

A New Beginning

Page slept in until noon, which is pretty standard for her these days. Not even the sunshine glaring through the curtains is enough for her to open her eyes. Instead of waking up at six in the morning to make a cup of coffee and gaze at the Colorado mountains, all Page could do was retreat further into her bright yellow sheets.

Meanwhile, Althea was scurrying around the kitchen. The clinks and clanks of dishes sounded as she made breakfast. When it was done, Althea walked up the stairs of their cozy apartment to knock on her sister's door.

"I made french toast if you want any. Just like how dad makes it."

Page continued sleeping. The only sign of life being the finches chirping outside her window.

Althea thought back to the time where they would go hiking together during the summer, accompanied by their friend Aster. They would wake up at five in the morning just to walk up the mountain trails and watch the sun bust through clouds in the sky to turn them a rosy orange. The breeze of the early morning air brushed through the pine trees and orange wildflowers, which made them motivated to take on the day.

One night, as a full moon shined down on Earth, Page received a phone call.

"Who is it?" Althea said.

She looked up from her phone. "It's Aster's father."

The last time he had called Page was when Aster got home five minutes past curfew.

Hoping she was not in trouble this time, Page closed her eyes, took a deep breath, and answered.

“Hi Mr. Clarke.”

“Page.” There was a long pause. Althea glanced over with widened eyes. She made her way over to the couch where Page was sitting.

“Everything okay?” Althea asked with concern in her voice.

Mr. Clarke sighed. “I know you guys are close to Aster,” he sniffed. His choppy inhale heard over speakerphone. Aster was on a study abroad program in Ireland. He loved travelling and dreamt of backpacking across Europe. Aster’s adventurous spirit was contagious.

“Well, he um... is no longer with us.”

Page’s face turned white and her stomach dropped down to her toes. The floor beneath her feet seemed as surreal as this devastating news.

“Mr. Clarke, we’re so sorry,” said Althea as Page sat there speechless.

One morning Aster took a cab to a local coffee shop. Discovering new places filled him with joy. He paid, waited for his iced latte, and made his way back to the cab. On his way back to his host family’s home, the driver rushed through a red light. Unable to stop soon enough, another driver crashed into the cab. Soon after the accident, Aster’s brave, dear soul ascended towards the sky.

Ever since Mr. Clarke’s phone call, Page was not the same person she once was.

Althea checks in on Page again. 11:55, the clock reads. She should be waking up any minute.

Five minutes go by. Noon. Althea nudges her sister's shoulder. Page begins stretching and grunting while laying on her side as her eyes are greeted by the sun. She uses her sheets to block out the light.

"Come on, Page. Time to eat. There's some french toast leftover."

The only response Althea got was an exhale through Page's nose.

"Okay, I'll bring it up to you."

She made her way down stairs, warmed up the food, sprinkled on powdered sugar, and put syrup in a little white glass. Althea then placed it on a breakfast bed tray alongside a tall cup of orange juice. The stomp of her walking up the steps makes it apparent to Page that her sister's coming back to her room.

"Here you go," Althea says as she hands over the food to Page. "I know you've been going through a lot."

Page continued to eat as Althea talked.

"I think it would be good for you if you got out of the house. Please, Page."

In that moment, Page felt her heart drop down from her chest into her stomach. She felt the exact same way she felt upon receiving the phone call. Tears blurred her vision.

Page took a deep breath. "How am I supposed to explore the world without Aster? It just feels wrong. He was always the one who inspired me to be the best I could be. And now I have to do that on my own- without any guidance from him." Page's voice breaks more and more upon saying each word.

"Aster would want us to go on an adventure, with or without him," Althea said, resting her hand on Page's arm.

“But I can’t even get out of bed. My body feels limp. Yet you still want to go. How come you only consider your own feelings?”

Althea looked down to the floor, her body feeling restless. “I just want to help you.”

“Well, you haven’t. You bring me breakfast each morning, but what else have you done?”

“Page, please-,” Page continued.

“Leave.”

“Page, I-”

“Go!” Page’s voice echoed through her bright, yet shadowed bedroom.

