

Violet Wilson-Wood

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### Relief and Regret

Burning heat, that's what it started with. Then, a warm trickle, running up his forehead and chest. Finally, there was pain. It was the overwhelming kind, the kind of pain that is so intense it consumes your entire body. He could not hear, or see, or even think.

When Oliver wakes up he feels fine, which is a strange contrast to his most recent memories. Now, there is nothing. Not even his leg injury from last week's football game is bothering him, odd, it always hurts more in the mornings.

He opens his eyes. It is not morning. The midnight sky stretches out above him. Surrounding him is darkness. He feels fairly content, however, despite his confusion, eager to bask in this feeling, the absence of pain.

"Ollie? Ollie!" A familiar voice cries out. He turns his head to see who it is, but the source of the sound comes to him. A girl with dark curly hair and deep brown skin. Her eyes are warm, like amber, like honey, slowly dripping. The drops of honey land on his face, but he does not feel anything. Carmen's hand is placed on his chest, he does not feel this either.

She sobs, before managing to choke out a few words.

"I'm sorry, I'm sorry," the crying continues. Oliver wants to speak to her, to tell her he's okay, he feels fine, but he can't get the words out.

"I-I shouldn't have let you," her words are sloppy, nothing comes out quite right, "We could have just called someone, you- you-"

A shaky hand makes its way from his chest to his neck, staying there for a moment before the sobs start up again. Oliver sits up, moving to wrap his arms around his girlfriend, but he can't, it's like she's not even there.

He looks around and sees that his body is hanging out of the driver's side door of the dark blue 2008 Subaru Impreza his dad bought him for his seventeenth birthday. It's a used car. He remembers sitting behind the steering wheel and wondering about all the journeys the car had taken in its lifetime. Now, the car will never drive again. The front is crushed in, rippling like the ocean in the most horrible storm. His body is hanging out of the driver's side door, he is not. In that moment everything hits him.

Oliver is dead, and there is the girl he loves, crying over his lifeless body, blaming herself for everything. This isn't her fault though, he wishes more than anything that he could tell her that. Oliver should have known better. He should have known when he was stumbling from the front door of his best friend's house to the car. He should have known when he got into the front seat and he could hardly read the speedometer. He should have known when the road began to warp right in front of his eyes.

He can see clearly now as sirens and flashing lights break the darkness, illuminating the dark sea, and the large maple tree that is halfway into the hood. Now Carmen is speaking to the officers, they're asking her to calm down. He realizes that he will never talk to her again, he realizes that he has hurt her in the worst way possible. He can never take this back.

He thinks about his family, will the police call tonight, or will they wait until the morning? He thinks about his father, who worked so hard to buy this car, who depended on Oliver to watch his younger brother and to be a role model for him. Surely, his brother will never

make the same mistake he did. He thinks about the pain that he can no longer feel, how it was passed on to the ones he loves. He wonders how long this overwhelming hurt will last for them.

He watches a few of the vehicles clear out, one of them with Carmen inside. There are thousands of thoughts and questions running through his head that he will simply have to wait to clarify, and even more that will never be answered. Soon, the night is dark again. He knows one thing for sure, as he sits among the wreckage; the guilt is on him. He should have known better.