

Creativity with Images: Modern Fairytale

Davina closed her eyes. It is a long way down from where she stands. The early autumn wind whips harshly around her, almost in a threatening manner, yet she felt no fear. Quite oppositely, she felt free for the first time in months.

It all traces back to one evening half a year ago when her life fell to pieces. It was just another ordinary evening. The sunset was painting the clouds, the school kids were running around with egg waffles in their hands, and Davina was taking her labrador for a stroll with her fiancé, Pierre, just like usual, “a healthy habit” as he would proudly put it.

As a daily routine, Davina would let her dog off the leash as the sidewalks gradually became less populated. “Run along Felix,” she would usher to her black-furred labrador lovingly. Then, Pierre would take her by the arms and watch her with adoring eyes as they walk along the stoney walkway until the skies darken.

However on that specific evening, it happened differently. Around the corner, Felix abruptly rushed to the middle of the road and barked excitedly, as if he saw something move in the bushes on the opposite side. “Hey! Come back!” Davina called out, but the dog remained on the road.

“He must have seen a squirrel or something,” Pierre muttered, amused, “Don’t worry, I’ll go get him.”

Davina didn’t stop him. Big mistake. Because just as he reached Felix who was still barking, a truck that turned the corner too fast suddenly appeared out of nowhere and slammed right into them before anyone could make a sound.

Pierre was gone in an instant, while Felix followed suit in a few hours. Earlier during New Year celebration Pierre finally put an engagement ring on her finger, and they even made plans to get married at the end of summer. But now, all her dreams withered. Without him, she doesn’t even know who she is or where to begin. So after six excruciating months, on a clear weekend morning, she finally decided to end it all by taking a step she won’t be able to take back.

Honestly, she has always been afraid of heights. Though she lives on the thirty-second floor, she barely ever looked down. To combat that, she drank all the liquor she can find at home until she is half delirious before she climbed up a chair and managed to dangle her feet outside the window. Flailing her arms, she balanced herself on the thin frame, toppling the chair behind her and knocking over the items on her bookshelf next to the window, shattering the crystal ball she owned since she was six into shards on the floor. “Broken, just like me,” she uttered as she put her feet on the edge and stood up. Auburn hair flaring in the sun, she scanned the horizon one last time, closed her eyes and leaned in to the wind. As she flies through a free fall towards the ground, everything went blank.

The first sensation she felt was something soft and furry touching her cheek. The air around her smells familiar, sweet and slightly heavy with evening dew. It’s been so long since she last slept so soundly. Satisfied, she turned and buried her face in what felt like a pillow and kept her eyes closed. She refused to let herself think or move, until a warm hand landed gently on her forehead.

Davina snapped her eyes open, only to find an unfamiliar face with slightly wrinkled forehead staring down at her with concern. Almost automatically, she flinched away and sat up straight,

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knocking that man off the bed. “Wh...What are you doing in my room?” she stammered, “I don’t reckon that breaking and entering is legal here.”

“Turns out you do know how to be afraid, huh?” questioned the stranger, raising an eyebrow at her, “So what were you thinking when you decided to throw yourself out of that window?”

At once, the memory of her loss and what she did rushed back into Davina’s head like a tide. Clearly, she remembers falling, so theoretically, she should be dead. Frowning, she examined that brown-haired stranger who seems to have appeared out of thin air. “Yes, that was on purpose. But it was for a good reason,” she explained impatiently and begins to get out of bed, “I should probably just try that again...”

“You are not going anywhere near that window!” he jumped to his feet and frantically pushed Davina back into bed.

“This is none of your business!” she scolded, fighting back with whatever strength she had left.

He shook his head but did not loosen his grip on Davina. “I know how insane this would sound to you,” he explained, “ but I am actually your guardian angel, whom you released after you broke that crystal ball. My name is Caleb, and my purpose is to save you. Our lives are connected from the moment you released me, so if you insist on dying, I would die as well.”

“Guardian angel?” Davina almost laughed out loud. “They don’t even exist.”

“Well, I just appeared in your room without opening a single door and saved your life with my powers. Isn’t that proof?”

“Even if you really are my guardian angel, there is no proof that our lives are connected, so you don’t have to save me again.”

“Are you kidding me?” Caleb half laughed, “You drank so much that you could have died of alcohol poisoning before you ever hit the ground. Your hangover made me feel as if my head was about to explode until I cured it for you!”

“Perhaps I need to put you back then.” replied Davina sulkily as she reached for the broken crystal ball that sits half pieced together on her bedside table.

“No, don’t—” Caleb started. But before he could stop her, she already grasped the crystal ball. Upon her touch, it again crumbled to pieces, and the jagged shards immediately drew blood.

