

Crashing
By Libby Skaggs

May 10, 2023

7:30am

God, I hate being at school early. This is the first day in the entire year I was up before seven for school. I have my AP Biology test today. This is the big one, the one for college credit. I knew I would fail. Science was never my strongest subject. Especially biology. There was too much to know, to memorize. As they read the test instructions, I pray for a three.

12:00pm

Shockingly, the test was a lot easier than I thought. I think I may have even pulled a four. I definitely passed though. My friends sit around me at lunch and they discuss what they will do for the rest of the day. Most teachers excuse anyone who had an AP test from class. Sadly, I had a guard director who did not understand the sanctity of the unspoken law. So, begrudgingly, I plan to stay at school all day.

3:00pm

I am finally free from this prison. A little dramatic, I know, but standardized testing followed by a whole school day? I would rather be locked up. I swing by Sonic on my way home and pick up a Coke. It is my little treat for making it through the day. The traffic on the street is backed up, so I take a few alleyways to get home. No big deal.

I chase my cat around the house until she resigns to lie with me on the couch. That brat likes to pretend she doesn't love me, but we all know I'm her favorite person. We cuddle as I turn on whatever trashy tv show I am obsessed with. This week, it's Dance Moms. I only get a few minutes in when my dad gets home from work. We talk about our days. Small surface level conversation, and then he switches the channel. Like hello, was I not watching something? He turns on some football rerun that he's seen a thousand times before. Go Cowboys? I walk to my room, cat in tow, and lay down for a nap.

4:00pm

My phone buzzes. It's my brother's girlfriend. I roll my eyes as I open the text. I do not like her. She doesn't know it, though, and still loves to text me. This one was different though. It was just one sentence: Has Hayden texted you?

I reply back affirmatively. Hayden and I text all day. He may be my brother but more than that, we're best friends. I did notice that I haven't heard from him in a couple of hours. Weird. But he's driving home from college, so it's not too surprising. Got to keep those eyes on the road.

4:30pm

My mom decided that we were going to Ikea for dinner tonight. Something about a coupon that will expire today. Now this may seem like an odd choice, but one taste of those Swedish meatballs would turn the harshest skeptic.

I climb into the backseat of the car and stretch my legs. It's about an hour drive, so I plan to get some reading in on the way.

"That's weird," my mom says, staring at her phone, "Can you all see Hayden on

your Life360?”

I pull out my phone to check. Usually with my mom, it's a user error. This time, though, I saw the same error: Location not detected.

“I can't, but I'm sure he just lost service,” I tell my mom with a smile. I almost believe it too. But the pit in my stomach says differently.

Something about Hayden and I is we are linked in a way. We always know when the other is hurt or needs help. Almost like a sixth sense. That's what made it so hard to push that feeling down. I try not to think about it for the rest of the ride. When we pull into Ikea, it is barely a whisper.

5:30pm

I hop out of the car and start heading inside. I beat both my parents. My dad had his knee replaced and still can't walk fast, and my mom was kind enough to wait for him. As soon as we get inside, my dad's phone rings. He excuses himself for a second and walks outside. We watch him through the glass doors. The color drained from his face. My mother rushed outside as I stood paralyzed in fear. I was begging to someone for everything to be okay.

My mom came inside and grabbed my arm. I can feel her acrylics digging into my skin as she drags me to the car. I see tears on her face. This is the first time I have seen my mother cry. She's always so strong. A wall. Her mascara runs down her face. My fear grew.

She puts me in the backseat and closes the door. For some reason, my parents believe a locked car door will stop a seventeen year old from getting out. They would be wrong. I march up to my father who is still on the phone. I demand someone to tell me something. I am ignored. My parents whisper to each other. I pick up bits and pieces: Hayden...St. Louis hospital...broken legs...jaws of life.

My skin goes cold. I feel tears streaming down my face before I even know they are forming. For some stupid reason, the only thought in my mind was: Our coupon will expire. Shock is definitely one hell of a drug.

6:00pm

Once my mom calmed down, I got a story out of her. Hayden was in a car crash in St. Louis, Missouri about twelve hours away from our house. They don't know what happened yet, but his car was completely destroyed. He has two broken legs, a broken hand, a broken wrist, a serious concussion, and a brain bleed. Not to mention the gashes from the glass on the car. The first responders had to use the Jaws of Life to remove him from the car and he was flown by a helicopter to Mercy Hospital Creve Coeur. He was currently in the ICU Trauma unit. They weren't sure if he would ever be the same, or even survive.

My dad booked a flight to St. Louis that day. By 6 o'clock he was in the Dallas Fort Worth International Airport, no luggage, waiting for take off. He has always been impulsive. When an emergency occurs, his first reaction is to panic. All logic leaves the room, and he must do the first thing that comes to his head. My mom is different. She is methodical. She plans, packs the car, packs clothes for everyone, and begins calling everyone we know. We leave for Tulsa, Oklahoma and spend the night with family. In the morning, we will finish the trip. My mom told me to try to get some rest. I lay up at night and stare at the ceiling.

May 11, 2023

Too early

In my family, I tend to serve as the mood lightener. This is a job that I take very seriously. So, as we load in the car at the crack of dawn to complete the next leg of the journey, I try to keep an upbeat attitude. I plaster on a smile and even crack a few jokes. Granted, most fell

straight on their face, but I was trying. I called a few more relatives and drafted a post for my mom's Facebook. My dad texted that he finally made it. He sent us a photo of Hayden.

