

Khailil Tookas

Dr. Fussner

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The View

Grey took a step out of the elevator and looked around, it was just before dusk and around now the seventeenth floor was usually totally empty. The lights clicked on as Grey continued out of the doorway and towards a door on the far end of the floor. They looked around one more time before trying the door handle, and like always, it was unlocked.

They gently pushed the door open and took in the cool autumn air. The central building on campus was terraced into two sections; floors one through fifteen were mostly classrooms, and floors sixteen and onwards were mostly offices. The department housed on floor seventeen, which happened to be the first floor on the second level of the building, had been dissolved last semester and the university had yet to repurpose it for anything. They had also forgotten to lock the doors to the outside, which meant anyone could get out onto the roof. Grey picked up a small rock from just outside the door and used it to keep the door slightly ajar.

The gravel on the roof crunched beneath their feet as they made their way towards the ledge, this side of the building faced the back of campus. The building had been built in the thirties, so the ledges were lined with large stone gargoyles. The ones on the corners had their wings outstretched, but the ones between them sat huddled close to themselves in contemplative silence. Grey chose the one they'd named "Hank" when they started coming up here and went to sit next to it. They took off their bag and placed it next to Hank before they sat down at the ledge. They hung their legs off the side so that the backs of their knees were right up against the edge and began taking things out of their bag. From a small pocket on the front they produced a sandwich wrapped in saran wrap and a small can of mango juice from one of the side pouches. Campus wasn't particularly busy as Grey watched over it while getting

settled, by now people had either gone home for the day or were just starting hours long night classes. Campus stretched out in this direction for about half a mile before being cut off by a thick wall of trees that reached all the way to the horizon, riding hills and mountains into just the distance like waves on the ocean. The sun was just starting to set, wrapping the sky and the treetops in a warm blanket of vibrant oranges and pinks.

Grey unwrapped their sandwich and took a bite as they watched the sunset, and just before they took a second they heard the creaking of the door behind them. They turned back to look at the door and saw someone peeking their head out. For a moment, Grey thought they may have been busted, but they realized the person was probably a student like them.

“There’s plenty of room if you wanna sit out here,” Grey said, gesturing to the roof around them. “I won’t tell anyone you were up here if you don’t.”

The other person hesitated for a moment before stepping all the way out onto the roof and sitting down near the door. They looked anxious, constantly fidgeting with the sleeves of their purple sweater. They had shoulder length brown hair and the sweater they were wearing was a bit oversized so that the sleeves nearly covered their hands. They had on a pair of ripped jeans, and an earring in their right ear but both ears looked pierced. They were picking small pills of fabric from their sleeves.

“I can move to a different side if you wanted to be alone,” Grey said, starting to re-wrap their sandwich. “I come up here to think a lot so I get wanting to be alone.”

The person nodded absentmindedly, they were staring at the gravel on the ground before they looked up at Grey, “I-I should probably just go, sorry for bothering you.”

As they were getting up to leave, Grey reached out the person, “Oh I didn’t mean it like that, I don’t mind someone else being up here.”

The person had their back turned to Grey at this point, with a hand on the handle. “I wasn’t expecting anyone to be up here. I can just come back another time,” they said, but their feet remained planted just outside the door.

“And miss this sunset?” Grey asked. The sun had descended more, and was close to touching the tops of the trees. What few clouds there were that evening carried the colors of the sunset in every direction, the sounds of college life were slowly being replaced with birdsong and the excited chirping of crickets. The person looked back out over the trees and into the horizon before taking their hand off the door and sitting back down, a little closer to Grey than before. “I think I might have some chips or something if you want,” Grey offered as they resumed eating their sandwich. The person remained silent.

This wasn't the first time Grey had been on this roof with someone, they'd brought a friend up here to show them the sunset after telling them that they come up here pretty often. They never told that friend why they'd started coming up, but they didn't ask so Grey didn't bother thinking about it. In fact, they didn't say much of anything to that friend when they were up here together, Grey had been so used to sitting up here in silence that they'd found themselves struggling to think of things to say. They were okay to maintain that silence with this stranger, but the person spoke anyway.

“How are you so comfortable sitting on the edge like that?” they asked. This actually had been one of the few things Grey *did* talk about with their friend when they brought them up here. Then, they hadn't even thought that someone would be surprised about their nonchalance with sitting on the edge of a building sixteen stories up.

