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### You Can Stop the Sun

The stale air of Fourty's grocery store slowly crawls its way in and out of my lungs. There is nothing I would rather be doing less than selling flowers. The sickeningly bright yellow sunflowers that crowded me this morning are mostly gone, with an exception of a few bouquets. The large stone sitting on my heart has my body dragging the floor as I try my best to look approachable. The chair I am occupying complains every time I move even slightly so I try to stay still.

"I've always believed these flowers could make just about anyone fall in love."

I nearly jump out of my skin at the voice of new company. It takes a few blinks for my eyes to focus on a leather skinned woman. Sandra, a woman that embodies a sun dried earthworm stands in front of me. She's cut my family's hair for as long as I can remember. I force a labored smile toward her not saying anything and use every bit of my brain power to send her away. But she stays in front of me, shifting back and forth like shes got rocks in both shoes and can't seem to get comfortable.

"How are you?" Her voice crackles from years of smoking.

"Good." I puff out dryly because that is what you're supposed to say even if you are the furthest thing from good.

"Well, if you ever need anything, let me know. I know how difficult today must be for you. I'll give you free haircuts anytime." Way to state the obvious lady.

I haven't cut my hair in six years.

And I'm not Auden anymore. I'm the girl with a dead mom. The girl selling flowers on Mother's Day with no mother to go home to. Sadness is no longer an emotion, it's a part of my personality. It has taken over everything else and I can't shove the darkness out of my way. Sandra has continued to talk but my mind has wandered to the countless very alive mothers that have continued to walk through the door all day.

I watch a frazzled mom chase a little girl through the sliding doors. The skipping girl's giggles fill the air as her mother catches her and sits her in a cart. The small pang in my chest grows until it's taking up so much space inside of me that there's no room for organs. And in an instant I feel myself shatter. I watch the walls around me shatter. Soon the whole town has fallen to pieces with me in the middle. Nothing but broken shards in a big heap is left. The nervous energy inside me decides to speed up and my body starts the shift uncomfortably.

I spring from the wicker chair I'm falling apart in and sprint toward the back of the grocery store headed for the bathroom.

I will not let myself break down in front of anyone else.

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I WILL NOT LET MYSELF BREAK DOWN IN FRONT OF ANYONE ELSE.

Why is everyone staring. Why is everyone always staring. It must be because they know, everyone knows.

Racing down the cereal aisle I leave a trail of fire behind.

Left, right, left, right. I make sure to only take three steps in each tile.

I watch my feet so no one will see the tears streaming down my face. I thunder around the corner, so close to seclusion.

Ouch. I hit something hard.

I skid backward and grimace as my elbows slam into the dirty white tile. I feel the dust covering my skin. My stomach lurches.

When I realize my fall backwards knocked down a display of marshmallows my face starts to burn from embarrassment. People have started to snicker. I wish, I WISH I would've stayed in my chair. Letting a few tears slip down my face in front of Sandra beats sitting in a massive pile of marshmallows with dozens of shoppers' eyes trained on me.

Universe-1 Auden-0

The brick wall of a boy that I ran into didn't even stagger when I hit him at full speed. "I am so sorry. You were moving so quickly. Are you alright?" He offers his hand. I pull my sleeves over my hands and push myself off the ground get back to my feet. I don't touch other people's hands. There are 1,500 nasty nasty bacteria living on each square centimetre of the skin on human hands. I have to go wash my hands.

Pushing past my human roadblock, I continue- at a slower pace- to the restroom. Though the tears have stopped, burning humiliation is still present. She looms over me whispering all the things I have done wrong, not letting me forget a single one.

A glance backward reveals the kind stranger gathering countless bags of marshmallows off the floor. I fight the urge to turn around and go help clean my mess. Taking my eyes from the explosion I created, I pull the creaky door open to be hit with the smell of artificial flowers. I begin to scrub at my hands and arms furiously until they're a screaming red shade of clean.

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“Tell me why you are here selling flowers on today of all days. You couldn’t take one day off?” My aunt complains wrapping her hands around the handle of an abandoned shopping cart near my flower booth.

“What else would I be doing? Not celebrating with my mom,” I say back as I pull the one leftover bouquet of flowers I didn’t sell from its place above our heads.

“She is *my* sister you know.” Her long blonde hair billows down past her shoulders just like mom’s did.

I let out a huff of air. “She didn’t create you.”

I’m starting to feel like a burden. I am starting to think everyone is tired of hearing about how sad I am. The load I am carrying isn’t an easy one to bear. Existing was hard before she died, now surviving is nearly impossible. The sun went out after she died, nothing living thrives without the sun.

