

Stuti Shenoy

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preface

There was a blinding flash before it all went dark. What happened after that? I'm not very sure. All they told me was that I'm lucky I'm alive.

story

I sat up in bed, shaking my head as if it would clear my confusion. I looked at my mother's tear-stricken face as I realized something had gone terribly wrong. Before I could realize exactly what I was saying, I burst out, "Who died?"

I meant it as a joke and a smile cracked out on my face before I could stop it. It faded away when I saw my mother's face break into sobs. As my father led her out of the room so she could calm down, I focused on the two grim-looking men.

As I looked at them, one shot me a warning glance before I could say anything and one of them proceeded to explain the situation. "Before you can deadpan your way out of this, you might be interested to know that you were the one that almost died."

"What?" I sputtered. "That's literally impossible. Wouldn't I remember something like that happening?"

The one explaining sighed, and continued on. "My name is Dr. Hernandez."

He gestured to the man standing next to him. "His name is Dr. Levine, and he will be your therapist to help you maintain the trauma you went through."

At this point, I was freaked out. "What trauma? I can't even remember anything!"

Hernandez looked at me with a judgemental look. "Well, if you would let me explain with no interruptions," he stressed, "I would be happy to explain it all to you."

I nodded and leaned back in the bed as Dr. Levine took a seat in a chair nearby. "We're glad that we didn't have to sedate you, and you've stayed asleep this long. It would help numb down the pain and shock after immediate effect." I made a motion to interrupt, but Hernandez held up a hand and continued. "You've been in a car accident. It hit the passenger seat, exactly where you were sitting. Although no major injuries have been found until now, there is a chance that you might go blind."

I couldn't hold myself back now. I shook my head numerous times. "No. That's not going to happen. It can't happen." I looked back at him. "Is this just a precaution or is it likely that I'll lose my eyesight?"

Hernandez gave me a look that made my stomach roll, while Levine simply averted his eyes. “According to our predictions, there is a 94% chance that you will go blind.” As I sputtered unbecomingly, he continued his explanation. “You were exposed to a series of sharp flashes. As the nature of your accident was a hit and run, and the offender has still not been apprehended, we are unsure of what might have actually caused the flashes. Regardless, the effects are still extremely real, and we are going to be monitoring your eyesight over the next couple years.”

“At this time, this is all the information we are allowed to provide you on this topic.” Those words were what caused it. I didn’t say it out loud, but all the anger bottled up inside of me until it came out in the form of tears. They couldn’t tell me why I was going blind? What kind of a response was that? Yes, because I was going blind. Me. A thirteen year old boy. And they just couldn’t tell me why exactly my life was being ruined. Before I knew, there were tears rolling down my cheeks, and I was furiously wiping them. As I stared up through the blur, I saw Hernandez’s eyes soften, as Levine still adamantly looked everywhere but at me.

I calmed myself, as Levine started talking for the first time. His voice had a strange accent, but it was oddly comforting. That was the beginning of my friendship with Dr. Levine. “Alex,” he said. “I went through the same thing with my mom. You have no idea how I feel for you right now. I know you don’t want to talk about this, but we have to in order to ensure you live the best life that you could.”

“You went through this with your mom?” I whispered.

“I didn’t, I was just trying to make you feel better. It worked, didn’t it?”

I snorted out a laugh before I could stop it, and I saw Dr. Levine crack a smile for the first time. It wasn’t the fact that he had tried to lie to me that made me laugh, but the simple truth that I was so desperate for any sign of normality, I was willing to believe whatever I was told.

Hernandez and Levine walked out of my room soon enough to let me rest, and went to talk to my parents about the changes that were going to have to be made. After the nurse gave me my painkillers, she told me sternly that I have to sleep. Of course, I nodded and smiled at her, but my plans did not at all include sleeping. How could I sleep when my entire life had just been upended? The thoughts blazed through my brain one after another? My friends? My school? I checked my phone once, and my head started to hurt as the notifications kept coming. Most of them were missed calls from Wyatt. I messaged him once, that I was as okay as I could be and in the hospital. He responded

immediately, but I didn't want to deal with my life right then. Chances were, I was leaving that life behind. I took a deep breath, and tried to sleep.

