

*TW: suicide. this story is loosely inspired by one of my closest friend's brother. my friend's older brother died by suicide, and it hurt me so, so much to see him hurt. I did my absolute best to make him feel loved during that time and after. throughout much of our formative high school years, we spent a lot of time together. he pointed out my natural intuition of writing and he motivated me to start writing professionally, beginning with his brother's story. he was the first person to ever read this story, and encouraged me to share it with others as well (I published it for the first time in Refresh Magazine in november of 2019). I hope to provide a voice for his brother through my words. experiencing suicide first-hand is heartbreaking; it rips you apart into pieces; moreso, a part of you will always be broken. seeing someone whom you care for be absolutely shattered is devastating and I wouldn't wish it upon anyone. if you ever need anything, please, please, please talk to me. I love u all so, so much and I will be here to listen to every word you have to say. hope you enjoy the story. ∞

Walking Through Walls

k.r.

There was no glimmer of moonlight in the sky. For a time, he thought maybe if he let his eyes adjust, eventually some faint outline would be visible. He had long given up seeing in the darkness. His hands were cold, shaking, gripping the edge. He had explored every inch of the concrete with his fingertips, stalling until the dark blue sky turned into nightfall. He smelled in the air for a faint scent of hope; the season, the distant smell of smoke and candied oranges wafting from below.

Was there?

For a glimpse of a moment, he thought there was. But the air was stale, wet, cold. Lifeless. His forearms were stained with dried crimson. Still, his hands were cold. Freezing cold.

There was a sign. A sign for him to let go. He couldn't yet find it. And so he stood there, desperate to let go. He couldn't tell what possessed him at the moment.

october 5, 2019

fifteen seconds isn't enough. is it troubling? sure. i don't regret it. maybe later. i don't want to. why am I like this? i shouldn't be feeling this. i can't figure it out myself and i certainly can't tell blaze. i am devastatingly aware yet i can't snap out of it. every time i'm engulfed in the trance that consumes my every thought. i can't feel this. there is absolutely no reason for me to. why do i? i don't know, I JUST DON'T KNOW. i'm not what you're thinking. i am not. but what if i am? what happens if i lose my conscious thoughts for one second? but i can't. i'm selfish and i'm not doing anything about it. don't you see? I AM SELF AWARE. I AM WELL AWARE. and how am i doing? absolutely fine, thank you very much.

sam

What absurd, cautionless, lawless entity took control over his mind and pushed him to —
He couldn't say. He couldn't think about it either. The truth is, he wasn't thinking. He had given up on it long ago. He was numb to it. All of it.

“Sam?” Blaze. That unmistakable disembodied voice of Blaze.

Blaze knew. It sent him into a tailspin. Of guilt and confusion and rigorous overthinking. Was it his fault again?

Sam remained facing the city lights. The brief strobes of a light indicating the passing of a car reflected against the mirrored buildings and illuminated the upper floors of the towering skyscrapers on the hillsides. All of those tiny lives, the tiny memories. Happy lives. Sad lives. They were all intermixed, a dissonance of perfection amidst the chaos.

Distant echoes of footsteps followed the whispers to the outside, reaching Sam's ears upon delay.

“You promised.” Blaze whispered, quiet tears blanketing his callous cheeks. Sam didn't turn.

Blaze realized.

“Oh my—”

Sam was pale, deathly pale. His aura radiated iridescence that only fog against a silent lake could create.

Sam heard the faint cries of Blaze, but only just. He could not speak to alleviate the one-sided concern. He lay in Blaze's arms. Still. Motionless. Blaze turned his head so his left ear was facing Sam's chest, lowering his head as he approached him. He didn't move. Didn't even acknowledge him. The two boys laid there for minutes. Or was it hours? It felt the same nevertheless.

Sam's arm itched against the smooth fabric of his shirt. He looked at himself in the mirror. His tie was strangely out of place. Misplaced in the clothes of the person he was not. Strangely enough, he remembered everything from last night. The muffled voices in the back of his mind, a frantic Blaze, the stumbled steps back up the stairs. All of it.

Sam grabbed his tie tighter as he pulled it up, leaving the slightest mark on his neck. His hair was left untamed and his buttoned shirt wrinkled. The rest of the boys were missing from their dorm beds. Sam figured they had already woken for their classes, not wanting to disturb *brittle* Sam.

