

THE TREE

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Address
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INT. BEN'S ROOM - MORNING

BEN wakes up to the alarm blaring. He sighs and sits up, but barely has time to yawn before his excited sister ROWAN enters the room, dancing around.

ROWAN

(Sing-song voice)
Guess what day it is! Stop being
lazy, and get up Benji! It's our
birthday!

BEN

I told you to stop calling me that,
Rowan. Just call me Ben.

Ben sits up from his bed.

ROWAN

Are you excited to go to our tree!
We have to see how much it's grown!

BEN

I don't want to go. Get out, I have
to change.

ROWAN

(Whiny)
But it's our birthdaaay!

Ben grabs Rowan and escorts her out of the room. He slams the door on her and turns around to go change. Rowan can be faintly heard whining outside the door. Ben ignores her. After a moment, the door opens again and the brother steps out in the hallway, fully changed. Rowan is changed too.

ROWAN (CONT'D)

Finally! Took you long enough!

Ben ignores her, walking by her and towards the stairs. His sister hops along behind.

INT. KITCHEN - MORNING

The siblings enter the kitchen. MOM is there reading newspaper. She looks up when they enter.

MOM

Oh! Good morning. Do you want
breakfast?

Ben talks, sharply cutting his mom off.

BEN

I got it.

ROWAN

I'm not super hungry, thanks
though.

Rowan walks over to the table and sits down. Ben grabs cereal from a cabinet and pours himself a bowl. He walks over to the kitchen table and sits next to his sister. There's a moment of silence.

MOM

Do you want to visit the tree
today?

Rowan looks over at Ben

ROWAN

Come on Ben! Let's go with mom.

BEN

No.

There is a moment of awkward silence. Ben eats a bite of his cereal.

MOM

Uhh, Ben, how are you feeling
today?

Ben doesn't look at his mom

BEN

Fine.

There is another moment of silence. Mom seems hesitant to talk.

MOM

So...What's going on at school?

Ben looks up at his mom. He shrugs, and then takes another bite of cereal. Rowan rocks back and forth in her chair.

BEN

I'm going to go.

MOM

Okay. Uhh... Bye honey. Call me if
you need anything.

Ben grabs his backpack. He walks to the door and opens it. Rowan stands up.

ROWAN

Ben...

MOM

Honey, I'm just worried. I love you.

Ben looks at his mom, and then turns away. He walks outside, closing the door. As soon as the door closes, his mom slumps.

EXT. OUTSIDE THE HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Ben stalks away from the door. Rowan looks back at the house before following behind Ben.

ROWAN

I get that you're having a hard time but you could have at least responded to her.

Ben ignores her and continues walking forward, but throws his backpack off in the front yard.

ROWAN (CONT'D)

Uhh. What about school?

BEN

I'm ditching.

ROWAN

Are you going to tell mom?

BEN

No. I just don't want to deal with class. Or her.

Rowan looks like she wants to argue, but relents easily.

ROWAN

Alright, If that's what you want.

EXT. PARK

Rowan and Ben walk towards a bench in the park.

ROWAN

I forgot about this place. We use to go here all the time.

BEN

I know.

ROWAN

We learned how to ride our bikes over there! I think my knees are permanently scarred from the amount of times I fell.

Rowan chuckles at the memory.

BEN

Yeah.

Rowan looks over at Ben, curious.

ROWAN

Remember how long it took you to get off training wheels? You used to fall over in the sand every time you tried to go on two wheels.

BEN

Yeah, Rowan. We've talked about this before.

ROWAN

Oh, we have? Sorry, you know how I tend to forget stuff sometimes. But it is funny!

BEN

I guess.

ROWAN

What do you want to talk about then? Your skater boy phase?

BEN

Don't remind me

Ben almost hides a smile. Rowan gets excited by this.

ROWAN

You wore that stupid hat every day! You looked like a wannabe Eminem.

Ben almost laughs. Then he looks like he regrets that, or that he was thinking of something terrible.

ROWAN (CONT'D)

Ben? Hey, come on, we were just having some fun!

(MORE)

ROWAN (CONT'D)

You know, this reminds me of this joke I just heard, so what did the hat say to the scarf?

Ben doesn't respond, still looking upset.

ROWAN (CONT'D)

You hang around, while I go on-

BEN

Ahead, I know. You've told me this joke before.

ROWAN

Oh, I have? Sorry, I thought I just heard it...

BEN

And we've had this conversation before. Multiple times.

Ben looks at the ground, upset.