For the rest of the day, Althea thought about their conversation. Althea wracked her brain thinking of what she could do to help. Feeling uncomfortable stepping near Page, she spent the rest of her day in her room.

While looking around, Althea stumbled into a box of tarot cards. The yellow box was beat up, but the magician on the front was still standing tall. Having not touched it in quite some time, she pulled the cards out. Upon doing this, one card fluttered to the floor. She picked it up, and saw a man standing on the edge of a cliff with tall waves rushing behind him. The vibrancy of the card gave Althea some hope. The yellow on the card made her think of a new beginning.

Later that night, Althea snuck into Page’s room. She kept looking at Page, and then at the card. The phrase “*a new beginning*” kept cycling through her head.

“A new beginning,” Althea whispered, “... a new beginning”. A single tear strolling down her face.

The next morning, Page was nowhere to be found.

Page opens her curtain and is greeted by a bright yellow sky without a single cloud in sight. Her body becomes tense.

“Althea?!” she yells. “Are you there?”

She attempts to open her door, but it refuses. With every pull she loses hope. Suddenly, she sees a face smiling at her through the window. She sees a man with blonde hair just barely reaching his pale neck. Page slowly lifts her feet up from the floor, proceeding with caution as she takes each step. The man continues smiling and then begins to tap on the window. He appears to be holding a white rose in his left hand, and a small bag of possessions on a stick in the other. Page also can’t help but notice the intricate design on his clothing. His flowy, shredded-up sleeves reveal a white, long-sleeve shirt underneath. The pattern seems to be leaves with yellow circles and stars scattered throughout. Page then hears a bark.

Concerned, Page makes her way to the window. She peers out, trying to ignore the man staring at her. The man then begins speaking, but Page struggles to hear him as he sounds muffled through the glass. Seeing no other choice, she opens up the window.

“What a wonderful day outside, isn’t it?”, the mystery man says with a big grin.

Page looks at him, with a sense of detachment from her surroundings. “Who are you and why are you here?”, she questions with a slight stammer in her voice.

“Why, I am The Fool and I am here to seek adventure. Wherever my dog takes me, that’s where I go!”

“That’s why I heard a dog bark. So I’m not hearing things?”

“Yes, of course! So let’s go and set sail!”

The Fool skips off with his dog trailing behind him. Page watches them as they become smaller in the distance.

The Fool looks around as if something is wrong. He shouts, “Well, well! Aren’t you coming with?”

She stood there for a few seconds, looked around, and glanced back at her room. “This is for you, Aster.”

Page scurries until she finds herself next to the man and his dog. They lead her to a small, wooden boat. The Fool steps inside. Page decides to copy him. They then set off, and The Fool begins rowing. The rest of the boat ride is silent, except for a few moments where The Fool giggles with pleasure. The ocean breeze flows through Page’s hair as she admires the yellow sky.

Suddenly, the dog howls. “We’re almost there. I can see it!” The Fool shouts with enthusiasm as a tall, stone tower casts a dark shadow over them. The calming, bright sky suddenly becomes overrun with clouds.

The Fool stops the boat at shore. Page watches him tie the boat to the dock as a means to distract herself from the sky. In an instant, the sky turns pitch black. The only things lighting up the land are the wooden torches mounted on the building.

“I’m going to look around this island. See if I can find any hidden treasures. Oh visiting a new place. What a delight!” The Fool then skips off into the distance, his dog following suit.

“Wait, come back!” Page trembles as she watches The Fool walk away. “Hello? Is anyone here?”

The ground shook, and so did she. She felt the warm breath of an unknown entity on her shoulder.

“Yes, someone is here indeed.”

Page resisted looking behind her as she feared what would meet her eyes.

“Come on. You can’t stand there forever. Look at me, and pay me the respect I deserve.”

Page gulped as she clenched her fists, resisting the temptation to look and see what or who was behind her. Her feet began to turn her around, involuntarily, as if the being possessed a special power. Page closed her eyes, but, as soon as she turned around, her eyes were forcibly opened.

“There, now I can see you... and you can see me.”