He shrugged at his reflection, not feeling an inkling of anticipation for school.

Blaze's considerate and placid behavior last night left Sam feeling slightly overwhelmed. Blaze had always been the logical one, but Sam hated to admit it. Blaze could have so easily abandoned his vow to stay away from him at that moment. Instead he had treated him like fragile glass. Already cracked, being wary enough to not crack it further.

He shook his head to banish the wistful thoughts and decided he had delayed heading down to the West Hall for his literature class long enough. He picked up his bag and walked down the stairs.

Autumn had crept up on the school grounds too quickly, its cold air brushing over the back of his neck. He let out a shaky breath, veiling his lips with a silky mist, and pulled the sleeves of his sweater over his fists to protect his fingers. He felt his jaws slacken.

Sam saw Mr. Henry glance up at him as he arrived in the doorway of the classroom. "Must be tiresome, having to keep up with the work your other teachers assign for you to be late every class." He smiled with apparent innocence. The other students laughed.

Sam slowly raised his eyes to regard the man with agitation. Who was he to call him out? Like he was doing him a favor. He didn't want to be here. He didn't need his perceptible sympathy.

As Sam entered the room, Marlo Blanche walked in right after him—always late, holding a bouquet of papers in hand as usual. *Oh.*

Sam saw Blaze in the corner of the room, diverting his eyes as he passed. He slid into the empty seat next to Luca and across from where Marlo sits.

He rubbed his chin and glanced at Luca, who seemed as if he was watching him. Not at him, particularly. It almost seemed as if it was *through* him. Regardless, he had that familiar impatient stare. Like he knew there was something wrong.

Blaze must have told him. Of course.

He saw that. He wanted to tell them both to mind their business, but he knew this offer wasn't optional. Mr. Henry was a conformist and Sam didn't want to go to the dean's office for the third time this month.

"Literary analysis is a critical part of this course. I expect you all to grasp this material by next Friday as the analysis essay will be due shortly after," Mr. Henry warned.

Marlo leaned over, his mouth inches from Luca's ear, still keeping his left eye towards the front of class. Sam was able to hear their whispers.

"Did you read it?"

"What?"

“Frankenstein. We were to read the first four chapters,” Marlo retorted, holding up his battered copy of the classic novel.

“Interesting.”

“The book?”

“Of course not.”

“Then what?”

“I didn’t read it.” Luca answered simply. Their seemingly uninterested banter was part of their daily routine.

Mr. Henry continued to drone off about the importance of analyzing novels and plays by great playwrights, but Sam paid little attention.

Class was dismissed after a particularly weak discussion. Luca had fallen asleep and Marlo nudged him slightly to arouse him from his much-needed slumber.

Sam stumbled out of the classroom, intending to spend the rest of his day in the dorms, skipping a few afternoon classes. He decided against it after realizing Luca must be headed inside (he didn’t have any more classes that day

The brisk manner in his walk was countered by the sluggish movement of the majority of students in the halls.

Blaze almost noticed the scraggly brown hair of Sam and examined him from a distance. He looked awful. Even worse than he did last night, if that was possible. One of his long hands fussed over his forearm—twitched in the smallest movements, almost too small to catch. It was the last movement he saw before his eyes disengaged from Sam’s white uniform shirt and he slipped around the edge of the doors, vanishing like a ghost playing hide-and-seek.

Sam arrived in Environmental Studies early this time. He tapped his fingers impatiently against the dark wood of the small desk, his legs folded up uncomfortably beneath it. His head snapped up as the door opened, and it completely knocked the air out of him when he realized that Blaze had this class with him as well. *Wonderful.*

Blaze’s chest was heavy, attempting to control his breathing and his face red-flushed. Between the heaves of his chest and his dilated eyes, he looked bewildered, but softened his gaze as soon as he noticed Sam. The soft wave of his hair waved at him, and he was on his feet in a heart’s thud, acting solely on instinct.

For a brief second, the pair locked eyes across the room, the confusion practically rippling between them, and Sam willed himself to remain stoic. From the anxious expression carved on Blaze’s face, he could tell he felt the same.