It didn't work, and my eyes flew open soon enough. I checked the time, and it had only been fourteen minutes. A few days later, I was discharged from the hospital, and went home. My parents treated me like a fragile piece of glass, and watched me as I even walked one step around the house. My legs were perfectly fine by some miracle, which I was extremely thankful for. I had a broken arm, but the doctors assured me that considering the nature of the accident, I was lucky just to have a broken arm.

The next couple months were filled with basically nothing. I had a boring schedule of eating, sleeping, and driving the one hour there and back to Dr. Levine's office. I was being treated as a pet, and it bothered me to no end. However, I had been healed enough by the beginning of October, that I was sent back to school. Whichever class I walked into, people would stare and whisper about me to their friends. The only person who cheerfully tagged along with me to whatever class I had, regardless of what classes he had, was Wyatt. He would fill me in on how many of the games our soccer team had won, and I would fill him in on how I'm going blind.

Months passed, and I began to be hopeful that maybe I wasn't going blind. Maybe they had made an error. I should have known that maybe rarely comes true. They told me that my vision was deteriorating at such a slow pace, that I hadn't even noticed the change. I shook my head violently, refusing to believe it. I screamed, I cried, I threw tantrums, which I knew I would later regret, but I didn't really care. When they got me settled down, they made me take an eye test. I failed it. Miserably.

The next year was stressful. I took an eye test with my door closed everyday, willing myself to read everything that I should have been able to. Until one day I couldn't do it anymore. I had been declared legally blind and my glasses were getting heavier and heavier on my nose. I had no choice but to tell my parents, and for the first time in a year, I saw Dr. Hernandez again. They had been taking me to a different eye doctor for a while. Mostly I insisted on not seeing Hernandez. He reminded me of when I first learned about my eyesight.

I was right. Every time I saw Hernandez my life became a lot worse. Because what did he tell me? That I had to go to a different school. I'm not ashamed to say that I threw a fit. Neither am I embarrassed to say that I cried. Because I did. I cried. I screamed. I stomped my feet. I did everything a toddler would. Because this past year had ruined my self-confidence to no end. You would think I had gotten used to the pain and the

disappointment, but surprisingly I hoped every time that there was a chance I could go back to normal. I guess there wasn't.

Of course, every time I tried to shake the doctor's opinion on what would be best for me, he firmly told me that this is what my life would be from now on, and I would have to get used to it.

That was until I went fully blind. It happened during the summer. In retrospect, I should have been expecting it, after seeing how bad my vision was getting. I crashed into so many things, and I was crying from eyes that didn't matter.

Although I didn't know it at the time, the first day at my new school was the best thing that ever happened to me. I had expected to be bullied, to be taunted, only to find out that a lot of people there were just like me.

I walked into that school, huddled down, only able to see shadows of light. The school was quite easy to walk to, as it was meant for other people like me. The lectures were similar to what I had in my old school, except they had audiotaped lessons and handouts written with Braille. I was slowly starting to become more fluent in Braille; I was able to read texts quite fast.

My main problem wasn't how good I would do, but how many friends I made. That was until I met Piper. She sat down with me at lunch. I heard the clunk of her tray at the table, as she spoke aloud, "Hey, I'm Piper."

"Hey," I said hesitantly. "Are you--are you... I'm sorry, that's a personal question."

She laughed softly. "Am I blind? Yeah, I am. I have been since I was born. This is a really good school, you know? I never feel alone."

I raised my head, surprised. "I'm blind too."

"I know," she said.

"How do you know?"

"The way you talk."

I raised an eyebrow, even though I knew she couldn't see it, but I didn't question her further. She was a nice enough person, and I didn't want to lose my first friend.

Time went fast. Piper introduced me to new people, like Jason, and Skylar, and all of these people were just like me. We hung out a lot, and I couldn't believe I was laughing with them the same way I would laugh with Wyatt. Having this in common with them made my life so much better, and even though my life would never go back to the way it was, I could get used to this. Because for the first time since the accident, I was happy.

My parents were happy too. They liked my friends a lot, and they smiled and laughed a lot more. I didn't sense the tension in our house, until it was gone.

I actually liked my life now. And it was refreshing to think that.

I'm Alex. And this is my story.

Bio

My name is Stuti Shenoy. I am a rising eighth grader who goes to Challenger School. I am pursuing this opportunity because I think it is a wonderful way to incorporate my interests in writing, and get some experience communicating with new people. I am an avid reader, and therefore, love to use different techniques I have picked up from reading into my stories. I find this includes more depth and emotion. Other than reading and writing, I like to play basketball and make art.