I couldn't believe that it was my brother. Gone were the bright teeth and charming smile. In its place was a busted lip, still bleeding gashes, and a neck brace. He told us that he was still unconscious. In good news, the brain bleed wasn't as bad. It was still life-threatening, but at this point, we will take what we can get. The next seven hours in the car are tense.

Mid Day

When we finally reach the hospital we are led to a waiting room. It is silent in there. No one lifts their head as we walk in. These people are broken and scared. Me too. The hospital was still under COVID 19 regulations, so only one person was allowed in the room at once. I waited for what felt like hours for my turn.

You have to buzz in to be let into the floor he was held in. You would think it would be loud, but the reality is much worse. It was deathly silent as I walked down the hallway, my feet echoing on the tile. His room was all the way at the end, with a thick blue curtain covering where a door would be. It was dark in the room. As my eyes adjusted to the light, I began to take in my surroundings. A table with my mom's purse on it, one chair, a large machine I have never seen before, and a bed with a man in it.

I sit down in the chair next to the bed and grab Hayden's hand. I gently wrap my fingers around and squeeze his hand three times. Since we were little, our parents would do that to say "I love you". The other person has to squeeze back twice. I sat there for ten minutes waiting for the squeeze that never came. I whispered into the dark a prayer. I can't remember the last time I prayed.

My dad walks into the room. He whispers that my time is up. I swear I just sat down. As I

let go of his hand, Hayden started screaming.

“Where’s Libby? You said she would be here! Where is she?” His screams echo through the hallway. I try to assure him I’m still here. It wasn’t until I grabbed his hand again that the yells ceased. That is how I ended up being in the room permanently.

May 13, 2024

In two days, the most awake Hayden had gotten was mumbling about goblins and rude comments about my sister. It’s funny how even as he lies with a brain bleed, he is still a hater. As I sat by his bedside and whispered to him, he blew hot air out and licked his lips. They were so chapped. There were cracks appearing on them and a thin streak of blood falling down his chin. I tried to give him chapstick, but the nurses insisted I didn’t. Either way, I’m sure he would lick it off. In his more conscious state, Hayden would rant for hours about how “Big Chapstick” is setting out to destroy our lips in a way to make more money. God, he could be so annoying. I would give anything to hear one of his rants right now.

9:00pm

My parents had finally decided it was time to stop living in the hospital. They were still staying there overnight, but they made my siblings and I move to a hotel. Hotel is a strong word. Actually, motel would be a strong word to describe this as well. I think hostel or crack house would be a more suitable description. Because my oldest brother brought his dog, we were limited to where we could stay. So we resigned to shower with shoes on and dodge rusty nails sticking up from the floor.

11:00pm

My brother and sister left me in a hotel room with the dog and ran to the Walgreens across the

street. When they came back, they had two bottles of liquor and a stack of cups. I had never drunk before. My brother keeps on insisting I don't need to drink, but I would do anything to dull the pain. The drink was bitter, so bad I could only take small sips, but I liked the warm feeling in my throat. And the way it made me forget everything that had happened over the past few days. We stay up and play Super Mario until eventually, I fall asleep in their bed. It had been a long day, and I knew tomorrow would be longer.

Days later

5:00am

A week had passed since the wreck. He had gotten better. We could get a couple hours of consciousness out of him at a time. Plus he remembers everything starting that Saturday. He still can't tell us how the crash happened. He says the last thing he remembers is getting onto the highway thirty minutes before. After that, nothing.

The days weren't so bad anymore. He was up making jokes despite everything that happened. We could finally get him to at least eat a little bit. Shockingly, the hospital food was pretty good.

Or maybe I just haven't had real food in days. He finally got moved from the ICU into the general ward. It was still the hospital, but from my understanding, it means he will live. At this point, that's all we can ask for.

The nights were awful though. Last night was the first time I got to sleep in the room alone, just him and I. He stayed up the entire night screaming. I don't even think he remembers it. But I do. I sat by his bedside and held his hand all night. It wasn't until three in the morning that I was able to get him to sleep. Then at 3:30, the nurse came in for vitals. She insisted she needed to wake him up. I insisted I didn't care what she needed to do, he was sleeping. She eventually did the

vitals as he slept.

I fell asleep around four. It was only for about an hour until they woke both of us to take him to surgery. We were led down a series of halls, through doors, and eventually sat in this hospital room. I put on Spongebob to distract him while I frantically call my parents. We were told he wouldn't go in until eight. I was alone, completely and totally alone.

My parents rush through the door as soon as his anesthesia takes hold. They are able to whisper a few words to him before he is carted back to the operating room. We are escorted to the waiting room by a lady I never caught the name of. I immediately fall asleep on the couch.

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I lost count of how many days we've been here. It feels like a month and a couple of hours all rolled into one. As I walk into the hospital room, I see my mom holding a balloon that reads "It's a Girl!" and a small pink cupcake. She apologizes and says it was all the hospital gift shop has. I was confused until she told me it was my birthday. I was eighteen. In the stress of everything going on, I completely forgot my birthday was coming up. I had a whole party planned. The idea was trashed as soon as the wreck happened, but I still dream.

Hayden hands me a stuffed animal and a card. He tells me happy birthday, but I can tell he isn't sure who I am. It's going to be one of those days. I thank him for the card and the gift. When I opened it, I saw that he signed it "Hayden Skaggs". My mom tells me it is because he wanted to make sure that whoever got it knew who he was. Yes, it was definitely going to not be a good day.