The more I think the more my stomach does backflips. My world is doing backflips. “Everyone misses her kid,” Aunt Jandy says in a more hushed manner; she knows about the tornados in my brain.

Not like I do. No one could even dream of missing her like I do. As I start toward the sliding doors leading out of Fourty’s, she falls into step not far behind me.

She doesn’t say anything as she starts the vehicle and pulls away from the grey building. My whole body is covered in thick black tar and is slowly suffocating me. I lean my head against the cool glass of the passenger window and the foliage that we pass turns into a green blur. As we pull into the driveway of my home I turn to her.

“You staying?” She answers with a nod and we both slide out of the rusty truck. The hundreds of sunflowers growing in my mother’s garden behind our home wave at me eagerly in

the wind as the sun sets behind them. We enter the house to find multiple boxes lining the living room floor. Has Evan finally decided to officially give up his position as dad and move out? A frail Nan is on her knees pulling books off the sofa and tenderly putting them in a box. Only then do I realize half of mom's bookshelves have been emptied. Nan looks up when I clear my throat.

“Oh. I’ve been waiting ages for you to get here. I need help boxing up a few of Lacey’s things. I can’t stay on my knees much longer.” Lacey my mom, Lacey her daughter. She pulls herself off the floor and points at the countless stacks of books. “We can start with those. That’ll be it for tonight. The rest of her things will be boxed later.”

I smile tightly at her. She shouldn’t be here. There was no reason to be moving mom’s stuff out.

“Is there a reason you’re doing this?”

“At your dad’s request.” She says shortly. For the first time I can tell she disapproves too. I watch as journal after journal disappear into the boxes. Not only was my mom an obsessive reader she logged every single day of her existence. Not what she was feeling like a diary but just what she did and her plans for the next day. I’ve always wanted to read them but just never had the strength. Within a few minutes the stacks of books that scraped the clouds disappear into the 6935 boxes, only by the hand of Aunt Jandy. I refuse to move anything of hers, it’s just not right.

The smell of Nan’s “someone is sad” pancakes float through the air. She is famous for thinking a stack of pancakes can solve any problem. She’s so wrong.

Evan/the dad who doesn’t exist anymore drags into the house slowly, moving with no purpose. A cigarette hangs from his mouth like always. I haven’t seen him without one since the day we got the call about mom’s car accident. Everything about him droops in a basset hound

type of way. Aunt Jandy is thumbing through mom's most recent journal. I can tell because of the bright green lady painted on the cover which mom asked me to do a few months before she passed.

I leave the room without a word not wanting to look at anyone anymore.

Slipping into my studio, I breathe in the smell I've grown to adore. I sit down at the smooth and perfectly clean wooden table my grandpa built for my art quite a few years back. I haven't painted anywhere else besides this table since the day he pulled it into this room. Only three months later he passed away due to lung cancer. He could never go more than an hour without a smoke, much like Evan these days. I think it's selfish that he smokes as much as he does knowing what happened to his dad.

I pour cool blues onto my palette, the color of sorrow. The bleak grayness that is hovering over my head provides a muse, it always does. The same muse it has given me for the last six months.

*Self portrait: Sad blob girl cries. Pt 16.* In today's version she sits in front of a mirror looking back at her days before the sun vanished. I put one blue stroke, then two, then twenty. Suddenly I hear the most stomach clenching, blood curdling scream. "You killed my sister!"

For a second I'm frozen. Not blinking or breathing but listening to the sound of muffled yells and glass shattering and a door slamming.

My chest starts heaving. The lead ball of anxiety in my stomach starts growing. What did she mean. I drop my paint brush and rush out into the living area. Aunt Jandy is on the ground crumpled into a ball scream crying, the *worst* type of crying. The journal lays open beside her. Nan has her hand on her remaining daughters back crying herself, but her cry is the silent one.

Evan isn't anywhere to be seen. I'm afraid. Little kid afraid. The type that grips you so hard you can't move, but I push through the fear. I spot a vase that had to have been thrown against a wall. Jandy shrieks out, "She did it on purpose. She pulled in front of that truck on purpose."

What?

I move toward them, pick up the journal, and read the open page. The final page that has been written on:

*Journal 14: Day 72*

*Today I left work early to surprise Evan with a new flower I've decided to grow along side the sunflowers. I found a surprise in my bedroom. Evan and Sandra. Going to drive and decide what to do. Maybe I'll get lucky and get hit by a MAC truck.*

