

A Day to Remember, A Promise – Jade, Year 12, NSW

The warm flow of *Can't Help Falling in Love* kissed her ears as they drove. Her grandfather hummed quietly in the front seat as her brother fidgeted in the seat beside her, eager to escape. A soft 'tick-tick' of the indicator, followed by the distinct 'crunch- rustle- crunch' of leaves under the wheels meant the arrival at our destination. Before the wheels had ceased motion, the door was open and a flash of movement shook the car.

"Someone's in a rush!" Her grandfather chuckled, removing the keys from the ignition. "Come on. Oh." Groaning as he heaved himself out of the car.

Click. The gold door of the Toyota Camry swung open, and with another soft *Click*, she was unclipped from my seat.

"Slow down. I have little legs," she whines, running after her grandfather.

"Come on, little one. Do you want to hold my hand?"

She nods and reaches up, putting her hand in his; their shoes click against the cobblestone path as they walked to the big oak. *Clack, clack, clack. Tip-tap tip-tap, tip-tap tip-tap, tip-tap tip-tap.*

"Do you think you can beat your brother up to the top of the tee?" Her eyes lit up, then she pouted. There was no way, she could beat him, he was faster, stronger and taller than she.

Grandpa lifted her chin up with his thumb and smirked softly. "Go on, Emerald, give it your best go," he whispered, his blue eyes sparkling in the sun. She smiles, running off towards the tree.

"You'll never catch me!"

She races after her brother up the tree; two monkeys running up the mountain. Mischievous laughs from above, and she's lost the race; her brother sits at the top of the tree, smirking down at her.

"Come on kids, it's time to go."

"Ok, Pa! Hmph." Flying through the air with grace, her brother landed on the ground with a soft *thump*. "Ah, perfect landing."

"Good job, buddy."

"Can we go and get ice cream?"

“In a minute, we just have to wait for your sister. Come on down, Emerald.”

“Mmh...” She bit her lip, eyes glancing over the enormous branch; the ground looms miles underneath her. She shook her head quickly, leaning back towards the enormous tree trunk. Underneath, her grandfather stands, looking up at her.

“Come on little one. Jump on down, I’ll catch you.” She hesitates, looking over the edge once more. His arms reach up for the branch, and she reaches down, hands only an inch apart.

“Come on,” he whispered. “It’s ok. Be brave.”

She took a deep breath in and closed her eyes. Then, she jumped.

“Hah! See, that wasn’t so bad, huh?” She opened her eyes; a familiar face smiling back. “I’ll always be there for you. I promise. Let’s go back to the car, my little bird.”

He began to spin in circles, slowly at first, and then picking up some speed; Emerald spun with him, free in his arms, like a sparrow in the wind. Young, carefree giggles filled the air, like a warm summer breeze.

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She sits in the pews, next to her grandmother and father, tears in her grandmother’s ageing eyes. A sea of black surrounds her, and white lilies sit at the end of each pew. Her brother sits still next to her, holding back tears, his face red and puffy from crying earlier on. She wasn’t quite aware of what was happening, but as the tears flowed around her, tears begin to form in her young eyes.

“Tomorrow, we’ll go to the oak—our little tradition. I promise. Go to bed, little one.”

She hugs him, the familiar smell of cologne overwhelming her senses.

“Emerald... I love you, forever.”

“I love you too, Pa. I’ll see you tomorrow.” She walked away, and he smiled sadly.

“Sweet dreams, little one.”

Can’t Help Falling in Love plays once more as her row stands up. She reaches for her grandfather’s hand, but cannot find it. Instead, the soft palm of her grandmother’s hand is felt against her young palm. Silence in the church, except for the soft melody of Elvis. Soft sobs from beside her, as they walk down the aisle towards the front. Photos of her grandfather line the front of the altar, and she is handed a single lily. Her brother lays his flower first, and

pauses for a moment, wiping away tears. She follows next with her grandmother; laying her lily in front of a framed picture of her and her 'pa' at the oak tree that they loved dearly.

"Tomorrow, we'll go to the oak... I promise." Words echo in her head as she stands at the front. The youthful face of her grandfather smiles back, and the tears stream down her young face. Warmth absorbs her as her grandmother hugs her, trying to stay strong for her granddaughter, but struggling. They release the hug, and she takes her grandmother's hand once more. They walk back to their seats, his smiling face in her memories, and his soothing voice in her mind.

I'll always be with you. I promise...