

Chapter V

roof, he decides to climb onto the ledge, and when the storm gets too loud, he decides it's quiet up here. It's quiet until it isn't, because people start to notice him up there, a silhouette against the city's skyline, and they start to shout from the ground below. Some plead with him to come down, others threaten, but they all seem so far away, their voices drowned by the storm inside him.

He doesn't remember stepping off, but he remembers the fall. He remembers the wind, the rain against his face, the freedom in the descent. And then, nothing.

He wakes up in a hospital, not dead, but not quite alive, either. Surrounded by the sterile white walls, he wonders why he jumped and why he's still here. His friends and family visit, their faces a mix of relief and despair, but the storm in his brain doesn't cease. It rages on, even as they speak words meant to soothe. He laughs when the doctors talk about the 'miracle' of his survival, the improbability of his lack of serious injury. He doesn't feel like a miracle. He feels like a cautionary tale, a punchline to a cruel joke the universe is playing on him.

Recovery is slow, hindered by his own reluctance. Physical therapy sessions blend together, punctuated by the endless intake of pills that promise to calm the storm but only manage to turn down its volume. He's told he should be grateful, that he's been given a second chance, but gratitude is as elusive as sunlight during a storm.

As he stares out the window of his hospital room, watching the city move below him, he realizes that the jump changed nothing. His heart is still broken, his brain still stormed, but now, there's a new understanding in his silence. The fall didn't quiet the storm; it only showed him that surviving the jump was the easy part. Surviving everything that comes after, that's where the real challenge lies.