

## The Fall

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“Here she comes! Here she comes!” They’re always buzzing about her, sneering at her, and picking on her. Ever since the day Electra Norman arrived, they’ve never felt bored. In the beginning, the whole class was just excited. If you had got a chance to visit Hephaess, this deserted town, you wouldn’t ask me why they were surprised about the girl’s transferring to the school. The streetlamps fall asleep for good, and hardly could I remember the last time I saw flowers bloom and trees grow up. It was like a century ago. The streets are gruesome and I don’t know why the sky’s gloomy all the time. And our school, Hadess, is a place dotted with old and shabby buildings. To collapse them only takes a strong wind, I think. Sometimes I hate myself for having to stay here, while sometimes I seem to have gotten used to everything. As for the newcomer, is she a weirdo? There’s no reason for anyone to settle down in the place which God has totally forgotten. And though almost everybody is interested in her and keeps on asking her various questions, the cat seems to get her tongue. Maybe she just doesn’t like to talk, and gradually becomes another backward one in the class. Maybe she isn’t in the mood of making friends. Or maybe she has found too early that most classmates are indeed wolves under the disguise of sheepskin, pretending to be friendly at first but soon revealing the other side. But who knows? Nobody knows.

“Who’d like to share with us first, Electra, wouldn’t you?”

Our teacher, Mrs. Wilson, is a woman who always tries to befriend us.

“Well, I... I’m sorry. I have no idea.” Her voice trembles.

“Really? Just talk about how you had spent your summer vacation. Come on, it’s easy.” She doesn’t give up.

“I’m sorry, Mrs. Wilson...”

There’s a long silence.

“Alright, but just relax. You got butterflies, I can tell. Remember you’re welcome here and we’re all nice people. I hope you’ll gradually feel at home, and I’d be very glad to answer any questions you may have.”

“Thank you, Mrs. Wilson...”

“Okay, then how about you, Williams?”

She gives up, too, as the others do.

It’s a rather freezing autumn compared with the previous ones. I put on a coat and get on the bicycle. When I’m back at the dormitory, I make no fuss over the near silence. More and more students are leaving Hades, and sometimes I’m wondering why I haven’t joined them yet. Every single day is like an endless year, and it even slips my mind that I’m still on this long-lasting journey. I guess I’ll be numb soon, since I suddenly realize that I’m no better than the new girl, who didn’t remember how she had spent her two-month summer vacation. I begin to take a little pity on myself. Then I open the window.

It’s her. No, it’s “them.”

High school girls! For me, they are monsters, at least in our school. We have so many Lindsay Lohans in *Mean Girls*, and I’ve heard about how she falls prey to them.

“Get up, bitch! Why are you shivering like that? Are we monsters eating you up?”

Double-faced is the only word I can think of to describe the tallest girl, Hilda. I have never seen her like that, especially in the face of teachers or boys.

“She’s just a bitchy freak!” The running-dogs follow on.

“I’m sorry... I didn’t mean it, really.”

“Dare you not. Then how about telling us what you have done to them?”

She’s talking about the recent situation. There’re fewer and fewer companions in our class. Since the semester began, since Electra came here, more and more of our classmates have gone, suddenly, and unexpectedly. One by one, week after week, and no one knows why. But to be honest, I can’t see any connection between Electra and it. I think they’re just getting bored as hell. They need entertainments.

“I’m sorry... I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

Then Hilda slaps her across the face, which drags me in. In fact, I’m surprised by my own courage. I used to shun away from troubles. Perhaps I just can’t take it anymore. The teases, the bullying, all that stuff. Anyway, I rush out of the dormitory

and make a roar toward these girls, not for the purpose of frightening them, but to inform them somebody isn't on their side. And somebody is prepared to give the victim a hand. I step forward and ask them to stop. They try to hide their anger, and astonishment, perhaps. But their facial expressions show no signs of going on with the game. So they make a sneeze, and they quit, as I have expected. We're lucky.

"Are you okay?"

"I guess I'm fine, thank you."

"They ain't got nothing else to do, those no-brainers."

I feel like I'm not myself in the moment, but it excites me, somehow.

"Yeah, they're always bugging me." Her voice is still shaking.

"More than bugging, I can see."

"That's alright. Just forget about it. But I don't know how to thank you."

"No big deal. Let's leave here. It's cold like hell."

