

I open my eyes, and bright sunlight momentarily blinds me. I yank down the blinds and burrow deeper under my covers. I want to cry, but there are no tears to cry. So I lay there; numb with pain, not caring about the outside world. My attempts at thinking about other things fail; I try to forget, try not to remember that day so vividly in my mind. I try to find a speck of happiness in my life; I come up with nothing. And as hard as I try, I know that the event that changed my life will be engraved in my mind forever.

May 29(four months earlier)

I open my eyes and find myself staring into a pair of green ones, inches from my face. I jerk back, but realize it's only my cat, Franco. I get up and get ready for school. *Only one more day, then I'm free.*

"Harper! Hurry up, you'll be late!" my mother continues to yell from downstairs, and I practically leap down the steps.

"See you after school mom," I grab a piece of toast and run out the door. My best friend Amy Kenton is just riding her bike up my driveway. She waves to me, and her blonde curly hair shines in the sunlight.

"Hey Amy! I'll be ready in a minute," I run inside our garage and hop on my baby blue bike. "Do we have football practice after school?"

"Nope, coach gave us the day off!" says Amy smiling, her eyes filled with happiness. "You, Bradley, Wes and I should go to get ice cream!"

"Sounds like a plan. Race you the rest of the way to school!" I say, and without waiting for an answer I speed off towards school. We're almost late, but we barely get into our first class just before the bell rings. The rest of the day is a blur. Nobody feels like paying attention on the last day of school, and our teachers are constantly telling kids to stop talking. When the day is finally over, Amy and I set out to find Wes and Bradley. We find them out playing football on the playground, the ball gets kicked towards me, and I stop it. Bradley comes over, and I give him a hug. "Want to go to go get ice cream with us?" I ask.

“Hey, can I have the ball back?” Wes runs over, and is now attempting to get the ball away from me. He isn’t succeeding, because I had played football all my life, and he is no match for me. “Come on Harper! Give it back,” Wes whines, embarrassed he can’t get the ball away from me. Bradley smiles,

“Do you want to go get ice cream with us?” Wes immediately grins,

“If you’re paying,”

“Then what are we waiting for?” says Bradley. We all run over to the bike rack and ride over to the ice cream shop. When we get there, we get our ice cream and sit down at a picnic table.

“How was your guys’ last day of 9th grade?” I ask.

“Well, the only good thing was that Mrs. Appling gave us all candy,” says Wes. I roll my eyes.

“Don’t you ever think of anything but food?” asks Amy.

“Not really,” says Wes. “You guys up for swimming after this?”

“Sure, want to meet back here around 3:30?” I ask. “I’ll bring the football.”

“Sounds good,” says Bradley.

“Ok, see you then,” says Amy. We all finish, and I bike home. As I ride back along our street, my bike suddenly wobbles, and I hop off before it falls over. I sigh and look at my tire. Flat; I run the rest of the way home, pulling my bike. I unlock the front door, get changed and grab my football as quickly as I can. I put on my sunglasses and hat, and start running. When I get there, Amy and Bradley are already there, but Wes is late, as usual. Amy has on her straw fedora and Ray-Ban sunglasses. Bradley’s black lab, Sophie, is with him. I hop off my bike, and she runs over to me and starts licking my face.

“Hi Sophie!” I pet the big black Labrador, and she calms down. Bradley laughs, “Sorry, she’s really hyper from being cooped up all day.”

“Amy, where’s Wes?” I ask. She shrugs.

“I don’t know where my brother is. He takes forever to do everything.” When Wes finally shows up, fifteen minutes late, we set off for the beach about two miles away. Since my bike has a flat, we decide we can walk. As we walk through our little town of Camdens Landing, the sun beats down on us. It is the perfect day for swimming. We pass Bradley’s dad’s bakery, Austin’s Bake Shop. Normally in Queensland, Australia there’s lots of jellyfish in the ocean near the shore. But two summers ago, we found a cove that jellyfish scarcely swim in; there is a little reef and we often scuba-dive there. As we get onto the beach I look back, and see Amy trailing back behind us, which was strange since she is normally leading the pack. I slow down so I am walking next to her.

“You okay?” I ask. “You don’t look too good.”

“Yeah, I’m fine,” she says. She is sweating; a red flag went up in my mind. We had barely gone a mile, and Amy normally lasted three miles before breaking a sweat. “I think I just need to stop and get a drink of water.” I call up to the guys to stop, Amy and I go over to a tree so she can sit in the shade. She sits down under a tree, exhausted. I hand her my bottle of water, and she drains the whole bottle in a minute.

“Call 911,” I tell Wes, panicking. “Amy, are you okay?” Amy shakes her head weakly. “We need to get her to the hospital,” I try to stay calm, but I can tell I’m not succeeding. “Amy, does anything hurt?”

“I-I-I can’t f-feel my arm,” she said. She is having trouble speaking; bad sign.

