

Stars That Fall

A row of dim lights lines a one-story brick building, casting faint yellow pools onto the asphalt. A field of woodchips with an empty set of slides and swings—once holding chatter and liveliness. Above, dozens of bright specs scatter the horizon. Some barely visible and others shining as bright as they can manage before fizzling out. Today, the crescent moon lies especially dormant, emitting a yellow hue above tiny outlines of houses—carrying a breeze that sways the orange fields and trees. Autumn is coming.

In a large parking lot lies a black, worn-out Prius, and a family of six out after midnight—lying face up from the concrete and gazing at the night veil. A single blink could mean missing it, so we split the sky into six quadrants—each shouldering a burden, and knowing that one of us will soon be gone.

My family has always been ambitious—especially my oldest sister. We were raised with the common belief that going to a good college leads to a successful future. My siblings and I learned to be high-achievers and to take all the opportunities that we could grasp—In particular, my older sister excelled in countless extracurriculars and accelerated classes. She was always busy, and so I didn't really know or talk to her. I remember briefly seeing her work at one specific brown desk—always there when I went to sleep. And she is also the reason we went to see a meteor shower for the first time. Six bodies sprawled out under the stars at 1:00 AM, sixty miles from home, and two days before my oldest sister would be leaving for college in Connecticut.

Silence. The buzzing of crickets drums into my ears. The cold, hard pavement becomes warmer on my back and a cool breeze passes through as I think of everything—and thus nothing.

Finally,

“Top left!” my little brother's voice exclaims.

For a moment, the sky holds its breath. Our family of six is in unison, eyes darting towards the life that's appeared before us. The crickets quiet—if only for a moment—and a bright speck darts across the sky, flickering with trails of faded pink and green.

And before us, that life dies. It's seen hundreds, millions of different planets and creatures. It didn't know anyone would be watching, and yet it decided to emit a glimpse of light that won't last beyond a glance. I wish I could stop time—and linger for a moment more, to live without worry, to be disconnected from the world's firm grasp. I wish that I could apologize to that life for trying to replicate it with countless games and videos that have rusted my personality and body. And I wish that I could thank that fleeting life for keeping me here. Before. Gone.

My oldest sister looks up a split second too late. Although she brought us out here, she's missed the show. I wonder if she actually wanted to watch the perseids, or wanted to bring us together, once again, after two years of isolation.

"Next time," she says, frustrated. "I'm not missing the next one."

And we all nod and joke that that perseid was the last one, and we laugh, hyper focusing our tired, oblivious minds on the sky. And those heartfelt laughs echo across the parking lot, leaving a trail of genuinity in a world that laughs at everything and anyone.

I fill my sights with just the sky and the haze of clouds encroaching on the moon. I wish that we could be hushed with another spectacular sight. And I forget, albeit for a moment, that the sky is slowly being tainted by human-made machines, and millions of stars are forcibly left unseen. And I know that the night sky can't hold us together forever.