Harry and Hermione soon become friends after "the troll incident," except there's no Ron. It surprises me that we share a lot of similarities. I enjoy reading novels, and she's crazy about it. She has seen numerous films, including all of the types you can think of, and watching movies is also my favorite. I don't watch soap operas, and they never appeal to her, either. Chatting with her during the breaks makes enjoyable periods of time. We often spend the Friday afternoons together, filling our leisure times with joy and laughter, before she leaves for her hometown, Livingstone, to spend her weekends.

Little by little I can't hide my curiosity, the curiosity over what a person she is like. Although I can call her a friend now, there's much about her I have no idea. We're always talking about our interests, and nothing else. I have tried for many times to switch the topics of conversation, and to make her tell more of herself, but to no avail. I really want to ask her whether she hears about the gossips behind her, why she has to hurry back home before dusk each day, why she doesn't look me in the eyes when we talk, why she doesn't touch anybody and let anybody touch her, and why Hilda

failed to leave a wound on her face that day.

A new week begins, and another member of our class disappears. No. There are two more vacant seats this time. Where's Electra? She has never been late for school, not to mention being absent. Is she gone, too? The whole day I just can't concentrate on my schoolwork, even for a minute. I lose my appetite for lunch, and I don't feel like playing basketball in P.E. class. My eyes have been laid on the dead woods outside. My mind is full of question marks, and I'm driven insane.

Where has she gone? What can I do? I decide to ask Mrs. Wilson. She must know, and she should know. So I sneak out the classroom, and head for the faculty offices. To my surprise, I bump into Electra at the corner. She jumps aside in fright and lowers her head, which confuses me, and also, enrages me. I don't know how to describe this kind of feeling. Why is she so weird? What happened to her? But before I open my mouth, she has run into the classroom, without emitting a single word.

I feel humiliated, puzzled, and furious. I just stand there, with my mind a blank. I can't move, and I don't want to, either. I have to wait for her to tell me what the hell is going on. Did I do something wrong? If I didn't, then why is she punishing me like that?

Then the bell rings, and she slides out, just as I expected.

"Stop! Isn't there anything you need to tell me?" Yes, I lose my temper, completely.

"Oh, Ronson, you're here! I'm sorry. I've got to go home now."

"For what? You're a werewolf, I guess? Under the full moon you'll reveal your true colors, so you're afraid that I will be terrified?" I don't know what I'm saying.

"It's not like that! Sorry, please forgive me..."

"Then tell me! What is the truth?" I nearly roar out these words.

"It's not the right time. I can't. I'm sorry!" She cries.

"You should be sorry."

She dashes out the entrance with tears in her eyes. But I don't really care. Several minutes later, I go back to fetch my own stuff. It's empty in the classroom, empty as my heart. The autumn wind blows in, and I sit on the floor for a rest. "It must be the

worst day I've ever had in my whole life," I sigh.

A headache suddenly strikes me, and as I rise to my feet, I find that she has left her notebook in the drawer.

Three days have passed, and she doesn't show up. I feel the rage in my mind turning into worry with time. I open her notebook and find that it seems to be a diary. But it's all Greek to me. What is she talking about?

*Why me? That's not fair. The power is a curse, and I don't want to own it. Mama told me to stay calm and keep on finishing the job step by step. No! Who cares? I'm just a high school girl. I want to lead a simple life. I want to make friends with humans. I want to leave this town as soon as possible...*

I don't get it. What power, what "curse" does she have? What job is she taking? She wants to make friends with "humans"? What does that mean? Is she a zoologist or something like that? It perplexes me.

*They never leave me alone. They come over every night. I'm so scared. I'm going crazy! I will never get used to it. Seventeen years have passed, but the fear remains the same. Maybe I'm not born to do this job.*

Who are "they"? Hilda and those bully girls? How can that be possible? Again and again, I feel puzzled, thoroughly puzzled. Then I turn over to the last page.

*It's his turn... What can I do? It's impossible for me to tell him the truth. He's my friend; he's my only friend in this place. I can't make it. I just can't make it this time. Help me, God!*

Her only friend in Hades. It's me. It's me! What secret is she hiding from me? I can't take it anymore. The curiosity is rolling, and the anxiety is burning. One way or another I have to search for her and ask her. Right now.

It looks as if Mrs. Wilson has been waiting. When I get to the faculty office, she stands near the front door, looking downcast and depressed. I never see her like that before, but I'm not in the mood of concerning myself with other things. I inquire

about Electra's phone number and home address. She looks for them in the files and takes a note for me, without even asking what my purpose is. Then she slides into the inside room, before I say thanks to her. The voices of other schoolteachers emerge from there. I smell a disturbance. The atmosphere is strange, beyond description. What are they discussing about? Why so secretly? A fierce wind blows the door shut suddenly, and I'm drawn back to reality. God, what am I doing here?