“Hello? Yes, I need an ambulance, stat.” I hear Wes say. “We are a mile south of Camdens Landing, on the beach. She’s having trouble speaking, and her arm in numb...Amy, does your head hurt?” Amy nods, and says,

“H-harper? Help me up please,” Bradley and I help her stand. She immediately sinks into our arms. We support her and she moans. “Please s-set me d-d-down again. Harper! Where are you? I c-can b-b-barely s-see. It’s all b-blurry.”

“She’s having trouble seeing,” says Wes. “Guys, the lady said to lay her down in the shade, and wait for the ambulance.” We set her down under the tree, and she groans. Then she closes her eyes.

“Amy! Amy, wake up!” I lightly shake her arm, but she doesn’t stir. “Wes! She’s unconscious!” Wes tells the lady on the phone. Then we hear sirens, and Bradley runs towards the ambulance. He waves them over; Paramedics get out, and practically sprint over. One of them brings a stretcher, and they start hurriedly examining Amy. “What’s wrong with her?” I ask. One of the paramedics who are examining her answers without looking up.

“She looks like she had a stroke. We need to get her to the hospital,” she looks up and sees Wes with a phone. “Call her parents.”

“Can I come?” I ask, tears welling up in my eyes. The paramedic shakes her head.

“You guys will have to get to the hospital by yourselves; there’s not enough room.” I am still in shock, and feeling a little shaky. I start swaying, but I feel Bradley catch me before I fall down.

“Are you okay?” he asks, with a worried frown spreading across his face. I slowly nod and the paramedics cautiously lift my unconscious friend onto the stretcher. They put her in the ambulance, and speed off, sirens blaring. I start sobbing, and we start walking towards town. We follow as quickly as we can, silent. The only thing I hear is the ambulance sirens, slowly fading as it gets farther and farther away; Amy, getting farther, and farther away. When we get to the hospital, all our parents are already there; they all have worried looks on their faces. We all sit waiting outside her room; everyone silent, everyone feeling the dark cloud hanging over our heads. I fight back tears, and bite my lip until it bleeds. I finally excuse myself and walk down the hallway, down the stairs into the bathroom. I cry there for some time. When I come out, Bradley is there waiting for me. My eyes are red and puffy from crying, and Bradley looks at me, concerned.

“Are you okay?” he asks. He and I both know the answer to that. I start crying again, and he holds me, not saying a word.

“Is she going to be okay?” I ask. I try to sound like I’m okay, but my voice cracks.

“I hope so,” he answers. “I really do.” We go back upstairs, and wait with everyone else. A few minutes later, the doctor comes out with an expression no one can read.

“Amy has had a serious stroke,” he says slowly. “She is still unconscious, and we think she is going into a coma.” Mrs. Kenton puts her hand over her mouth, and cries. I feel like my heart has just been ripped apart. Anguish came over me slowly, and I start sobbing again.

“Will she be okay?” I hear Mrs. Austin say.

“It’s very hard to tell with comas. But we will do everything we can to help her,” the doctor tells us.

“Thank you,” says Mr. Kenton. My mom comes over to me.

“Honey, I think it’s time to go home,” I looked at her blankly.

“No. I’m staying here. With Amy,” I say firmly. Before my mom can say anything, I say, “Mom; she is my best friend, and she’s in a coma. I’m not leaving.” My mom sighs, knowing that once I’ve made up my mind, she isn’t going to be able to convince me otherwise.

“I’ll bring you clothes later, okay?” I nod. My parents and everyone else leaves except Wes and Mr. and Mrs. Kenton. Bradley gives me a hug and says,

“Take care of yourself, okay?” I nod, and give him a weak smile. I watch him leave, and turn to the doctor.

“Can I go in?” He nods, and opens the door. Tears fill in my eyes again when I see Amy laying there; her golden hair, no longer shining. She looks so helpless. I sit down next to her bed, and hold her hand. I silently pray, and squeeze her hand lightly.

I went on like that, by Amy’s bed all day except when eating meals, for a week. Then my mom forced me to come home to take a shower and get a good night’s sleep. I reluctantly leave

her, but I do need a shower. I go home, and feel better after I shower and change clothes. I want to go back to the hospital, but my mom tells me I have to stay home, and that I can't live at the hospital. I'm mad at her, but really don't have enough energy to be. I collapse on the couch and fall asleep.

As the rest of the summer goes by, I regularly visit Amy, but spend most of the time at home, feeling depressed and useless. One day in late August, I'm half asleep on the couch when the doorbell rings. I hear my mom open the door.

"Hello Bradley," I hear my mom say. I almost feel good enough to go say 'hi', but stay on the couch.

"Can Harper come to my football game?" asks Bradley.

