

## Transcendence

The snow was a never-ending vision of contradictory innocence. Plateauing at the cabin's base and sloping down the jagged mountain-like embankment, it was an impressionable sheet of unreliability and uncertainty. The cabin, which was sturdily built but with a shaky lack of confidence that anyone would occupy it longer than a few nights' stay, was a massive formation of wood logs tightened together with now bent and rusted nails. Inside, the soft glow emanating from various taper candles was enough to read and write with but was not even close to being bright enough to examine one's flaws. Pounds of dust accumulated on various books, records, and antiques throughout the cabin, which did not receive much affection despite having abundant company. The light's subtlety contrasted distinctly with the heaviness of the navy sky outside, which, during the Winter, was barely visible as the constant blizzards sprinkled the air with the salt of the Earth.

This cabin is where the similarly insidious Timothy resided. Standing tall and moderately built, Timothy had hair like a raven's, eyes like the ocean floor, and pale skin littered with black pepper flakes. Since adolescence, he had a countenance that was constantly sullen and void of brightness, and he was the type of person you looked at and knew that he had something melancholic buried deep within him. But, the most distinct feature about Timothy is that he was, by no fault of his own, exceedingly troubled in the way that left a hole both in one's mind and heart. He moved away from his old life to this secluded cabin because he was not consistent enough for its stability; and, the depression that left an inkblot on his brain was chiefly to blame. Timothy was a commission painter stuck making pieces for dentist and doctor's offices despite having a Van Gogh-Esque mind and the work to prove it; and, he was miserable. The depression that overtook him and eventually swallowed him whole drove him to periods where he wouldn't

complete a single painting for months, only to spend the following month or two catching up on these paintings. During these times, he locked himself in his room, barely ate and rarely slept, and on a very limited occasion and up until the time that she only existed as a memory, checked up on his sister, Caroline. Eventually, though, Timothy's inconsistency led him to lose every single one of his clients and every grasp of self worth that he had left.

He then started having problems getting out of bed. Timothy slept sixteen hours a day, which left him with a mind so hazy and dazed that routine tasks took a considerable amount of mental strength. It started with work but then rapidly advanced towards daily needs. Brushing his teeth, taking a shower, cooking meals, and picking up the paper on Sundays were deemed laboriously unnecessary tasks by Timothy. Eventually, he just stopped doing these things all together.

It would be naive to think that Timothy's depression wasn't at least partially caused by the absence of his parents and the untimely death of his younger sister, Caroline. His parents decided to wait until their fifties to have kids, so by the time he was in his late twenties they had both died of natural causes and left him to be the sole caretaker of his nine-year old sister. Their death didn't change too much, though, considering that Timothy and Caroline's parents raised them with such emotional detachment that their relationship could be simplified down to "Provider and receiver".

Caroline's death, however, sent shockwaves of grief and confusion so deep within Timothy's core that it left him with an eternally dull sting in his chest accompanied by a feeling of vertiginous nausea. Although still under the age of ten at the time of her death she had too much knowledge of sadness for her age. She lost too much of her innocence witnessing Timothy's depression, and knew the evils of the world and that they existed in his mind. These

evils created such a thick fog between the two of them. Moments that they used to spend together in great jubilee were replaced with solitary evenings on the couch for Caroline while Timothy hibernated between his sheets. He missed most Breakfasts and every Lunch and Dinner—most of which Caroline replaced with a tub of icecream and a reused and gnawed on plastic spoon.

It happened three summers after the passing of their parents on a bright, reflective lake, where they often vacationed. Caroline and Timothy sat by the lake observing the trees and played a game where, if they heard a bird chirp but didn't see it, they had to guess where it was coming from. Caroline, short, round cheeks with her baby fat, stood up at one moment and dipped her foot into the lake. "I want to stay here forever," she sighed.

Timothy, tired from a long day at work in the studio, used a splinter to clean out the dried up blue paint from underneath his nails. The sky was the same exact color. He was frustrated that the painting wasn't going as well as it should. He should have finished by now. Caroline walked over to him. "Can we go into town today? For some ice cream?"

Timothy had to get back to work in the studio. He couldn't go into town, there would be no time. "I'll make you a Sundae," he said. "You stay right there."

He got up, and over his shoulders he saw a flock of birds. One little bird struggled to catch up. As he went inside the house, he decided Caroline would distract herself, as she often did when he was stuck with work. He took the ice cream out to let it thaw and figured he'd spend just a few minutes working before giving her this treat. He went up to his studio.

When Timothy walked back outside, the silence that occupied the lake weighed heavily in the air. The ice cream had melted on the countertop. He'd only been able to salvage a scoop of wilted strawberries, and he held the cup high above his head.

“Caroline,” he called. “Come and get it.”

Caroline did not respond.

