



As I sat on the plane, I looked outside, thankful I got a window seat. Clouds surrounded the plane and although there were many others aboard, I felt at peace with myself and the world. A feeling I have not felt for a while. I thought about a lot on this plane ride, about the family I have not spoken to before I left, friends I should have called, things I could have done, and suddenly I went from relaxation to instant anxiety. It hit me harder that they would not hear from me while I was visiting Japan. I reached for my cell phone, only to be reminded it was on airplane mode. I sat back against my seat and rested my eyes, only a few more hours until I would be in Japan.



As my flight landed, I gathered my things and went to get my luggage. I spent most of my day leaving the airport and getting to my hotel in Mizunosato.

As I arrived in my room, I looked outside the window. I was alone, completely alone in a whole new place, I turned on the hotel TV and laid with my head towards the ceiling. I heard my phone buzzing. I assumed my family got their letters from me. I felt selfish for not answering, and my mind couldn't even begin to comprehend what they were going through right now. I did not tell them where I was going, but I told them, it be the last place I would ever be going. It was all becoming overwhelming, so I threw my phone off the hotel bed and decided to go to sleep. I did not know what tomorrow would bring.



I woke up and felt a pit in my stomach knowing today was the day. I packed up all my things from my hotel room and headed to the rental car. All my most personal belongings were packed in a bag, and just like that, I was headed towards MT. FIJI.

As the rental car pulled up to the entrance to the forest, every thought slowly became a reality. I walked to the entrance, passed a few cars. Some look like they've just been parked, but some look like they have not been turned back on in years.

Entering the forest I saw a sign, thankfully I am fluent in Japanese, one of the reasons I chose this place. The wooden signs engraving said in translation, "Remember your loved ones, family, friends. Your life is precious." I walked past the sign remembering my family and friends, with a heavy heart.



As I entered the forest, I saw two trails, one for hiking, and one cautioned off with warnings of being easily lost. I hopped over the fencing for the cautioned off-trail and pulled out my caution tape. I wrapped it around a tree and held it with me as I walked. This way I could not get lost. I headed throughout the forest, expecting to see tons of bodies hanging from trees or killed, but no, just silence.

Before coming, I researched the forest and there is little to no animal life, so the only thing around me I was hearing was my feet and the leaves crunching below me.

I spotted a stuffed cartoon animal against a tree nailed by its arms and feet, it gave me goosebumps. I found out that people do this to symbolize suffering, or where one was going to commit suicide and chose not to. Now I was starting to feel regret, but I tried to put it behind me.



As I was walking I heard other leaves crunching. I tried to believe it was a squirrel, but I remember the little vegetation the forest had. My tape for a chance of return was about to run out, so I decided to stop.

I got an alarming feeling when I could sense something else near me. Footsteps coming close to me. I looked around and did not see anything, but after a moment of silence, I heard an alarming scream. I could tell by the piercing sound it was a woman, who sounded distressed.

I walked towards where I thought it came from, trying to not stare far away from my caution tape.



I Passed a few trees, and a small hill I saw a Japanese woman, she sat with her head to her knees crying with bags and other belongings around her. I yelled towards her, trying to get her attention, and immediately her head raised and she yelled back.

I walked over towards her, asking her what was wrong, trying to comfort her. She explained to me how she came here to commit suicide, and before I let her finish, I cut her off and told her that was the reason I was here too because in a way it felt like I was no longer alone. She spoke only Japanese and was surprised I could understand her.

We walked away with her belongings towards my things. When she saw my tape around the tree, she almost jumped with joy, yelling, "We're saved!"

"Saved?"

"Saved. This was a big mistake." She said with a frown.

"I have been here for many days. I brought my cell phone like you brought your tape, but there is no connection."

"Well, not to sound insensitive, but what stopped you?" I asked.

"People do not always come to die right away, I brought all my belongings to stay here in peace and decide what I want to do." She said.

"So you decided not too?" I said confused.

"Thankfully yes, I got a second chance, and you will too." She happily remarked.

I didn't understand what she meant.

"Do Japanese people come here often?" I asked.

"Well, I did, but I wasn't expecting to see an American here." She said.

"Yeah, I have always loved Japan, so I thought it would be best," I told her.

"So you are here for the forest or-"

"I came here to end my suffering, why are you here?" I said cutting her off.

"School has gotten very stressful. My family is very strict. Academic pressure is huge here. I did not know how my family would react knowing I did not pass my college exams. I felt as though I'd be taking responsibility for my actions." She said sadly.

“So failure is that huge here?” I asked.

“Yes. Many families are the same way. My family personally believes that success and social status are the most important things in life. Since I was young I have been forced to do my best in school, with no excuses. But, I realized that failing doesn't have to be the end.”

“Are you scared that your family won't accept you back now that you have failed school? I asked, interested.

“Yes, but in Japan, as much as the pressure and stem for excellence is valued. We value other things. We have many, many organizations to help people struggling with suicide. Over the phone help, counseling, health care. Although failing is huge, it be better for me to get help.

“America is sort of the same way. Money and success are valued too, but not as extreme. People oftentimes take their lives for other reasons. Mental health plays a huge part, such as depression, anxiety, bipolar disorder. Many reasons.”

“Do you have forests like this in America?” She asked.

“No, the most common is a firearm, overdosing on medication, and more or less self-harm. However, this forest is number two to our Golden Gate Bridge, many people go to jump off the bridge there.” I explained.

“In Japan, they had to ban pesticides due to the high suicide rate. It linked to 10%

“Well, that's good,” I said.

“If you think it is good that is linked to a drop in suicide. Why are you here?” She said.

The question hit me like a brick. I took it as a sign to go home.

“ I came here because I am tired of being distressed. I felt very alone for a while, and in the United States we have the same programs, organizations, and help, but I didn't think it would help.”

“If you don't mind me asking, how do Americans react to suicide?” She asked



“We frown upon it of course, but it usually hurts families the worse. We have a lot of anti-suicide programs and associations.” I never really thought about how many people would be there for me before asking this.

“ Let's get out of this forest before it's too dark. We have plenty of reasons to live, failing doesn't mean it's the end.”

I looked around, at all my belongings, took a minute to look at the forest, and thought for a moment about what to do.

Then, I made the greatest decision of my life. I chose to live.

