

“Above the Summit of Solitude”

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“We must all make the best of this situation and continue to strive for the best. When everyone is working hard, we have no excuse to stop and rest.”

The rigid clacking sounds stop abruptly, echoing across the four tight walls. My sluggish hand reaches for the mouse, clicking the small blue ‘submit’ button at the corner of the blinding white screen. “Your assignment has been submitted.” Ah. Right. I drop my tense shoulders and hunch my back, spiritlessly leaning back onto my chair, my chin reaching for the grey ceiling above. I turn my head to the other side of my room, my eyes gently reaching for the weak strays of light falling from the tall dusty window. “Ah, its cloudy again, isn’t it?” The impure clouds surround the ridges of the sky, spiraling into fading blue, grabbing the light, attempting to penetrate the great mass of white. The wind rustles the tall swaying trees. The leaves grasp for a light that no longer exists. I forcefully push away the rusted windows and extend my arm out. My palm is raw, longing for cold drops of rain, receiving nothing. I pull back my hand and wrinkle my eyebrows, the windows closing with a squeak. The clouds do not release the hidden blue, nor shift together more tightly. Away from a world of ticking clocks, away from a world where water drops. Am I the only one, for all the change has stopped?

The news from the living room plays, a constant buzzing escalating into my ears. I’m experiencing a major disaster that will go down in history, yet such an event feels so distant, so out of reach. Every day, every minute, every second I am reminded of the pain, the death, the lament of the people. Yet, I am wandering a path of my own, one of no trees nor leaves. Above me, only a borderless gray stands still. I guess I don’t really mind, for the company is better than the void. The clouds do not release drops of rain, seeping through their clusters and layers, and frankly, neither do I. I wonder why.

“Strive for the best, an undying fire of hope and motivation---” Such bold statements of my own creation, but I can’t help but doubt if the fire can withstand this tired air.

The wheels turn, hands rotating into eternity. I sit in front of a blinding white screen, as the teacher’s instructions become nothing but white noise droning through the air. An

excruciating pain accumulates in my eyes. When was the last time I had an appetite again? I roll myself in the thick yet shivering covers and scrunch up. I shut my eyes. I see nothing. Can you hear? A heart longing? Yet my eyes won't shut, my brain won't stop, thick roots coiling my hair and neck, collapsing, into my infinity of thoughts.

Ah. Is this what feeling burnt out is like? I only have 4 hours of online school and a bearable amount of homework. To be burnt out by such paltry work. Have I always been this weak? I wonder why.

In their eyes, I see nothing.

Social engagement. There's a lack of social engagement I reckon. Staring at the blank expressions of my computer doesn't count, does it? I'd wager mine looks the same. Congregating is what defines humanity, a trait carved into our genes since the earliest of times, some may argue since the creation of mankind. The teacher continues to ramble, but I can't help but notice a soulless look in the eyes, a gaze filled with dejection. I wonder why.

It has been two months since the suspension started. Notifications unexpectedly assault my phone. I lack the drive to respond. I wonder why.

Friends I met from Oxford's summer course last year decide to hold a meeting using the online lesson software from school. Everyone reports on how the coronavirus is taking its toll on their country, informing everyone of their country's status. I wrap myself in my furry blanket. This is no different from the news. Voices of statistics, eyes of dead fish. Monotone voices whispering since the rise of the Sun, murmuring 'til the rise of the Moon. The ramblings of death, medical resources and all that surrounds them.

I wish I had the heart to care more, but alas, I don't. I wonder why.

Someone in the chat holds up their phone, the camera facing the computer screen. "Oi! I'm posting this on my social media! Pull off something weird!" Still wrapped in blankets, I lift my head up and let out a meek smile. Typical. "WAIT! WAIT A SECOND! LET ME GRAB TOILET PAPER!" an enthusiastic voice rings through the chat. Toilet-paper? All of our faces show visible confusion as Audrey, an enthusiastic Swiss holds rolls and rolls of toilet paper in her arms. Several rolls of toilet paper escape her grasp and fall onto the floor, unwrapping into an outrageous mess. She clumsily positions the rolls of toilet paper into every nook and cranny she can find and throws her head back with a laugh "EHEHEHE! I'M READY FOR THE PICTURE!" I take a breath and wheeze, squinting my face as laughter

bursts from within, my lungs burning. “HEALTH-HELP MY LUNGS!” I shout as I throw away the blankets, in a hurry, scanning the living room for any objects that piqued my interest. This will do! Returning with an old-fashioned gray hat, a potted plant and a bottle of hand sanitizer. “IF WE HAVE TO ACT RIDICULOUS WE HAVE TO DO IT FLAMBOYANTLY!” I shout merrily as everyone else scatters around their rooms in search of random objects competitively, distant laughter echoing from the speaker.

The six of us, each from different corners of Earth, each separated by geographic boundaries, bonding in the same spirit, acting outrageously just for a picture that’ll soon be buried along with plenty of others. For the first time in months, I let out a genuine laugh, a warmth coming from within. Clouds sweep by the piercing wind, throwing the fallen leaves into violent shape and manner. The wind stops, and the leaves fall with grace. I squint my eyes again. Patches of my skin glow, and I lift my head to see light scanning the field of blue ignorant to the chaos. Ascending, to a more carefree world of our childhoods.

I lean forward and push myself up, nearly toppling over as I ready my stance. I laugh lightly and shove my hair to one side to see better. For a brief second, an opening exists. A breeze has lifted a veil, and I glimpse a light beyond the heavy shadows of seclusion, the light of a future yet to come. The breeze runs through my hair, my shirt flowing. Wait. Something’s off. A wind roars around me, my arms hiding my eyes from a blinding white. I step back to steady myself, and sli- Ow. Ow Ow Ow. My back drops against the sharp rocky floor, my hands scraped and scathed. I clutch myself into a tight ball, sharp needles penetrating my frail skin. Slowly, I open my eyes and look down in disbelief. Below, wrapped in a layer, soft and white, tall structures extending from an abundance of mist.

A view—from a summit?

Every minute, every second I am reminded of the pain, the anguish, the suffering. I’m not invincible, I can’t endure it forever. But soon enough, rays of a bright future will shine through the thick clouds of today. Under the gloomy clouds, wait for young strays of light. Even the emotionless cloud will weep one day. Endurance. Tolerance. For now, we have no other choice, do we?

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