

Will to Live - Sophia, Year 6, NSW

Part I

A scream rips through the air. I tense. It's from a small grove of trees, just outside my school. A second one, this time a voice I recognise. One of my classmates, Mitchell Lauthry.

That settles it. I can't leave people from my school, people I might know if they survive, to whatever is going on there. I know it's dangerous, I can feel it. I don't care. Leaping to my feet, I crash through the bushes.

Then, I see the monster. It's built like a wolf, but three times larger, dripping hissing black saliva from its mouth. The beast is black as night, with claws and teeth the size of small blades. Huddled against a tree are two students, Mitchell and another boy. Henry, I think. It doesn't matter anyway. They're going to die if I don't help. I'm going to die if I do help, probably.

If it means others can live though, I'd trade away my life a thousand times in an instant. My mother always told me I was too selfless, that I always put others before myself. Guess she was right. Even if she's not alive to see it.

I rush forward, darting between the hound and the boys. Mitchell's sixteen, like me, but the other student is younger, probably only a Year 7. It snaps and growls at me, its attention averted. Good. I signal for the two to run, and they follow it.

I'm alone now, I guess. Its eyes are filled with pure rage and bloodlust, glowing sickly green with a strange cursed blaze. Is this really how I'm supposed to die? During lunch break, at Hollyfield High School, bleeding out or eaten, shielded by leaves? I almost laugh. At least I'll be with nature.

It's stalking closer, and my fear returns. I'm sure it can hear my pounding heart, see the shaking in my limbs, smell my panic and terror.

I wasn't expecting the green fire to come spitting out of its mouth. I don't have time to dodge or avoid the attack. I can only hope I bought enough time for all the other people in the school, kept the creature occupied.

A moment before impact, time seems to slow.

Golden and bloodred whorls of what I can only assume to be magic flows from my hands, forming an impenetrable barrier between me and the attack, which dissipates harmlessly against the surface. The strange light loops back towards me, begging me to take control.

Acting on pure instinct, I slash the air with a hand. I don't know what I thought would happen. But the light forms an arc of flame. The monster just barely manages to leap back.

A lump rises in the back of my throat. What am I supposed to even do next? I can't control my newfound power, at least not fully. It prepares to pounce, but I stay frozen, rooted to the spot. I can't move.

Seconds before it splits me open, a blur in black charges out from the trees and slams the animal to the ground. I only barely manage to back away before they begin pulling the same element I used just earlier from the air, forcing it into a solid shape. Except this time, it's silver and blue, and much faster moving. It writhes through the air like liquid metal, forming a wicked spear.

The stranger stabs it into the hound's throat, tearing its head almost clean off its body. Inky pitch blood, gleaming in the sunlight on the blade - but only for a moment. Then the newcomer dispels the weapons, letting it crumble to wisps. Slowly, before my eyes, the corpse of the creature turns to dust, now nothing more than a mound in the grass.

The person is finally still enough I can see them fully, and their appearance immediately sets alarm bells ringing in my head. They are a girl, probably my age, with messy, raven-dark hair and pale skin. A figure in black, she looks terrifying but also strangely beautiful, like an angel of death. But her eyes... they are molten gold, just like the part-demons in the stories my mother used to tell me. She had always warned me; *eyes of gold, soul of night, hearts too cold to see others' plight.*

"Don't worry, I won't hurt you. By the way, I'm Nyx Crux. Who are you?" She says it cautiously, with a non-threatening tone.

"I'm Flora Ayeolene. Call me Fey, I guess." I guess it won't hurt to tell her my name, and they sound friendly enough. It doesn't really matter here anyway.

Part II

The car is quiet. We don't need to speak to fill the silence. In fact, it's comforting. Knowing that my best friend, who's stayed with me since we were sixteen, is here.

Fey is driving, maneuvering smoothly through the traffic. Sometimes it's hard to believe it's been twenty-one years. But then again, we've seen so much together one might think we've known each other our entire lives. So many attacks from various demons, from barely formed imps to full-strength Shades. Even when my 'family' labelled me insane, a full-on demon, and locked me in a heavily warded room, she helped me escape. I've taught Flora enough for her power to rival a master's.

A red light. Now we have our own families. Our own lives. My son Sebastian, and her daughter Melanie.

A green light. We move again, gliding along the asphalt of a street worn smooth by the vehicles of thousands of people.

A car, speeding toward us. Its tyres screech. Flora tries to maneuver out of the way, anything to lessen the impact. It's already too late.

A crash, and the dashboard crumples. Above us, streetlights flicker, then stabilise. I tear my seatbelt off easily with the strength that being part demon grants me. In an instant, I create a shining blade of light in my hand, and cut Fey's. All this, in just a split second. Another gift of being descended from demons: speed.

A spark, between two engines. Not much, but enough to light the fuel still in the cars. For a brief moment, the dark night sky lights up with a brilliant flash, like lightning through a storm. I kick the door, but it only dents. It's stuck, and there isn't time to find another exit.

An explosion, blowing the machines into pieces. A moment before it rends the flesh from my bones, time seems to slow. Fey tackles me, shielding me from the blast.

As quickly as it comes, it fizzles out. Dust swirls around still, and burning wreckage litters the ground. I do not notice though.

Flora's skin is scorched, covered in burns that blacken and twist before my eyes. I can hear her breathing, so I know she is still alive, but her heartbeat is sluggish and her breaths are laboured.

"Don't die on me," I pull her closer, but deep down, I know she can't survive. "Don't you dare."

Slowly, with shuddering movements, she tips her head up to look at me. She locks eyes with me.

"You... saved... me... when we... first... met. Now... it is... my... turn," Fey rasps, before turning limp.

I can tell she's dead, I can sense it. I check to make sure anyway. No pulse.

Blood is seeping from her body, lying prone on the ground. It stains my skin and clothes, but I don't care.

The paramedics arrive minutes later. They take away one person, the driver from the other car in a stretcher, but they tell me it is too late for Flora. For Fey. The next few hours pass in a blur, but I remember crying in an unfamiliar car, still crusted with Fey's blood.

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The funeral is small, private. I am hidden, tucked in the shadows. Fey never wanted my family to know about me, or our powers. She said she didn't want them to be endangered by us. I agreed. Around me, I cast a small illusion to disguise my presence, but I can't bring myself to do anything further. I can't gather the concentration to do it.

The celebrant drones on about her accomplishments in life. Prodigy. Scientist. Helper. Mother. With each title they announce, the gnawing pit of grief within me grows. They didn't know Fey. Why should they get to talk about her like she is a trophy, as if the only thing that matters about her is what she has achieved?

My mind begins to wander, thinking of all she has done for me and everyone else. How she was prepared to sacrifice herself for a few people she barely knew, even as a teenager. The growing list the preacher tells of is *nothing* compared to what she has done.

But in the end, I guess it is up to the people she knew to carry her memory.

You were my will to live.

Now I live for both of us.