

Elodie peered at the waterfall, contemplatively watching as the water cascaded down. It spilled out many secrets – absorbing every thought; every whisper. She adored these spectacles; ones that carried more than just beauty, but a sense of mystification. The billowing water had a dazzling grace emanating off it, cleansing the souls who wandered too close.

She was one of those souls.

Elodie wove her fingers through the glistening water. She admired how this lake stays so strong; capturing the tears spilling off the edge of the cliff. Without this lake, the tears would go pouring off into the suburban world, engulfing each soul buried in it.

That world seems so far from here, yet ever so close.

Even with both feet into this forest, one can still be miles away. Miles and miles away.

The hands that should be tracing along the bark with the uttermost care, step forward with an axe and chop.

Chop, chop, chop. The causation for the trees to slam against the ground.

Possums bolting in every direction; birds searching for their nest.

Elodie winces at the thought. Cringing at the slightest chance that this beautiful living organism; blossoming with life and freedom, will suffer. Suffer at the hands of mankind. Suffer until all that is left is endless plains of nothingness. Until this forest is a barren wasteland, where rubbish skips along the ground, capturing the possums until they can't squirm away anymore, and trapping the birds until they can't sing anymore.

She sews her eyes shut; ejecting the thought from her mind. The waterfall drowns out her racing thoughts, overlapping the worries buried deep in her heart. She inhales; letting the dewy scent waft up her nose. It climbs into her thoughts, placing a seed in her mind. The seed emerges into a tree.

This tree is safe. Safe from the axes. Safe from the greed of mankind.

*Safe.*

She wishes she could save all the trees; longing to hide them from the malicious hands of humanity. She wishes she could change the trajectory of the earth; but she can't. After all, Elodie's only thirteen.

She's too young to be worrying about this. *Too young.* They say.

*Too young to express your ideas; your opinions. Too young to worry about your future. You're just a child; act like a child.*

And when she does, she's ridiculed.

*Too old.* They say.

*Too old to jump around in the lakes. Too old to be wandering around in the forest. You're thirteen, you're a big girl; act like one.*

Adults contradict themselves.

The thread bounding her eyes begins to unravel, letting the sun pour into her vision again. It's bright, so bright. She carefully watches through the narrow slits in her eyes as the sun peels the bark off the trees in the late afternoon light.

She's been trapped in the cage of her mind for so long that she's forgotten that her hand is still woven into the water. She pulls her hand out from the lake, where she is greeted by her reflection. It sways in the water, quietly waiting for any movement, any source of motion to copy; dependent on Elodie alone. That completely juxtaposes the entirety of her personality; solely independent. Elodie doesn't move, instead she scrutinises her own face; her complexion. She peers at the shade of her hair, mirroring the chestnut colour of the Earth. She watches her eyes; the gateway to her soul. They reflect the blue sky above. With them, she traces her face; the crevices of her nose, the brunette strokes above her eyelids, the roses that colour her cheeks, and her parted lips.

Words rarely escape her mouth; she can't trust them. They always betray her thoughts – saying too much, asking too much, *being* too much. It's safer to stay quiet. Safer to let the thoughts linger in her mind, no matter how hard they ache to escape.

She begins to walk; crumpling the dry leaves beneath her feet.

The wind has a melodic hum to it, harmonizing with the whistling trees. Nature is like a siren; it has an alluring beauty to it; a gravitational pull. It's hypnotizing. It's captivating. It's beautiful. The overwhelming sense of tranquillity threatens to drag Elodie into a sleep. It's as if anvils are on her eyelids, weighing them down.

By the time the tsunami of fatigue fully engulfs her, Elodie is already resting on the ground. She doesn't need a blanket, not in the middle of summer. The sun is a blanket, hugging her tight, wrapping her with warmth.

Dreams crawl into her mind.