Mrs. Black started the lecture promptly. She droned out in her nasally voice, discussing the nature of mineralogy.

Sam jerked his head around to take a swig of the clock posted on the back wall. His eyes flitted downwards, and then met Blaze's like a car crash. A head-on collision. He greeted Blaze's warm eyes with his cold ones for the second time in the past half hour.

Those vacant, gray depths filled with something. Grew less empty. And he watched them squint—another small movement he almost doesn't catch. Then he reset his jaw, straightened his back slightly, leaning fully against the wall of the student desk chair.

Sam shook his head and turned back around so he was facing the front of the classroom. He saw that glimpse-of-a-moment look of surprise painted on Blaze's face. He was unsure to whom Blaze is paying attention to, but he had the slightest suspicion that it was him instead of Mrs. Black.

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A week disintegrated before his eyes. It was as though he watched it from behind a glass. From outside of it. That was how he felt. Like an outsider. Because they kept *laughing*.

Laughing and smiling and talking about nothing of consequence and passing notes like children and joking and teasing and staying up late and *laughing* with each other. Laughing like everything was fine.

And it was. Perfectly fine. For *them*.

Sam could barely stand to be in the same room as Blaze, Marlo and Luca. To be around all that light. Maybe it was jealousy. He admitted part of it definitely was. He wished he could feel what they do and not what *he* did all the time. He wished he could feel like them. To behave like them. To see the world like they do. But it was as if his vision was muddied; it was a bit browner for him. A bit darker.

He only went up to the dorms once he was certain they were asleep and woke up before they did.

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The halls were more peaceful in the early hour of dusk. It had a less foreboding edge than early morning night, but was equally empty. Equally calm. Even the birds were at rest, and the silence was a release. Outside, it was even better. Even quieter, and what few sounds broke through were welcome ones—water lapping, wind against blades of grass, and the occasional wolf's howl.

Sam took to his spot by the lake. He faltered a heavy sigh and lifted his weighted ankles a little too haughtily. And then he heard the sudden *crunch* of a leaf break louder than it should. His eyes

fluttered over the brushes as he snapped his neck around and gasped—panicked and stumbled back, fell as the sight of a figure a few meters away appeared, half submerged in shadow.

The figure stepped out into the dimly lit concrete path. Dark, wide eyes stared back at him, somehow surprised and disinterested at the same time.

Sam narrowed his eyes. Blaze again. Staring right at him. Like two deer staring at each other. All innocent-like.

Only they weren't innocent. Neither of them were. Why was it that whenever he wanted to be alone, lovely *Blaze* managed to know precisely where he was?

Blaze was sopping wet. Sensibly, it *was* raining, but Sam hadn't been paying attention.

Blaze knew he would be here. He wondered where Sam wandered off to in the mornings and decided to follow him one day. When Sam came to the lake, so did Blaze, but Sam hadn't been aware of it until now. He must have been careless, not being cautious of where he was stepping.

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“Sam?” It's sort of a question. Sort of a stunned statement of fact. And it's whispered like a curse.

“Blaze.” He crossed his arms over his chest, and his voice had a bite Blaze had been expecting. The last conversation the two of them shared was that night on the tower. “Found this as a convenient time to go for a nice morning stroll all on your own?”

Blaze thought about what he was seeing. Thought about the time of day. The way he looked. Ghastly pale.

Almost, only almost, like he had been that night on the tower. He didn't know what it was like to feel warm. Come to think of it, Sam had looked anything but warm since that night.

“What are you doing? I know you come down here every morning. I've seen you.”

“Been keeping an eye out for me, haven't you?”

Blaze shrugged.

“Well... what have you been doing here then?”

“What do you think?” Sam snaps. “It's none of your business anyway.”

Blaze brought his eyebrows down slightly, his memory cloudy as he struggled to recall what constant he had been seeing while at the lake tailing Sam. He scribbled in that blue notebook. Probably a diary of some sort. And then, the repetition. The splashing of the water.

“Are—are you trying to drown yourself?” The words are out before Blaze had even fully processed it. His right arm as shaky as he reached out, wavering between the awkward notion of gently laying it to Sam's shoulder and gravity's downward force.

His lips curled up on one side. He swept the wet hair out of his face.

“Every night since the jump,” he sneered.

