

Ian's face blocked the moon, and it was only then that Ryan realized how much taller he was.

"That's okay. It was a lot of fun, but, I just feel like it was really friendly – like, maybe we'd be better off being friends or something."

Ian stepped back, but regained himself and said, "Oh, whatever you want." He closed the small gap between them and hugged Ryan, briefly. Ryan felt the rough texture of his sweater against his cheek. Ian's arms encircled him, resting lightly across his shoulders. The body beneath the sweater was firm, too, and Ryan didn't want to pull away. Ian did, though, and walked away towards his car, not looking back.

The apartment was just as he'd left it; his book was still on the table, and there was no noise from his mother's room. He collected it and went back to his bedroom, but still he couldn't read. The elm tree swayed in the wind and the sight of it caught his eyes. He thought about his aunt's words that afternoon.

"You felt it." He had felt it, although what exactly it felt like he couldn't recall. He'd felt a dread, but had there been something else? Maybe a feeling like when someone loses a finger to a saw, a sudden scream and then an absence? These things he didn't remember, but the harder he thought the more his head seemed to be pushed down, the tighter his shoulders became, and the more he ached.

He sat up and knelt in front of the window. There was no sound in the house, only occasionally the distant walking of a neighbor, audible through the thin walls. His window was on the side of a building at the far end of the complex, and he could see only a small parking lot and a few dumpsters. There were no streetlamps and so no one ever parked or walked there, and beyond the dumpsters the ground rose into a steep hill crowded with bamboo to separate the complex from a neighboring subdivision.

He reached out and silently slid the window up. The breeze came in and knocked a Geico calendar off the wall. It smelled of rain. He set his hands on the window ledge; the screen had fallen out years before, and peered down at the ground. The grass was purple in the dark, and ran up to the curb of the parking lot, not far from the building. He could see below him a ledge, the purpose of which he didn't know, jutting out only a few feet down from his window. His foot would fit on it, sideways.

With his head outside he felt like he could breathe, like his skull was expanding. He wanted more of it. He climbed out so he was facing the window with the balls of his feet resting on the ledge and his arms held onto the window frame. The wind was getting stronger, and whipped his hair around his face, interfering with his view of his bedroom through the glass. A few strands tickled at the outside of his nostrils and inside his ears. He breathed in deeply. It was wonderful to want, to crave whatever the wind would bring him, whatever climbing out of his room and onto a ledge would bring him. He could feel his fingers beginning to ache as they dug into the metal lip of the windowsill. He waited, feeling them weaken and tremble, for the moment to pass; he would not go back in until the desire went away. The wind died. He could hear crickets whining, and in the distance, from the nearby highway he heard the steady rhythm of passing traffic like the indistinct dull throb of the world.

He climbed back inside and sat for a moment, feeling the deepest part of him alive with fire, burning his skin against the cold air coming in through the window. He shut it out, undressed, and crawled into bed but couldn't sleep. He hadn't turned on the bathroom fan like he usually did to help him fall asleep and it was quiet in the room. His body was still cool from the wind. He thought he could hear the cockroaches scuttling along the wall, only this time the thought occurred that they might be scuttling along his brain. He thought about the sound of his mother rattling the doorknob while he read at the table. He thought about the rough feel of Ian's sweater. He thought about what it must feel like to hit the pavement from three stories up. The silent room closed around him. The pavement, he was sure, was rough.