

The threads of the universe have always been at my fingertips, and yet they are barely within reach of my full potential. It only happened once: the first surge of my power. Ever since then, it's always been oh-so achingly far, just barely brushing against my skin. It's like there's a barrier stopping me from opening the world again like dissecting a frog, and it is sickeningly frustrating. It doesn't matter how many times I press my palm to the barrier or cause unbelievable headaches from sheer concentration. The veil has never split again.

The first time was thirteen years ago when I was just seven years old. The memories blur together as you get older, but this memory in particular always stood out to me. I remember the feeling of my plastic dolls in my sweaty palms, the smell of warm milk lingering in the household and the distant newborn cries of my baby brother. I felt the world vibrate around me, and the walls began to open and collapse. It was as if the world around me had been fake all along, and the cardboard cutout of reality had simply succumbed to age and fallen away. My small fingers curled tightly around the plastic doll in my hand as fear possessed me, the creak of the plastic beneath my warm hands felt somehow louder than ever. Once the walls fizzled away into nothing, I was left on the sands of an empty beach with the sea mist brushing through my hair.

The waves crashed upon the silky sand, and the grass in the dunes nearby rustled in the breeze. It was unfamiliar to me, it didn't feel like my own reality. The moon was bigger, and in the distance, I could see a belt curl around the sky like the belt of Saturn. The sky had absent streaks of pink lingering within the blue, and the faint glimmer of an evening start began to make itself known. In a moment of pure beauty, I was terrified. That was when my former reality vibrated back to the way it was. A part of me wondered if it was just a waking dream — but the particles of sand clung to my sundress for days.

Ever since then, I've tried to replicate what I felt that day. Even attempting to trigger it with the sounds of a baby crying and boiling milk in a pan. But, it never worked. I nearly

felt the strings of the world split open after my father died: the grief overwhelmed my senses. After his death, I'd always had a stronger sense of the world around me, how it felt and how it could be split apart. I was working towards something; although I wasn't sure what it was. Was I able to travel through time? Enter alternate worlds? I don't know — and I still don't know — but it's always been in my mind. Every day I wake up, go to work, come home and rest, the same thoughts and ideas linger. Whether or not I get closer to that day where I'm able to unlock the rest of my potential is a mystery.

“Ava.”

I'm tugged out of my thoughts as I hear my name uttered casually. I turn my head from stacking a shelf of pasta, and I suddenly realise just how tired I feel. I've been on my feet for hours now. *I don't get paid enough for this*, I realise solemnly.

“Yeah?” I reply, my eyes honing in on an older woman. Sophia, the only manager who I actually tolerate. She has a kind, older face creased with laughter lines and crows feet. Her eyes probably look as tired as mine do.

“Your shift's over.” She taps her watch.

I frown in thought for a moment. I didn't realise how long I'd been stuck in my thoughts for — I've always had my head in another place. “Oh.” I mumble, lowering my hands from the shelf I was stacking.

“Go clock out, sweetie. You look tired.” She looks at me in concern.

“Right,” I manage to smile for her, “I'll be seeing you tomorrow, then.”

Sophia smiles and walks over to where I am, lightly shooing me away from the trolley of food I was stacking. “Yes yes, now shoo. Go home. Tell your mom I said hi, will you?”

“I will.” I snort softly and walk out of the aisle, making my way to the staff room out the back.

Working in retail wasn't exactly my first choice when I took it on, but at the time I had very little choice anyway. After my dad died, my mom had to take on two jobs to pay our bills and get me and my brother through school. My college fund had to be dipped into, and before I knew it, I had to go straight to work to help my mom get my brother through school. A part of me resents her for it, but now I know that the system we live in is the only thing to blame.

Stepping through the staff room, I took off my store-branded sweater and grabbed my coat and worn, beige shoulder bag. The day was the same as every one before it – get the bus to work, spend a day in a dead-end job and then get the bus back home. My friends from school all went off to college, and I rarely keep in contact. People move on and I've been left behind, feeling the universe move and breathe with each step I take. I spend most of my waking time thinking of ways to visit the other-worldly beach; even just for a moment. I want to be sure of myself and what I could be capable of.

The bus on the way home is always quiet, it gives me the time to charge my social battery for the evening ahead. I pull my wired earbuds from my bag and plug myself into my music; alternating between old pop songs and more quiet, slow tunes. Usually, I come home to cook dinner with my mom and help my brother with his homework. After that, I spend a few hours trying to figure myself out and maybe read a book before I go to bed.

Unless I can figure out exactly what my abilities are, I'm afraid of living a mundane life alone and frustrated. A part of me wonders if perhaps I could see my dad again one last time – it's a selfish thing to want, but a reasonable one.

The bus finally rolls around to my stop, and I pull myself up from my seat, thanking the driver and stepping off as I do every day. It's around five in the afternoon, and sometimes I see the stragglers of students from the nearby school coming home late. Often times I see them walk the streets with their friends with cigarettes between their fingers, heading in the

woods to hang out. I keep to myself as I walk home, stuffing my hands in my pockets and admiring the way the sky settles for the evening. The blues, pinks and gold splayed across the sky like watercolour on a canvas always reminds me of the beach from the alternate reality I visited. It fills my body with hope and warmth, that maybe I can visit that place again.