Blaze faltered. Sucked in another deep breath, caught off guard. “You—I—*what?* You... you were?”

A sudden, unbidden image of Sam in crisis flooded through his mind. It was hard to picture at first, and then it all started to throw itself at him like a jigsaw puzzle, and he could see exactly what had led him to this place. He had people at this school. Friends, people who care about him, including Blaze and Marlo and Luca.

But Sam couldn't see that. He was blinded by hatred for the world and he blamed himself.

Sam. In crisis. With no one here to fix it for him.

Blaze was so caught up in it he almost missed Sam's response.

“Go back to our room, yeah Blaze?”

Blaze gaped at him. What in—What is he asking him to do? At a time like this?

“I'm—no, Sam. I can't just go... back.”

“Of course you can.”

“You were trying to *drown* yourself. I can't just—”

“Blaze—”

“—leave at a time like this. You need—you need—”

“*Don't,*” and his voice was so sharp it sliced through the air like a knife—silenced Blaze instantly, “say the word *help.*”

Sam was in full profile now, not looking at Blaze, but not quite looking away from him either.

“Fine,” Blaze said, deadpan, and he could barely see the outline of Sam anymore. He seemed the same. Still the same Sam he was before. Blaze didn't know why he so badly wanted Sam to change after that night. He never did.

That would be stupid wouldn't it? People rarely ever change.

Blaze turned around and walked to the Left Wing, to his dorms. He laughed quietly to himself. He didn't know exactly why. He shouldn't be laughing. He shouldn't even be thinking about it.

And then he stopped. Swore at himself for being so ignorant. They shared the same blood, the same brotherhood, the same childhood. They should have everything in common, but they had nothing in common.

He wondered daily what made him turn out differently. He knew Sam was hurting himself over something he cannot control, but it never stopped Blaze from wondering. Perhaps the reason was Sam *wanted* to be understood. But no one did. Blaze did as well. They all were so desperate to be understood that sometimes they forgot to understand.

He stood there, for what seemed like hours. He thought. About his past, Sam's past. It seemed like his life's occurrences came in waves. Supposedly and seemingly tough, but soft as water once touched.

Realization always kept him sane. He thought about whether the same applies to Sam. This time, he realized once more. The loneliness came back. It hit him harder than it ever did before. Because this time, he was truly alone. Again. Sam pushed him away and he had no one else.

A ruffle of leaves and footsteps approached Blaze. He recognized the slow pacing of the steps.

Then they stopped right away. Blaze already knew who was there. He recognized the slowed pacing of his footsteps outside, each step hitting the carpeted floors of grass with a soft *thud*, barely subtle enough to hear from where he was standing.

Sam's head was down. Was he— sad? No. That wasn't quite it. He was rather—*solemn*.

"Are you disappointed?" It was hardly a question. Partly because he had a vague sense of Blaze's response already.

Blaze was unresponsive.

"Blaze."

He took one last look at Sam before he took off on a run back down to the lake.

"Blaze, answer me, damn it!" The penetrating yell lingered in the air for a moment, then disappeared.

Sam followed after him, reaching the dock of the lake only moments after Blaze.

The pair carefully approached the surface of the water, the soles of their feet brushing the top.

Sam's face softened after seeing Blaze amidst his outburst. He glanced up carefully at Blaze's face, perfectly concealing years of torment and blame.

Blaze and Sam sat at the edge of the lake bank for hours, simply sitting with their thoughts. Sam must have fallen asleep, because he awoke after hearing a giant *splash* of water. Blaze was gone. He stood up instantly, and peered into the ripples with confusion and guilt.

Then he saw a glimpse of the blue fabric of the uniform sleeve, flailing among the waters. Sam dove into the water, desperate to help his brother. The current was getting stronger and stronger as the night was getting darker and darker. Sam felt a fragment of skin brush up against his arm, fighting for life. He had to do it. Sam pulled him up from the currents and set him down on the grass.

Blaze laid there, motionless. He was still conscious. He felt Sam's cold hands ice his feet as he removed his shoes. But he didn't acknowledge him. Not even an ounce.

As quick as it came, the wave made its departure, tucking a square of paper in Blaze's pockets.

October 26, 2019

i don't know why i did it. no, maybe i do. but that's worse. that's so much worse.

sam

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He fell asleep.

