down the petal-littered aisle and stretch out to reach the altar before her. Finally, she catches up, and we stand face to face with the person we love. Just like the candlelight drew me out to make two of us, on our right there are two of him. As they clasp hands, so do we. Quiet vows are then exchanged and promises are made. Finally, the priest declares us husband and wife, and both pairs gently lean in for the first kiss as a married couple. As we walk back down the aisle, music starts to play. It's almost too overwhelming, and the music fills everyone to the brim as we listen to a melodic expression of the very emotions that we all feel inside. Together, hand in hand, we burst out laughing, and the music takes control of her body. She dances. I dance.

We push. As the next wave of contractions hit, she screams obscenities at him. We never asked to get pregnant, it was that little son of a bitch who did it to us. And even if we did want to have kids- it hardly seems fair for one person to bear the burden of having a child grow in her

body while the other just watches. A new surge of pain quickly shoots our spines into the air. In the dimly lit hospital room, I fall slightly to the right of her, and our chests rise and fall in unison as she masters the pain that ebbs and flows through her bodies like the sea on the shore. Her body decides to create a masterful production of *Julius Caesar*, playing both Julius and Brutus. The body that is supposed to protect her was betraying her with every surge of pain that washed over her body. As the sharp, piercing pain in her back reaches a new high, both of them grab our hands. The one like her has her hand clutched in between both of his, while the one like me grabs mine just like he does. Hours pass. She wisely asks for more epidural. The nurse says she already has given the maximum dosage. She asks if the nurse accepts bribes. The nurse doesn't. Finally, a doctor comes in and says that it's time. He says to push, as if the hours leading up to now have been filled with light chatter and cocktails. One minute. Five minutes. Ten minutes. Finally, her screams are met with a much higher pitched shriek. As one baby is placed in her hands, another comes to life in my arms under the white hospital lights. A family of two becomes a family of three, and all are exhausted. She sleeps. I sleep.

We shop. We've been going to the same grocery store for the past twenty years. It's almost comforting; time wreaks havoc on the world outside, but in the produce section of this worn down store, the same dingy linoleum has covered the floor for decades. Peeling paint crawls down the walls, creating an intricate pattern that balances the sky blue paint and neutral sheetrock. In the only corner where time has left its mark, the sole thing that changes is the vegetation that spills over the crowded, refrigerated shelves. Fall reveals its presence through the deep red apples, golden squash, and plump pumpkins. The artificial light casts me out next to her; my figure is short like the days outside. Thanksgiving is coming up, and the kids are coming

home from college; apple pie is needed to celebrate. Only the best apples are selected for the honor of being baked in the best pie made all year. Eyes scan over the red delicious apples with intense purpose. Suddenly, a cough rises in her chest. As her hand raises to cover her mouth, mine does the same. Then pulling our hands back down, something is different. My hand comes down uniformly dark and shaded, just like it always does. Her pale white skin, however, has not gone unblemished. Crimson red splotches lay spattered across the worn lines of her hand. Suddenly, we drop. No reason, no explanation, just a thud as skin and bone meet hard linoleum. I sprawl across the floor like her. No one sees us. My hand is stretched out in a cry for help, hers lies limp in defeat. She whimpers. I whimper.

We wait. We've been here for at least ten minutes, lying stretched out on a sterile, white table. Voices float around in the air around us. Murmurs and whispers ride on the warm breeze emitted by the unit heater, which occasionally drowns out the doctor's chatter with a low, mechanical moan. Finally, the doctor approaches us. He's in scrubs and a surgical mask, giving him a foreign and alien appearance. He tells us to stay calm. The CT scan is about to start, and we just need to stay still, and it will be over quickly. The bed slowly moves into the machine with a loud whir. It seems to be moving at the pace of a funeral march. I settle down inside her. We're in this together. Suddenly, everything is black. Any noise from the chaotic world outside this metal death trap is quickly smothered. The eerie silence is pierced with a shrill beep. Then the brightness. The light whirls all around our head and chest, never stopping. The light is as indecisive as a leaf whirling around the harsh winter wind, never pausing for more than a second. I rebel against the pull of the pulsating bulb, but there is nothing I can do. I am pulled out and

whipped around the metal chamber against my will. I am slave to every whim of the light. It's starting to hurt. Make it stop, dear God, make it stop. She panics. I panic.

We blink. No, we must have misheard the doctor. This hospital room is full of love. The whispers of those we wish were here with us rise up from their cheesy hallmark cards and engulf us with well wishes. Those who are here wait outside in the lobby with boxes of chocolate and bouquets of flowers. It is a beautiful day outside, and the soft glow of the morning sun casts out over us, and I lie where I always do in rooms like this: on the same bed, slightly to the right of her slender frame. This room is cheery. Cancer can't exist somewhere so cheery- can it? She asks the doctor to repeat himself. He does. No. He must be wrong. Cancer? Other people get cancer. Cancer is for lifetime movies and sappy romance novels, not for real people. Wait, how long did he say we had? NO. That's not enough time! Less than a year? How is that fair? She reaches for the doctor's hand and I follow her lead. With that simple human contact, the suspension of belief is dropped. This is real. Death is real. Death is coming. The realization hits us like a truck. Shoulders immediately slouch. Dying. She will be dead before spring. I will be dead before spring. There will be no more Sundays in the park with family. No more lunches with dear friends. No more beach trips. No more books. No more laughter. No more light. She sighs. I sigh.

She shudders. I shudder. The sunlight streams through the window. I am at her side. It's almost time, but that's okay. She is hooked up to machines, that are supposed to save us, but all we want to do is go; she and I are both ready. The past few months have been hard, yet good. We filled them with Sunday picnics in the park. We filled them with lunches full of friends. We filled them with weekend beach trips. We filled them with good books. We filled them with

laughter. We filled them with light. The room is crowded, and we are surrounded by people who love us, and we can see our reason and purpose for existing. People come up to us one at a time to whisper goodbyes, or give warm hugs. Everyone is crying, but no one is sad. Finally, the light starts to leave. We smile. Suddenly, a small speck of light pierces our new pitch black reality. The light grows bigger and bigger, until the darkness vanishes and warm lights floods the world around us. As the brightness shines down upon us, I take my flight. It is not like where I came from, but it is warm, it is bright, and the light engulfs us in a warm embrace. She is free. I am free.