She lives on the skirts of the town, which seems to be a different world, in my opinion. The sun shines, the gentle breeze sways, and the unpleasant moisture is gone. I follow the address on the note and soon reach Maple Street. I wouldn't call it a street, since there's only one residence nearby. Surely it's her home.

Is that her mother? When I'm worried about the impoliteness of visiting her without an appointment, a woman goes outside the house.

"Excuse me, are you Mrs. Norman?"

She has no response. I raise my voice, step forward, and ask again.

Is she staring at me? No, it seems that something behind me catches her eyes. Then she enters the car without replying me. While I'm confused by her reaction, a familiar voice calls.

"Why are you here?"

I turn around. It's Electra. Electra stands in front of me. Nonetheless, I don't know how to start.

"I wanna give you this, your notebook. You left it behind in the classroom."

"Yes, I did. I left it for you."

"I'm sorry?"

"You must have read it."

"Yeah. So what?"

"So that's why you're here."

"Oh, come on. What game are you playing? Don't fool me around!" Finally, I started it.

"Stop questioning me! You tell me first, how long does it take you to get here?"

“What are you talking about?” My patience is nowhere to be found. “That’s not the point!”

“That’s definitely the point! And ask yourself again, how long did it take you to rush to the spot?”

“What spot?”

“The spot where they picked on me. Hilda and her fellows. You can’t have forgotten. The first day we got to know each other.”

How much time... how much time did I spend? No! Not a second! The first second I was in my room, and the next second, I was... I was there... beside her.

“And you must have wondered why Hilda couldn’t hurt me.”

“No!! Shut up!! I don’t wanna listen!!”

“Because...”

I cover both of my ears and run away. No. Maybe I didn’t “run.”

*Again, I cry. But how can I not? Grandma, I miss you so much. You used to be there protecting me, wiping away my tears and fighting away my fears. You were the one who gave me strength. Now you’re gone. And I can’t find my courage anymore. Mama and papa wouldn’t understand at all. Why are we the only members of the family capable of seeing the dead people? Have you ever for a moment in your life regretted being a psychic? Can I just run away and leave them all behind...*

She finds me, in the forests. She turns to one of the pages she had made a mark on previously. She stands by my side, while I’m still squatting, hiding my face in my hands, with tears bursting.

*The “task” is divided into several parts, and I’m in charge of Class 302. The tutor is Mrs. Wilson. There’re thirty students in her class. All died from the deadly fire accident last September...*

She weeps too.

*I feel happy the whole day. We chat like old friends do. I don’t know why there seems to be no distance between us, though I have to conceal the secret. I feel at ease*

*when I'm with him. But dear diary, should I feel happy? Do I have the right to be happy? Can anybody just tell me? Tell me that our friendship will last. If it's a dream, never wake me up.*

"I'm sorry!! I never mean to hurt you!!"

I just want to give her a hug. God, can you do me this favor?

"Carpe diem," what Robin Williams said in *Dead Poets Society*, still impresses me every time I think of it. I never imagine its becoming a reality. I never know it's not far away from me. I used to waste my life on waiting, waiting for my chances of learning, to come. Now, the wait is over. So this is how the story ends.

"How did you get through all of this? It's hard to imagine..." I asked.

"Whatever did not kill me made me stronger, perhaps."

"You haven't told me. Why do you always hurry back home before dusk?"

"Cause when the dark comes, 'you' are everywhere in this town. That's really horrible."

"And why don't you meet my gaze when we talk?"

"Cause sometimes I can't see your face clearly. I can only sense you're there."

"What's it gonna be like, after you'll open the door for me?"

"A journey. Just take it as a whole new journey."

"How many days are left?"

"One."

Yeah, one. Even so, we are satisfied. We go for a ride and feel the fresh air kissing our faces. We sing out loud in the mountain like there's nobody else. We chase after each other, play hide-and-seek in the forest, and act like we're eight years old again. "Live" for the moment, we laugh. It's the first time she answers to all of my questions, and also the first time I am pleased with her each answer. We lie on the meadow, watching birds fly across the sky. The hours stop passing by. The time ceases.

So this is the fall, the fall that changes my life forever. She asks me whether I feel scared or not. I say, "Yes, I'm scared. But I will be prepared." She smiles in return.



And now, here she comes.