

Pops

It's been six months since they found me on the floor. Eleven months since "The Accident". Too long since life was normal. I never understood the concept of normal, but now it makes sense. Normal is what life is like before an event. A life-shattering event.

"Evie!" my mom would never let go of a childhood nickname, no matter how hard I asked her to stop, "We're leaving soon. Come on!" They were leaving for a funeral. The entire family would be at this funeral. Except me. Nobody in the world could force me to go.

"E, we have to leave," my dad was busy finishing setting up the alarm app that would remind me to eat. "Are you sure you want to stay at home?"

There was nothing I could do but nod my head. Then, they left.

I was going to be home alone for almost two weeks, and there was nothing I wanted to do. School went out a few weeks ago, and it was just another summer. I had turned 16 a few months ago. I could have walked into a DMV and gotten a license, but I didn't. I was too scared. I had a fear of cars. In fact, too many things scared me now. Nothing ever made sense. Ever since "The Accident".

I remember the day of "The Accident" in snapshots. Me, biking to school. Then, me, biking home. Walking inside the house to find my parents gone. Then, the call. My mother's voice echoing in my head.

"Evelyn, your grandfather is in a coma. He got into a car accident," it was the one time my mother called me by my actual name. He died a few days later. I couldn't breathe, couldn't sleep, couldn't live. But, I would not let myself cry. After a while, everything became less important: school, music, food. I couldn't bring myself to think too much about him. My parents

were always gone for their jobs, and I learned to keep my pain contained. Until they found me on the floor.

The first alarm for the day rang on my phone. Time for Breakfast, followed by a specific set of foods that I had to eat. I checked it off, went to the kitchen, prepared everything, and got ready to eat. Suddenly, a weird feeling washed over me. *Someone is watching you, someone is just around the corner.* I jumped and looked around. I left the room to check the security cameras. Nobody was there. My mind was fooling me. I shrugged it off and turned on the TV.

My next alarm rang, Lunch Time, and then I realized I'd never eaten breakfast. I looked at everything on the table and knew that I couldn't eat both meals. If I saved the breakfast to eat tomorrow, I would be behind on my meals and my parents would find out that I skipped one. The only way was to be sneaky and hope my dad wouldn't check the cameras. I put the breakfast in the backyard soil to decompose. As I walked inside, my lunch was gone. It had disappeared. Someone was in the house. Panic rushed in. I checked every nook and cranny, but nobody was there. Suddenly, a tiny idea came, *It's okay if you miss one meal, nobody will notice. Don't worry. It's a blessing in disguise.* I came to a decision and turned on the TV.

The last alarm of the day rang, Dinner. After preparing everything, I sat down to eat.

A whistle suddenly filled the hallway. It was the same song my grandpa used to whistle to me. *Nobody knows that song except you and Pops. You would sing that tiny song and Pops would whistle. Remember, back when everything was okay in the world. You used to always try to whistle it, but it never had the same feel as Pops. The feel of Pops...* I ran to the hall and found not a single moving thing. What was going on? Who was in my house?

I went back, and my dinner was gone. Good, I didn't need it anyway. I felt that beautiful feeling: hunger. It blocked out all my memories and pain. The emptiness enveloped me, and I embraced it. *You're doing this again?* My mind wouldn't leave me alone. *Remember last time. You ended up on the floor, then woke up in a hospital. What's the use? They'll take you to a therapist, tell you you're ill and that you need help. But you don't need help, you need Pops.* Suddenly, it hit me. Pops was gone. But I needed him. I needed his soft voice and his reassuring smile. I needed his never-ending teasing and his funny songs. There was a void in my heart that nobody but Pops could fill. I looked outside, where my breakfast, lunch, and dinner were strewn onto my backyard. *There's nobody in this house but you, and that is the most dangerous fact of all. You can't help yourself.*

The whistle came back, and I turned around. There he was: Pops.

"Eva, do you want to stay here?" Pops voice echoed in that way that always relaxed me. I shook my head.

"They think I'm crazy. They don't understand me like you did."

"Then come with me. Live freely with your Pops," he stretched out his hand, and I took it. Together, we walked out of the front door. Behind me, I saw my body on the ground with a pill bottle in her hand. This time, the body wouldn't wake up.