"Oh, please!" I can clearly hear the desperation in my mother's voice. "Please just get her to go somewhere! All she has been doing is moping around the house. If you can convince her, I would be very grateful. Come in, come in, she's in the living room." I hear Bradley coming down the hall. He enters the living room and smiles at me. I give him the best smile I can, but I'm afraid it was rather pathetic.

"I already know what you're going to ask me," I say. He grins,

"Eavesdropping again?"

"I don't want to come to your game Bradley. I'm sorry." His face falls.

"Please, Harper. You need to get out of the house. Just come," he says. I think about it. I look at him, the pleading look in his eyes. I know that going on like I have been isn't healthy. Yes, I know I really must get out sometime. But for some reason, I can't make myself say yes. I fight with myself for a few minutes, and finally win the battle.

"Fine, I'll go." His face brightens, and I smile at him.

"Now there's a real smile," he says. We walk to the football field; it's only a couple blocks

from my house. "I'm glad you decided to come," he says, breaking the long silence. I just nod, not really knowing what to say. When we get there, I sit down on the bleachers, and the game starts. My thoughts wander from the game though. I kept thinking about Amy; I make up my mind. I am going to the hospital after the game. Bradley saves a ball, and I clap, but I am distracted. I can't stop thinking about Amy. After the game, Bradley comes to find me.

"Are you ready to go home?" I shake my head.

"No, I need to go see Amy first." He shrugs,

"Okay, let's go." We walk through town in silence. I am anxious to see Amy, and when we get to the hospital, I practically run up the stairs. When I get into the room, Amy is still lying there, unconscious; her pretty face still lacking its brightness, her eyes no longer filled with joy. Disappointment sinks in. I don't know what I had expected. So I sit near her, and start talking to her. I know she can't hear me, but I want to talk to her. I tell her everything that has happened since I talked to her last. It feels good, and somehow, I have no clue how, I feel like she can hear me. After about half an hour, I walk out of the room. Bradley is sitting there, eating some chips he got from the vending machine. As we walk back to my house, he asks me,

"What were you talking to her about?"

"I talked to her about everything that's happened since she's been gone. I just needed to talk to her; I just want it to feel normal again, even if it's never going to be the same," I say. We get to my house, and I hug Bradley. "Thank you," I whisper. He nods and smiles at me. I go inside and up to my room. But as soon as I get up there, I burst into tears. When I talked to Amy, without her answering, it just hurt me. It was a good and bad hurt. There was the good of talking to her again, but the bad of having no answer. If Amy never woke up, my life would be over. I knew I shouldn't be thinking about that, but I can't help it. A tear slides down my cheek, and I see my bible open on my desk. I go over and sit down. I know my mom opened it; she chose Psalms. I begin to read, but no matter how much I read, the anguish will not leave my heart; I look for happiness, but it seems to be eluding me. I realize that over the summer I have been so depressed, I haven't prayed once. I know I should, so I try it. For a long time; I feel a lot better,

telling Him everything that is on my mind. I pray over and over for Him to heal Amy. After I'm done, I flop into bed and fall asleep. For the next month, I visit Amy after school every day. But today after school, I'm so tired; I just go home and fall asleep. I wake to my phone ringing. I instantly know the ringtone. Amy's phone is calling me. A terrible thought goes through my mind; what if it is Amy's parents telling me...telling- I force myself not to think about it. I pick up the phone and answer it.

"Hello?" I say cautiously.

"Hey there stranger, you forgot to visit today," says a familiar voice. I drop the phone. "Harper? Harper, are you there?" I nearly faint. I pinch myself; again and again. No, I'm not dreaming. I pick up the phone but before I can think of an answer, I just run downstairs and out the door. I hear my mom calling me, asking where I am going, but I don't answer, I'm already at the end of our street. I don't stop running until I get to the stairs going up to the second floor of the hospital. I try process what had just happened, and slowly walk up the stairs. I walk down the hallway, and timidly peek into the room. I see Mr. and Mrs. Kenton, Wes, and Bradley. I look at the hospital bed, then stop, suddenly afraid. For what reason, I don't know. Then I look and see Amy sitting up, smiling at me. There's a moment of elation, then I cover my mouth to keep myself from yelling; tears of joy fill up in my eyes and I start crying. I walk over to the bed and hug Amy so tight, she has to tell me to let go. I am so giddy with happiness, I can barely think straight. "I can't believe this," I murmur. Amy squeezes my hand.

"Thanks for visiting me every day," she says. I just nod, unable to speak. My best friend is back, and all I can do is smile. "Will you help me up so I can give you a real hug?" she says. I nod, and support her as she stands up. She tries to support herself with her right arm on the bed, but groans and has to sit down again.

"What's wrong with your arm?" I ask. She shrugs,

"Doctor said it's probably from the stroke; I'll have to have Physical Therapy," she says. "But, it's not all that bad." I smile. The road to recovery is long, but my best friend is back. And there is no one that can take away this happiness; the happiness that I have been looking for.

