

Buddy

My vision is nearly entirely obscured now, as a blanket of dark fog sets upon the valley. This is not the first time I've taken my search to these depths, but perhaps I would find a stroke of luck this time. I can sense it; I can feel his presence. There is a rustle in the wet undergrowth behind me, along with the swift departure of sparrows from the surrounding spruce trees. With the urgency of a soldier, my eyes lock on his elusive shadow, my body thrusting towards him with the sort of speed I possessed in my younger days.

“Oh, I nearly have you Buddy! You're almost in my arms, I can feel your warmth already. After all these years I've got you. Oh my, you're really here a-a-and well, everything will be okay.” I shared with nature and all her subjects.

My eyes shut and arms out, anticipating them to be filled by the friend I've so longed for, but all I feel is nothing. Nothingness. The void remains there. I look around and find myself amidst crushing homes and crashing parties of the local critters in the thick bushes beneath me, and there is still no sign of Buddy.

I hoist myself up onto the thick spruce branch in an instant. The damp bark is met by my firm grasp, and the firm grasp becomes weaker with every branch that passes by. This is most definitely the oldest tree in the valley, as well as the tallest, but I am determined to reach the top. Stuck in place for centuries, this tree has

seen the horrors of many wars and survived too many terrible storms to count. The tree possesses all of the valley's wisdom, this tree right here must have all the answers. This must be where Buddy is, and I will finally find him at the top.

The hunger of a thousand lions fuels my body up the tree. *Step. Step. Step.* I catch a glimpse of the stars on my journey up, even though the fog's opacity remains the same. I watch as they dance upon their elegant perch pumping my heart full of hope. So beautiful in nature. The Big Dipper is gazing back at me, but those stupid stars won't mend relationships, fill my endless void, or find Buddy. I continue to persistently trudge up the tree.

It feels as if I'd been at it for hours now, but I forgot my watch at home so I can't be certain. Great. More uncertainty. But that doesn't matter because when I get to the top of this tree all of the uncertainty will disappear. With every branch I pass I become ever so closer to the answers to all of this and of course, Buddy. My journey, my search. I can see my long-awaited destination and soon everything will be okay. Everything will be okay. But just as my arm makes its way to the final branch, my clumsy foot slips, and I graze the wet bark by an inch. My body parallel to the ground, I begin my inexorable descent into the valley below. The Big Dipper and all its disciples are gazing back at me, as my body begins to pick up speed, but this time I cannot find a single shred of hope in those stupid stars.