Her body trembled in fear as an entity seemingly composed of four different species stood looking down at her. A goat head with outlandish antlers and straggly beard met her gaze. Gray bat wings extend outwards from both sides of its back. The torso resembled the human body, with its left hand holding a torch. Page’s eyes met the ground, and was taken aback when she saw the huge crows feet it had for legs. She struggled to look up and meet its eyes again as she would have to relive seeing the entity another time.

“Don’t just stand there. Come with me.”

The being yanked Page violently from the ground with its feet and flew her up to the top of the tower. She gasped. The ferocious sound of its bat wings swatting through the air. The entity released Page from its claws and dropped her into a hole at the top of the tower. Page’s cries echoed between the four walls until she hit the ground. When she met the ground, she heard the sound of metal scraping against brick. She laid still on her stomach as she tried to catch her breath, caressing the floor as she was grateful to still be alive.

Page lifted herself from the floor, and was met by a boy with curly, red hair. Everything about him felt so familiar, yet so foreign. His fiery tail scooped the air as it curled back up. A chain looped around his neck, and horns poking through the top of his head. When Page looked at him again, she realized who he was.

“Aster...” Page cried. “Is that you?”

He nodded with shock in his eyes. Page ran up to hug him, but before she could she felt the burn of his skin. The entity must’ve made Aster’s blood boil. A booming voice rang through the tower.

“Don’t look at him. Only look at me. Do as I say.”

Aster cried and reached out for Page as she looked away from him. “He’s... Satan.” Aster’s bottom lip quivered, and Page’s eyes filled with tears. She questioned why Aster was in hell. He was the one person who was there for her, and now he has to spend the rest of his life chained up as if he is Satan’s pet?

Satan swung his hand through the sky and flames began falling from the clouds. The rumble of thunder shook the ground, and an electric shock rattled the Earth. Aster and Page slowly began floating off the floor, being lifted up toward The Devil himself. To resist, they clung on to chains attached to the brick wall. As the two got closer to the top of the tower, the force of their grasps shattered the wall and bent the metal loop that fastened the chain to the brick. Page looked back at Aster, and let out a scream that made the tower shake more intensely as tears streamed down her flushed cheeks.

Unable to handle the force, the chain snapped and Aster yelped as he was swept through the tower's ceiling. Determined to save Aster, Page abandoned the idea of clutching on to the tower's wall and was snatched up by Satan's unruly force.

Page was greeted by The Devil's red, perturbed face. With his power, he forced Page to touch Aster's burning skin. As they embraced, she shrieked. The Devil laughed, knowing what he had done to him. Never did she think that the touch of a friend would be used as a source of torture. The two stayed floating in the sky, until Satan released them from his grasp. Out of the blue, Page and Aster separated, with Page falling into the body of water The Fool's boat was docked in. Aster, on the other hand, being pulled towards the glistening, full moon.

Page swam up for air, looking forward to seeing Aster. Her friend being nowhere in sight, her heart began to race. With her ears plugged from the water, she could just barely hear Aster shouting from above.

"Page!" There was a slight pause. "Thank you."

A bright light poked through the sky, and the sun parted through the black clouds. The Fool, using the power of the sun, refracted a ray of sunshine back at The Devil. Page then heard Satan screech and saw him dissolve to ashes. The silhouette of Aster's body was seen in the light, as a ray of sunshine took him up to a mass of white, fluffy clouds in the light blue sky.

Overwhelmed with emotion, Page swam back up to the surface, not being able to distinguish her tears from water droplets on her face. When she got back to land, Page spent a few minutes basking in the glorious sun. The Fool walked up to her, and cupped her face with his hands. Suddenly, he vanished- and so did the world around them.

Page grounded her feet back onto the soft, delicate Earth and began walking up a steep, green hill populated by sunflowers. After a while of walking, she saw her apartment complex only a few feet away. Page ran into the building, and knocked on her apartment door, soon to see Althea's face again. Without saying a word, they embraced.

After walking through a world full of extreme bliss and horror, Page was now ready to live life the way Aster would want her to. To the fullest- without fear.