Now, Timothy began to worry. Was she mad at him? Was she playing a prank, hiding? He got closer to the lake, and saw her hair floating in the murky green water, so blonde that, even when saturated, it resembled a white bed sheet floating in a washing bin.

“That’s not funny, Caroline,” Timothy said. Caroline was part of the swimming team at school, her lung capacity meant she could pretend to drown and did so often. He was tempted to go back inside, back to his painting, but something about the way her hair swayed, snakelike in the water, made him pause. Something was wrong. He dove in.

The body that Timothy struggled to get out of the lake wasn’t Caroline’s anymore, but was that of a fallen angel. By the time he got Caroline out of the lake, the sticky ice cream had already seeped deep into the crevices of the wooden deck, and he knew by her stiffened countenance and pruned features that she was gone, that she had risen. As soon as the paramedics arrived, they confirmed his suspicions, and Caroline was pronounced dead. Although he never knew *for sure* what happened on that desolate June day, he had his suspicions, and from then on he subconsciously promised himself that he would blame himself for her death until the day he died.

He moved to the cabin in an attempt to rid himself of the cobwebs that formed his neural pathways. He possessed the unique and vital quality rare in depressed individuals of self-awareness and a lack of denial. He knew how he was feeling and didn’t want that—he wanted an impactful and fruitful life for himself. He thought that if he moved there, the seclusion would synchronize with his natural introversion and would create a much-needed harmony within him.

From the moment Timothy moved into the cabin, he felt a strange dark fog envelop him fully as he sank into the most profound depression he ever had. He had never hated himself more and was filled with such a sinister feeling of self-disgust that he didn't find himself worthy of living anymore. Timothy never went outside, stopped eating, and only got out of bed once or twice a day because if he didn't, his bladder would explode. Unaware that he was dying a slow and morose death, Timothy decided that he was so far gone into the well of depression that even an echo of hope seemed impossible. He was planning to end his suffering and his life eternally.

Timothy was the type of person that never remembered his dreams. He always woke up feeling that he had just gone to bed seconds earlier, and the only memory he had of his sleep was a pool of blackness. However, the night that Timothy decided to kill himself he had the most vivid and transcendental dream imaginable. He had gotten into bed on this particular night knowing that he would do it the following day, and, although he did not know how he was going to do it, he knew that it had to be successful. So he layed in bed with the window next to him cracked partially, and as the blizzard roared on outside, he heard the whistle of the wind escaping the atmosphere as it found its way into his room and tickled his cheekbones. This sting on his face was the most he had felt in months. Whether from the wind's chilling aridity or the subconscious acceptance and understanding that his life was about to end, Timothy wasn't sure, but at once and in a fleeting moment, a solitary tear escaped his left tear duct, traveled down his sallow face, and jumped off his chin onto his bed as he slipped into a deep sleep.

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The next time Timothy opened his eyes, he became blind from the white heat of the Sun's harsh rays. He was on a boat floating atop of a crystal clear lake— its turquoise sheet contrasting distinctly with the white transparency of its reflection. The dingy light-brown canoe that

grounded him sat right in the center of the lake as he fell equidistant to the wall of water oaks surrounding. Flies swarmed the air and bumped lazily into his face as the audaciously and characteristically humid air suffocated him into a drowning state of hysteria. To his knowledge, he appeared as desolate and abandoned as he did in real life, but with an overwhelmingly additional sense of grief that clouded his vision and obscured his perception.

Timothy knew he was dreaming with a dubious cognizance, partly due to the difference in weather and how he, despite his hazy dream-induced mindset, felt less of the physical effects of depression. What mainly gave it away, though, was an eerie sense of nostalgia that took over his mind and gave him a sharp pain in his forehead. Timothy felt like he had been there before and that there was something dark and menacing about the space that he inhabited.

Timothy's chest pounded and his heart raced as all of these thoughts entered and sunk their teeth into his mind. And, at once, he felt a sharp and sudden feeling of nausea that dropped rocks into his stomach as he escaped denial and realized exactly where he was. He instantly and instinctively grabbed the edge of the canoe so tightly that his knuckles turned white and peered down into the water that was both metaphorically and literally transparent. He surveyed the water with similarly glossy eyes and saw the saturated straw that he recognized from that fatal Summer's day. But, to Timothy's disbelief and surprise, escaping from the strands of straw that were Caroline's hair were multiple tiny bubbles. Timothy flipped headfirst into the lake without a second thought out of a combined feeling of instinctual fear and hope.

That was the first time Timothy had come face to face, eye to eye, with his sister since her death. Besides the static nature of her countenance and the pale shrivel of her lips, she appeared precisely the same as she had on that warm June afternoon, down to each freckle on her cheek and pimple on her chin. Her soft, lavender blouse floated up towards the surface of the

water as her dark brown pants sank. Although underwater, she had a peculiar sense of buoyancy that allowed her to float upright as if standing on top of the water that fully enveloped her.

