Dropped World

In, out, in out. Air. I needed air.

The harsh burning pinch at my sides swelled out from its epicentre, filling my right side like a spreading virus. I needed to stop. No. I couldn’t. Forcing my legs tirelessly on, the pounding of my feet on the forest floor created a sporadic rhythm in my body, as I fantasized that they would detach from my body and continue on arduously like some terrifying nightmare.

I snapped my head back; she was getting ever nearer. How much longer could I run for?

The squeaky crunch of the snow beneath my throbbing feet echoed through the forest, as I took a moment to take in the captivating sight. Glistening like stardust, the snow-melt dew trickling on bluebells glowed from the shafts of light piercing the pine canopy. The forest played with my dilapidated brain, directing a beguiling trick that lured me into its bewitching beauty once again. This distraction had been my downfall – it had always been. My legs turned to noodles, and I flopped down in a tangled heap. I let the cool pillow of snow absorb my salty sweat as I lay there listening to my heart pulsing in my ears.

My mouth exploded giddily into an infectious giggle, and Cara dived into the untouched plane of snow beside me.

“Got you!” she boasted, “I told you I could catch you, I told you, I told you!” she continued while revelling with pride in her victory. But I didn’t care. We lay there in silence for a few minutes, absorbing the light that poked through to us – this must be what heaven felt like. She was a few years older than me, and I envied her long, sculpted legs she got from Mum in comparison to my stumpy little shins and chubby ankles that Dad just had to pass on to me. But at that moment, I just lay. I lay and I let my mind wander…

Just when I had started to shake off the inveigling effect, a sudden screeching burst out like dynamite from thin air, and the sirens that they had prepared us for broke out. We jumped back up again – rooted in our positions – and stared in each other’s panic-stricken dilated eyes. I tried to remember what they had told us, and the voice of my schoolteacher flooded my mind: Remember to keep calm and just wait it out. Ugh, that monotone voice of hers agitated me more than I could bear, and an instantaneous fury bubbled up in my throat (even more so than the bile that kept slugging up). How could I? How could I not panic? Couldn’t she tell us something that was even remotely helpful?

But before another thought could squeeze into my head, we froze, transforming into these empty coloured moulds – utterly and completely transfixed.

Paralysed, I watched our world get turned upside down. Brutal blasts of white were all that could be seen from the ravaging avalanches triggered by the trembling. I was helpless to do anything. I could only watch as chaos ensued in our shaken world. Trees snapped in half like toothpicks as strangled cries emanated from their broken trunks, leaving us to tumble around and around in a soup of broken branches and snow, thrown around mercilessly like some paperclip left to tumble around in a washing machine.

At last, it stopped. We plummeted back to the ground and the deafening sirens ceased. The skies righted themselves once again and the snow settled as it made its way down in a gentle cascade from up above. I glanced at Cara. She was ok. Smiling in fact. She poked her tongue out, wiggling it in an effort to catch as many of the snowflake clusters as she could, and tasting delight as each cluster vanished at a touch. As I marvelled at the magical disappearing act, I felt myself slip and smash into her suddenly, and before I could think we were both skating rapidly down the snow as if from a steep hill. Pines fell like dominos, but this time there was no trembling. No, our world was…rolling…falling?

The skies cracked and shattered into a thousand sharp pieces and our sea of air inside oozed out, taking me with it. Peering back as the tides washed me away, the sight of our broken globe, my home, my whole world, got ever smaller until it became a miniature winter wonderland with its insides spewed out among shattered glass. Was that all? Was that my whole world? It looked more like a toy or ornament. Now, a new universe filled my widened view as the ceaseless questions tied knots in the disconnected wires of my brain, and I could think of only one thing…

“Cara?” I screamed.