Blaze realized it in the middle of his dream, as he sat in the middle of a tornado of darkness, and the panic woke him up instantly.

So instantly, in fact, that he fell off his bed —laid sprawled, cold, still tired, on the hard stone of the floor for several seconds, utterly confused.

For just a moment, Blaze thought he felt his brother's arms wrapped around him, almost breaking his fall. He must have still been dreaming.

When he opened his eyes, his suspicions were confirmed and he found only a tangle of blankets and pillows in front of him.

The room was cold. Not the cozy cold. But the cold that pierces through skin and envelopes every particle of skin, caressing its spite deep within. He didn't want that needle-like cold. He wanted Sam's cold.

It all starts flooding back to him at an alarming rate.

"Blaze." A tender voice of Sam startles him as he—

It couldn't be.

"Blaze." The voice was repeated once more.

So he *wasn't* dreaming?

He opened his eyes. He saw Sam hovering over him, with concern scrawled over his face. Blaze blinked once. He reached out his hand to touch him. Then blinked once more.

He expected fierce gray eyes staring down at him, but instead he saw warm brown ones, filled with kindness. Luca's eyes. Behind Luca was another set of eyes, a deep green that belonged to Marlo. Sam was nowhere to be seen.

Blaze was surrounded by love. So much love. And kindness. None of which belong to Sam.

Blaze pulled himself up so he had his weight on his elbows, squinting his eyes as he looked out the window. The view wasn't the familiar one he saw every morning in his dorm.

"Where am I?" Blaze groggily murmured.

“The hospital wing.” Luca replied.

No, not after this morning.

Blaze didn’t look up, fumbling angrily with his nightmare of hair.

“Why did you do it?” Marlo looked up, silent tears forming in his eyes.

Blaze didn’t respond.

“Sam really did care about you. We all do,” Luca reassured.

“I know,” Blaze said finally.

Another minute of silence

“You have to—”

“I don’t *have* to do anything.”

“Just come talk with us. About Sam.” Luca shifted his feet. “About anything,” he corrected himself.

“It’s troubling, seeing you all... remorseful. I just wish for things to go back to how they were before.” Marlo drew little circles on his arms, not trusting himself to look back up at Blaze.

Blaze swaddled himself in the belief that what he felt was little more than irritation. It was annoyance. Exasperation that he is behaving like a typical, childish boy in this situation, where he used to pride himself on repelling typical, childish boys. Except beneath all of that, he knew what he was feeling. Slighted. Hurt. Numb. Always numb. It was a stark contrast. It gave him a mental whiplash.

He would have to teach himself how to live, for an act of conventional life has laid absent in his life. He was possessive, as his insecurities manifested within his mind and disrupted his ego. He was human; he did feel remorse for his character. However, he hindered his emotions to the back of his throat, where he allowed them to boil until he couldn’t handle the burning sensation anymore.

“Blaze?” Marlo asked once more.

“What?”

Marlo walked slowly towards him, within arm’s length. As if he was approaching a poisonous snake instead of his friend.

“We know about that night, wherever you and Sam were when he died.” *What?* That night you walked in half past three in the morning? When you saw him last, you weren’t... stable. I’m not sure if you are aware, but you get dreams every night and speak as if you are delusional.”

Blaze gaped at him.

“Sam isn’t dead.” His voice lowered and his eyes narrowed. *What were they saying?*

He looked at the mirror once again. His cheekbones popped out of his face. His eyes were puffed from the crying. The skin on his lips was cracked. The usual pinkness of his cheeks were not there. Empty. That was what he felt like. So useless. So heartless. So stupid. His heart was not there anymore.

Gone. Dissolved. Broken. The pain distracted him. It felt good. But it was bad—a stark contrast. Tears trickled down his face.

It was almost as if he was looking at the Sam he saw the last few weeks in the mirror. Empty. Cold. A corpse. This whole time, Blaze was talking to a ghost who wandered through the halls as if it were real.

Blaze reached into his pockets to grab his glasses in order to see the clock posted above the door. There was something in there. Blaze felt it as he reached inside. He took out a small piece of paper and unfolded it, his hands shaking every inch of the way.

“fifteen seconds isn’t enough...”