“I've been coming up here for a while, I've just gotten used to it I guess,” Grey replied, “But I was scared the first few times I came up here. I sat as far back as you're sitting.” They looked at the person and saw that they were sitting with their legs pulled up close to their chest, like the gargoyles lining the edges of the roof. “The view is still great from back there though. I was kinda worried, I heard that it might rain today and I didn't think I'd get to enjoy the sunset tonight.”

The person traced their finger through the gravel and offered no response, but stared ahead at the sunset. "My name's Grey by the way," Grey said, the person didn't look at them.

"Alex."

They resumed their silence, as Grey finished their sandwich and juice, while Alex continued to pick at the gravel around them. Grey put their trash back into their bag and fished out the bag of chips they had offered earlier, holding it out towards Alex. They were met with nothing, and put the chips back into their bag before turning back towards the sun and leaning back. The sun had finally met the trees, and their leaves were illuminated a brilliant yellow from within, as the sky turned even deeper shades of orange and red, while at the furthest edges the once blue sky crept towards purple. Then, out of the birdsong and crickets came Alex's voice, "Why are you up here?"

"Sorry?" Grey asked. They remembered wanting their friend to ask them a question like this, but they hadn't actually been prepared for it.

"I was just...I didn't think I'd see anyone else up here, I was wondering what made you come up here."

"Same as you probably," Grey leaned their head against Hank. "I was stressed out. Classes were rough, had some relationship issues, shitty job that I couldn't stand. I just wanted somewhere where I could be alone and clear my mind."

"Something like that I guess."

At the beginning of last semester, Grey had been dating someone they knew from highschool, although they'd never really known each other then, it was just some minor sense of familiarity that had brought them together. They had met each other at a party that one of Grey's friends had convinced them to go to. When they first ran into each other, Grey had to explain their new name, but they hit it off and started dating a couple weeks later. It had only been two months into the relationship when Grey found out they were being cheated on, they

tried to confront their partner but they turned it on Grey for getting mad and promised that it wouldn't happen again. It happened many more times, but Grey pretended not to notice because they didn't know what to even do at that point.

At that same time, they'd been working a minimum wage job at one of the few bars on campus. Thankfully they didn't have to deal with customers working in the back cleaning dishes, but they would've almost preferred being out front. They were the newest member to the team and everyone else who worked there had their own set routines and interactions, and were totally unforgiving to Grey at even the slightest misstep. Their manager was never any help, always siding with their coworkers, valuing efficiency and keeping the overall group happy over dealing with any issue that might actually take effort to solve on their part.

And then there was school. Grey was a junior, getting ready to look into internships and making serious considerations about their life after college. That was until midterms hit, it was the worst they'd ever done in school and they were sure they were going to fail at least two of their classes because of it. With all the other things going on their motivation and hope for school plummeted, they stopped coming to classes, turning in homework. A few of their friends would reach out to them from time to time, but they'd always just say they were too tired to go out, or that they were busy studying.

Grey thought about all of this while they sat, wondering what Alex was going through that had brought them up here too. "Did you find what you were looking for up here?" they heard Alex ask.

Grey thought back to the first time they came up here, the anger, the confusion, the feeling like they were trapped in a well with no way to climb out, "I don't think I found that I thought I wanted then, but I think it helped, coming up here. I really was terrified the first time I came up here, but I saw the sunset and..." Grey turned to look at Alex and met their eyes for a moment before Alex turned away. Grey looked back towards the sunset, "I don't know, something in that moment just hit me and I just, it felt silly to have even come up here. I was

gonna go back inside, but the sun was setting, like this, so I stayed and watched it. It was the first time things had felt peaceful in a while.”

Grey looked back at Alex again, and this time they were staring straight ahead at the sunset, their face bathed in the scarlet warmth of the receding sun. “How long ago was that?” Alex asked, their voice sounded a bit shaky, but Grey wasn’t quite sure.

Grey checked the date on their phone, “It’s been four months and twelve days.” That meant it was also four months since they’d broken up with their partner and scheduled an appointment with their advisor.

“D-do you think it could work for me too?” Grey wasn’t looking at them, but they could tell Alex was fighting tears. A cool gust of wind blew towards them, sweeping Alex’s hair out of their face. The sun was now a semicircle of fire, burning through the gaps between the boughs of far off trees.

“I don’t know if it’ll be the same for you, but I’d be glad to be here with you if you want to stay.”

“Can you?”

“Of course.”