The fantastical nature of Timothy's dream state allowed him to stay underwater with her for as long as he wanted. For a while, he just stared at her as his seemingly incessant tears joined the lake water with an almost-perfect homogeneous unity. Taking in every facet of her profile was all that he could bring himself to do—all that he allowed himself to do—in fear that his consciousness might take this moment away from him with an absence of agency similar to that of his sister's death.

Abruptly, the outer concentric circle that was the white's of Caroline's eyes gradually took over both her iris and her pupil until all that was left was a sea of innocence. Stunned, all that Timothy could do was stare with a gentle fright that put goosebumps on his saturated skin. Suddenly, as if the rays of Sun that pierced themselves into the lake like a needle through plastic were a projector and her clean-slatted eyes were a screen, Timothy began to see all of Caroline and his most happy and carefree memories in her eyes. He saw the first time he showed her how to ride a bike and how, although she fell over and over again, she got back up with a perpetual smile on her face. He saw them driving down a highway during the Spring with all of the windows down, how their hair slapped their faces leaving fresh wind burns as their eyes dried and watered and their throats became hoarse from yelling songs. And, most distinctly, he saw them during their very last Winter together. They were catching snowflakes on their tongues during a gentle snowfall in February. Caroline kept asking Timothy why the crisp, frigid feeling of the snowflake hitting and melting on her tongue only lasted a brief moment before it turned hot again. Every time, Timothy replied that it was only a fleeting moment and that no feeling, especially the good ones, lasts forever. And, every time, Caroline naively asked him why not.

It was at the cessation of this illusory time capsule that, in one swift and graceful motion, Caroline closed her eyes, turned away from him, and effortlessly swam until she was out of sight. Forever gone, forever remembered. A gentle wave of heavenly relief massaged Timothy's hippocampus, freeing him from the cell of survivor's guilt that has imprisoned him all of these years. He swam up until his nose was up above the water. Once his eyes adjusted, Timothy noticed that the once lorn circle of trees was replaced with their old lake house, and on that once fatal deck he saw two lambs— one much bigger than the other— sleeping peacefully... innocently... virtuously.

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Timothy slept eight hours that night. When he woke up in the morning, he was hungover with relief from the drunken highs and lows of his dream from the night before. What had started with deep, melancholic grief turned into a poignant feeling of yearning that made his chest feel warm and his head clear. For the first time in a long time, he was sure not only of himself but also of his intentions. He stood up to open the window by his bed a quarter of the way open and, for the first few hours of the morning, layed in bed and watched the snow fall as quiet, gentle sobs escaped his cloudy eyes and barely parted lips.

Eventually, though, he got up, and going downstairs, made himself a bowl of warm oatmeal and white tea. As he waited for them to cool down, Timothy watched as the steam from both the cup and the bowl joined forces and traveled together to the cedar roof before silently going their separate ways at the roof's barrier. Subtly, he allowed a tender smile.

Timothy spent the rest of the day sitting by the fire. Positioning himself right at its base on a thick, wool rug, the hearth intensely heated up and almost burned his nose, cheekbones, and fingertips as the rest of his body warmed up with a gentle intensity. His mind went entirely blank



as he stared into the orange flames with soft elation. The smell of Maplewood smothered his face and tickled his olfactory nerves with rich satisfaction. He let out a few sighs every once in a while that both relieved his brain from the smoke and coincided with his all-consuming content.

As the day grew old, Timothy looked out of the window across the room from the fireplace and noticed that, as the sky began to darken, the once-gentle snow storm began to pick up. With a childlike manner, Timothy walked over to the door without hesitation and draped his coat over his shoulders before securing his winter boots tightly on his feet. As soon as he opened the door, his already rosy nose turned red with the cold, and the wind was so strong that it created a tunnel of pressure between the inside and outside of the cabin.

Although covered, Timothy felt the cold air on every square inch of his skin for the first time in months. And, this moment was the most electrified that he had felt in his entire life. In awe not only of the nature of life but also of himself, he grinned as hard as he could and let out a yell so loud that it echoed and bounced off of the mountain walls, its resonance robust and hardy. Timothy then looked up into the velvet navy sky, glittered with eternal luminosity and countless stars. He opened his mouth to allow a single snowflake to fall on his hot tongue. Only, the snowflakes didn't stop, and he was left with constant and ceaseless pangs of burning ice.

Timothy fell backward through an abounding sense of euphoria as his body sank a couple of inches into the soft, powdery snow. Although uninhibited by the tunnels of stark snow surrounding him, he noticed that it contrasted distinctly with the sky above. Timothy, after a while, closed his eyes and let himself feel it all with blind ecstasy. The wind that harshly grazed his cheek, the thousands of snowflakes melting into each and every one of his pores, the way the snow crunched with every slight move that he made: he felt it all. And then, with an irony so

astute that Caroline's heavenly chuckle let out a million snowflakes, Timothy began to make snow angels.