"Ouch!" Both of them exclaimed simultaneously.

"What did I tell you?" Caleb held out his wounded finger. "You bleed, I bleed. You die, so do I."

Defeated, Davina sank back into the bed and held her knees to her chest while he healed her finger. "I'm sorry," she whispered in a trembling voice, "I never meant to hurt you and I don't want you to die with me. I never wanted any of this to happen."

"It's going to be okay. You can always choose to live." He attempted to comfort.

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"No it's not. Every single day is suffocating...and I just can't do this anymore. But if I take you with me, I will feel guilty even in death. What am I gonna do?" She buried her head in to her blankets in despair and begins to rock back and forth.

After a moment of silence, Davina finally spoke again. "Me and Pierre, we have known each other since forever. Even when I got bullied at school and when my parents got divorced, he never left my side. I don't expect you to understand my fears."

"I do understand," Caleb replied.

"How?"

"I haven't told you how I ended up in that crystal ball, did I?" an empty and faraway look appeared in his eyes, "About half a century ago, I was human just like you. I lived in a tiny fishing village by the sea on Hong Kong Island. One night I was enjoying a cigarette alone on my sofa after my family went to bed. I fell asleep while smoking and the cigarette lit the carpet on fire."

"Once that wooden house started burning there was nothing anyone could do," he continued helplessly, "so my entire family—my parents, my wife, and both my kids—perished in the flames."

"I'm so sorry, I didn't know."

"I hated the fact that, me, the perpetrator, was the only survivor. I tried throwing my life away too, but then, a winged figure appeared and offered me a chance to atone for my mistakes, so I have been in the crystal ball ever since, given the mission to protect whoever owns it. You see, you're not the only one who has been through tragedy."

"I know I seem irrational to you. But he has always been my constant in life, a compass pointing due north I can always count on. When he is gone, I simply don't want to face this uncertain life alone. Who knows what else life could take away from me tomorrow? After all, nothing ever lasts." said Davina tearfully.

Caleb smiled reassuringly and took her by the hand.

In the blink of an eye, Davina found her self sitting on a crisp-white picnic blanket on top of Victoria Peak, looking out at the light-speckled horizon. On the grass beside her feet, a dozen candles that lights up their surrounding, and on the blanket, is a finely-prepared meal for two with a huge crepe cake adorn with flowers placed in the middle.

Davina's eyes widened as she took in the tantalising aroma of cheese and vanilla beans and the delicate decorations.

"Happy birthday, Davina." Caleb said, "You have being so focused on your grief you forgot about the good things in life. Today is your twenty-seventh birthday, don't you remember?"

Davina blushed and lowered her eyes. How could she have forgotten, and when was the last time she bothered to have a proper meal? Suddenly feeling hungry, she plucked a chocolate off the cake and popped in it her mouth. "Feels like you can see forever here," she mused, admiring the brilliant night-view.

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“But there really is no forever, is there?” Caleb gestured towards those countless skyscrapers, “Somewhere among that mass of buildings, was where my home used to be. I use to think that my fishing village was all there is to my life, but now not even a speckle of it remains.”

He begins to trace the outline of the city with his fingers, “Someday, these skyscrapers could be replaced as well. Someday, this seemingly endless range of mountains could crumble and fall, or be subsumed by the rising ocean. The thing is, nothing stands permanent, perhaps not even this city. We all think we control our future, but in reality we can’t complete decide what happens tomorrow. You could go for a walk and your dog could run off. Your fiancé could get hit by a truck going after him.”

“Or,” Davina said, staring out at the layers of sky and mountains, “you could be taking a relaxing smoke only to light your house on fire. Your family could perish in the flame. You might even become a guardian angel.”

Wrapping a jacket around Davina’s shoulders, he turned to look her deep in the eyes, “You got it. Uncertainty is a natural part of life, and that’s just the way everybody lives. In fact, I don’t even know when my magic might fail me. I don’t belong in this world, so I’m unsure when I’ll turn transparent and disappear. I can’t promise you anything, I’m sorry.”

Davina scoots closer towards Caleb and leans toward him, pressing her shoulder against his, and for a moment, she no longer feels so hurt and lost. She just wants to hold each moment before it slips away. “It’s okay,” she replied slowly but steadily, “we are both going to be alright.”

Nowhere in this city can the moon shine as bright as it is now over their heads, the busy world continuing below them, barreling downward for more than five hundred metres. At the top of Victoria Peak the whole world stretches its wide, wide wings below them. Yet, the future still refuses to make a single promise. But somehow that is alright, because the only thing anyone can really have and hold is the present tense—immediate and fine and ever so fleetingly sure.