ROWAN

I didn't know. I'm sorry, I was just trying to cheer you up.

BEN

I know.

Ben and Rowan sit in silence

BEN (CONT'D)

Rowan, I can't keep doing this.

ROWAN

What, I didn't think my jokes were that bad!

BEN

But I've heard them all before. I hear the same thing every day. I just need...

ROWAN

Sorry. I just... I just forget.

BEN

I know Rowan! But I can't keep doing this!

Ben puts his face in his hands for a minute. Rowan wrings her hands, looking worriedly at Ben. She opens her mouth to speak a couple times, but thinks better of it. Ben looks up.

BEN (CONT'D)

You're not even real. You need to leave.

ROWAN

What?

BEN

I want you to leave.

ROWAN

How can I make you happy if I'm not here?

BEN

I can't be happy around you.

Rowan looks shocked and confused at that. He's never said anything like that to her before. Ben looks at the ground again, hand on his face. At that moment, Ben's phone rings. He looks to see the caller is his mom. He declines. He looks up where Rowan was. She's gone

INT. BEN'S HOUSE

Mom looks at her phone, which playing a pre-recorded message of Ben asking the caller to leave a message after the beep. She hangs up and sighs, looking worried.

EXT. PARK

Ben looks around, almost surprised that Rowan followed his request.

BEN

She's gone.

Ben is conflicted between needing Rowan to leave, and missing her anyway. He seems to be bouncing back and forth between if that was the right decision to make.

BEN (CONT'D)

That wasn't how that should have happened.

Ben stands.

BEN (CONT'D)

She deserves better. If I can't say goodbye to her directly anymore, I can at least say goodbye to the next best thing.

He begins to leave the park, his gait confident. He is obviously going somewhere.

EXT. BIRTHDAY TREE

Ben walks up to a solitary tree. Sitting in front of the tree, facing away from Ben, is Rowan. She's uncharacteristically still. Ben walks up to her.

BEN

Rowan?

Rowan turns towards Ben.

ROWAN

Oh! Hey, look how much the tree has grown!

BEN

I didn't think you'd be here.

ROWAN

I go here every birthday! Why wouldn't I be here?

BEN

I told you to leave back at the park... I thought you were gone.

ROWAN

Oh. That. I guess you can't get rid of me that easily!

Ben sits down next to Rowan. He takes her hand.

BEN

I'm sorry about what I said.

ROWAN

It's ok. I know I repeat things. It probably gets annoying.

Rowan looks away from Ben.

BEN

You could never annoy me! It's just hard for me, you constantly bringing up memories. You aren't really yourself.

ROWAN

I guess that's what happens when you die.

Rowan gives a sad smile.

BEN

What I said, back at the park. I love you! I didn't mean that you make me unhappy, I just...

Ben sighs.

BEN (CONT'D)

It's hard for me to talk to you every day. Be reminded that you're not really here. You're just...

ROWAN

Memories?

BEN

Yeah.

There's a long pause.

BEN (CONT'D)

I tried to be happy, but I'm just not with you here.

Rowan gives another sad smile

ROWAN

I thought I was just here to make you happy. I couldn't even do that.

BEN

It's okay. I still love you, but...

ROWAN

I can't stay here.

BEN

Yeah.

Rowan sighs, but smiles.

ROWAN

It's okay, Benji.

BEN

It won't be forever. I'll find you again, someday.

ROWAN

I'll be waiting.

Ben squeezes her hand.

BEN
I love you Rowan.

ROWAN
I love you Benji. And tell mom I
love her too.

BEN
Of course.

They both look back towards the tree, and slowly Rowan fades out of existence, her hand fading out of Ben's. He looks down at his empty hand, and wipes away tears. She's gone. As he sits in front of the tree, another figure comes into sight behind him.

MOM
Hey Ben. I thought you'd be here.

Mom looks relieved, and sits down where Rowan just was.

MOM (CONT'D)
I tried to call you.

BEN
I'm sorry. I was just having a hard
time. I should have texted or
something

Mom takes Ben's hand, and looks at him.

MOM
It's ok honey.

Ben opens his mouth to try to speak, but closes it, choked up. He sits for a second and tries again.

BEN
I miss her.

MOM
I do too.

Mom looks away and blinks something out of her eyes. There is another second of silence

MOM (CONT'D)
I love you so much. I'm here.
Always.

Ben hugs mom

BEN

I love you too. So does Rowan, even
if she's not here.

Mom almost smiles at that. She puts her arm around Ben and
they sit in silence, just being with each other.

FADE TO BLACK