These dreams are so special and delicate; they won't be remembered when she awakes. They'll be hidden in the crevices of her mind, veiling themselves as she attempts to recollect them. She never will. They will stay forever lost; never growing old, never growing tired.

Once and a while, a memory sneaks its way back in. They hide among the swirling spiral of dreams, waiting until the right moment to trickle back into the tight space of her mind. It's like water, dripping down into her brain, moving along the currents until it overflows.

Drip.

Drip.

*Drip. The water gushes down the winding path. Travelling among the current, moving with the shapes of the rocks. "What do you reckon, El?" Elodie's dad asks, hands on his hips, "You think you'd be able to cross this?" He is scanning the river, making sure his little five-year-old can cross it. "Yes! Yes! Yes!" Elodie exclaims, beaming with joy. Her smile is radiant; purified by the innocence of a child. She is overflowing with excitement, radiating with happiness. Elodie is iridescent, glowing with light; with sparkles of glitter hovering around her.*

*She hasn't crossed a rapid river before. "Eeek!" She squeals.*

*"Ready?"*

*She enthusiastically nods, unable to contain her excitement.*

*"You go first," her dad states, "and I'll be right behi—"*

*Elodie jumps onto the first rock, cutting her dad's sentence in half. Adrenaline is coursing through her veins as she leaps onto the next rock. She can hear her dad step onto the rock behind her. He is much taller than Elodie; able to skip past one rock with ease, but he slows, waiting for Elodie to land on the rock ahead of her. Her dad smiles as she builds up the courage to hop onto the next rock, being significantly further away than the others. "I did it!" She exclaims, before quickly leaping over to the following rock.*

*A peaceful smile rests on Elodie's face as she sleeps, experiencing one of her favourite memories she nearly lost. All unravelling in the security of her mind.*

*She can hear her dad chuckling behind her; happy that she's happy. A couple more rocks to go and she's back on the grass. Huffing out the exhaustion accumulated in the minutes of joy that just unfolded. She wipes her forehead with the back of her palm. "That was some..." she pants, "hard work."*

*"Hey," her dad grins, balling his hand up into a fist, gesturing for a fist bump, "now you've crossed a river!"*

*She giggles, pounding his fist.*

*"You're going to do great things, El."*

*That was the very catalyst which ignited her love for nature. Her love for the towering trees, her love for the rapid rivers, and her admiration for the weeping waterfalls.*

*Elodie's eyes fly open.*

Her eyes sweep around, collecting any information; the sun has nearly dipped below the horizon, sending streaks of gold, pink and orange onto the sky; the canvas. Stars are dotted across the sky, providing a little company for the moon. The lonely moon.

Elodie always had a soft spot for the moon, wondering how desolated it must feel, surrounded in darkness; condemned to live a life in the sun's shadow. The sun always soaks up the spotlight; mankind loves the sun, *needs* the sun. But when it's time for the moon to shine, everyone turns off their lights, pulls over the covers, and falls asleep. The moon performs without an audience.

The forest has a different beauty at nighttime. It has a sorrowful kind of magic.

Elodie turns around, less than several steps away from the lake. She watches the rays of the moon bounce off the waterfall and shimmer onto the lake. It glistens with melancholy. With dolefulness.

She rubs her eyes. Then yawns.

The imagery of stepping stones and gushing rivers and warm hands and pure hearts and fist bumps and laughter seep into her mind.

She blinks. Blinks again.

Unable to differentiate the wailing waterfall ahead of her from the sound of rapid rivers echoing in her head. She can feel the adrenaline rushing through her veins, just as she did eight years ago.

She is five again, jumping from one rock to another, engulfed with confidence.

An inexplicable sense of certitude blossoms in her heart. It illuminates her; strengthens her. She remembers the words of her dad: *"You're going to do great things, El."*

And she will, as fortitude is carved into her soul.

Ripping off the restraints bound by the words of everyone who said she was *"too young,"* or *"too old"*, Elodie smiles.

Maybe after all she can save the trees.