

Beneath the Boulder, Beyond the Cliff - Jocelyn, Year 6, NSW

Nothing matters if there is nothing to live for.

Hazel clutches her bag, biting her lip hard enough to draw blood. Her feet dangle off the cliff, swaying gently with the wind. Her eyes grow large as they stare at the endless abyss. Wide and frightened, yet filled with acceptance.

Like she always knew this was going to happen.

She takes a deep breath and stands up, her legs shaky. Her nails dig in her palms as she stumbles back. She has slightly lost control of her footing. Her heart thumps, and she is glad that she did not go forward. There is so much to live for. She looks back. There is nothing but endless plains and hills. How far will she have to walk to see the end of it? *Not far*, she muses silently. Her bag has nothing except a few mere scraps of beef jerky and a water bottle. One litre at most. Not nearly enough to go the whole way.

She looks from where she came from. The road is blocked by a colossal boulder. Her phone has no battery.

She has no way back home.

Her family is already crushed by the rocks. She hates them as much as she hates that she agreed to come here in the first place. Her last regret, probably.

Hazel walks up to the boulders, brushing her fingers across the rough surface. She looks underneath, praying that there is a crevice enough for her small figure to squeeze through. She is trapped. Forever. She looks up at the clear, blue sky. Not a single cloud hanging overhead. She feels her face pale despite the endless heat. Maybe she could fire an SOS signal? But this part is isolated. Her mother had to insist on driving to a remote area.

Look what it has brought to us now, mother. Look what it has brought us now. Her inner tone is bitter.

She doesn't know how to feel. She can't cry tears. Not that she really can't, but it feels wrong to. Besides, her family isn't worth that much. She knows that her brother, in this circumstance, would feel quite different in respect to how her family has treated them. But in the end, they still didn't deserve this. No one did. They were neglectful to Hazel, yes, but polite. Funny how family could seem so distant but nice. Funny how out of all people, her parents chose their favourites.

Maybe she deserved it. But she doesn't think she did. She hasn't done anything too bad. But now, as she reflects back on her accomplishments and the greater good she has done, she

realises she wasn't exactly the best daughter there ever was. She has no reason to even dislike them.

She would, as well.

She leans down, breathing hard, catching her breath when she, in truth, has barely done any activity. She reaches into her bag and gulps down water that feels like a bare sip. Hazel is alarmed at how much she has drunk.

Abruptly, a ringing tone sounds in the air. It sounds like her mother's ringtone. She stiffens. It seems to be coming from the boulder. She presses her ear, hard, onto the boulder. The surface is cold, to her surprise.

Goosebumps pop onto her arms as she senses it coming from the right. She moves her body instinctively. The ringing tone is louder. Her heart skips a beat.

Someone must be calling from her mother's phone. It is still alive.

Maybe she can get help before she dies.

Hazel's hand slips into a small crack she found earlier. She feels the concrete floor, trying to seek for a smooth facet. Her hand goes to the vibrating sensation, and after what seems like an eternity of feeling and searching, she swears she's touched the edge of her mother's phone. Just a little bit more... Her hand stretches a little further. She doesn't notice the jagged edge of the rock. As she leans forward, it gashes a deep scar on her stomach. She flinches instantly, the movement making the phone slip a little deeper.

She curses silently, but now she has other problems to deal with. She withdraws her arm as she rolls a little backwards.

She slips a little and she tumbles dangerously close to the cliff. She stops just in time. Her arms are shaking uncontrollably. She can imagine her grave already. *Hazel Lily Citala. 2010-2025*. And that's *if* they can find her body. She bets that everyone will forget her existence. Maybe a couple of close friends will grieve, but it'll be old news in a month's time. She shivers at the thought. What would happen if she died? Would her memory evaporate? She does not know, and she does not intend to figure it out yet.

Right now, her most pressuring issue is the gash on her stomach. She grabs her bag, and presses the cloth to her stomach. It immediately turns a carnelian red. She almost stops in case she loses her sanity.

I have nothing to lose, she tells herself, *except my life*. She is probably going to die of an infection anyways. She looks back, unsure of anything now. The gash on her stomach aches a lot and she can't think straight. Tears finally come to her eyes, but she doesn't let them fall.

She tries not to show her vulnerability to no one, or to the world. She doesn't know anymore. She tilts her head, her bangs falling onto her face. They tickle softly on her skin. *There really isn't any point now, is there?*

She turns her head just enough to view the boulder again. Her family is invisible under there. Hidden under the rocks. Shielded, but protected. A feeling surges through her. Empty, and filled with longing. The gash she has numbs as she slumps down.

The ringing tone has stopped. She's surprised it lasted so long.

Staring at the endless chasm, she huddles her blood-streaked bag close to her chest. The little warmth she finds there is far more than enough.

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Hazel doesn't know how long she has waited. Hours? Days? Perhaps a week? She doesn't know. Time seems lost in the blur here. Her food is almost gone, and so is her water. Due to the merciless heat, her phone has fried.

What is she waiting for anyways?

Nothing. Each day, no one has run in like a knight in shining armour.

She doesn't know what she's waiting for ; death maybe? The thought amuses her even though it shouldn't. Should it? Her back aches so much, and she is pretty sure that the scar on her stomach is infected. It hurts a lot, but the other thoughts surrounding her are enough to keep the pain at bay. She takes a deep breath. The gnawing hunger in her stomach is killing her, both literally and metaphorically. She wrinkles her nose. She doesn't know how long she can go on for before dying of starvation. She may just end herself right before.

Hazel blinks slowly. Her lashes are heavy with dried dust and sweat. She licks her cracked lips. Her water is gone. Her food is gone.

Soon, her strength will be gone too.

She stares at the sky once again. It's still so blue. Unforgivingly blue. It reminds her of tears and oceans. Waves and eyes. It is hotter than the day before, but this time seems different. It's the kind of blue that makes her wonder if the world even knows she's dying, or even if they care. She knows they probably don't. They care as much as any stranger would.

She rests her head on the blood-stained bag. It's already dried and crusty. She tries to stand up, but her knees give way. The warmth she once founded has already faded; long, long ago. She breathes out softly. It feels like her lungs are sighing. Maybe they are. They are failing her and her life. She doesn't know if she will ever wake up tomorrow. She isn't even sure

what tomorrow is supposed to feel like anymore or where. She has pondered about the afterlife plenty in the past couple of days. Where will she end up? Maybe it'll be in Heaven. Maybe it'll be in Hell. Maybe it'll be nothingness.

Maybe she will endure for another day. Maybe, she will be saved or she'll wake up. Maybe this is all a dream.

She hopes. And hopes.

She doesn't cry. There are not enough tears for her to cry. Only the ache, and the quiet. The peace. She tilts her head towards the cliff's edge. The wind brushes her skin like a whisper. The sun glares in her face. She ignores it. She closes her eyes. She is still afraid. She is still scared. Maybe nothing matters if there is nothing to live for. But maybe.

Just maybe.

It's okay to end like this.