

Journey's End

Camera fades in on a mountain pass trail. There's an old worn out park bench in the center of the screen a few steps off the trail. To the left of the bench a cherry tree litters petals across the ground. Cole enters stage left and walks casually to the bench. He takes a seat.

COLE

Why is it always dark?

The night gives way. Sunlight peaks over the horizon. Birds chirp. The morning advances a step forward.

COLE

I haven't seen a sunrise since graduation.

The UI fades onto screen. Birds fly past. A Robin lands on the edge of the bench.

COLE

She woke me up that last day. Nothing was ever the same after that.

COLE

It probably started when Dad died. Way before Robin and I were a thing. Way before any of this.

Cole's mother fades in on the left side of the bench. She's doubled over crying. A cross appears, stuck into the ground, next to the cherry tree.

COLE

To be honest, I never really knew my Dad. I was too young to remember him. I know what he looks like from pictures, but to be honest, he's just a guy that I never met. So it didn't phase me when he died.

COLE

But Mom never really got over it. Before it all she drank casually, but as much as I never knew my Dad when he was alive I never knew her sober.

To the left of the bench, around Mom, beer bottles rise up out of the ground. Mom fades out.

COLE

Things didn't get easier from there.

Behind the bench, a backpack fades into view. The sunrise moves forward.

COLE

School was hard from the start. It wasn't that I was dumb or anything. I was just always on the backfoot. Mom worked nights at the bar below our apartment, so she was never up in the morning to take me to the bus stop. Most kids would tease me about standing outside in the cold, except one.

At the right end of the bench, Robin fades in. She watches patiently as he speaks.

COLE

I was in 3rd grade. It was an especially cold winter morning. It had snowed the night before and the town was slow to plow the streets. I waded through the snow all the way to the bus stop. Most parents drove their kids in on account of the leftover snow and sub zero wind chill. But I was outside. Sopping wet. Shivering in the icy breeze.

COLE

Then a door swung open from one of the cars and out jumped a girl. She sloshed up to me, and draped me in an oversized jacket.

ROBIN

"Here, my Dad said you can keep it. I'm Robin, it's my first day here."

A jacket fades in, folded on the ground next to Cole's backpack.

COLE

We sat together on the bus every day after that. From then on I looked forward to the mornings.

The sunrise moves forward a step.

COLE

Things were good for a little while. Robin and I hung out after school. Always at her house. Mom didn't mind, or even notice. But then things changed.

Cole's mom fades in. She's lying on the bench passed out, more beer bottles rise out of the ground.

COLE

It was the Winter Break of 9th Grade. Mom was passed out on the couch. She wouldn't get up for work. The landlord, who doubled as the owner of the bar downstairs, was banging on the door. Mom had skipped out on work twice this week and the landlord was threatening to evict us if she missed another shift. I was scared out of my mind, so I acted. I answered the door and told him, "I'm covering today."

An eviction notice appears nailed to the back of the bench. Mom fades out, Robin fades in. The sunrise moves forward.

COLE

Home wasn't really home anymore, it was a place of work. Robin's house became my only reprieve, but eventually that changed too. We were always good friends, but as we got older and I started spending more time there, things changed. We were still friends, but also a little more. It wasn't official or anything. But we both flirted with it.

A carving of a heart with the letters C + R faded into the side of the cherry tree.

COLE

We made a promise to each other around then. A promise to escape. Robin had a good life and a decent family, but she wanted more than a small town. As for me, I'd follow her anywhere.

A map rises out of the ground to the left of the bench. Robin fades out. The sunrise moves forward.

COLE

I didn't know how hard it would be to keep that promise. Mom took a turn for the worse in the later years of high school. I had to start taking more shifts so that we could keep the apartment. School ended up coming second. My grades slipped, and my chances of getting into college got slimmer. I tried to hide it from Robin, but she saw right through it. We stopped planning as much as we used to.

The sunrise moves forward. The map flies away in a gust of wind.

COLE

Then that awful night. Prom, senior year. Robin offered to skip it, but I saved up some tips so we could go. I rented a tux,

bought a corsage and piled on way too much cologne before heading out. Then I saw her.

Robin fades in, wearing a prom dress. After a moment she fades away, as Cole's Mom fades in, asleep on the bench, more beer bottles rise out of the ground.

COLE

Asleep, on the couch and my heart sank. Mom had promised to make it to work. The bang at the door hardly even registered with me. I had heard it so many times. It was the landlord. He'd threaten to put us out on the street and I would get ready for work. I had 15 minutes to pick up Robin. I watched those minutes pass from behind the bar.

A corsage floats away in the wind. Mom fades out. Robin fades in, silhouetted.

COLE

I couldn't face her after the prom. So I avoided her. I walked to school, took different routes between classes. I couldn't stand to see the pain I caused her. The last few weeks of school went by in silence.

The audio drops to silence, Robin fades out. The audio returns, but the ambient noise is different, more solemn.

COLE

Then that morning happened, and everything changed.

The sunrise steps forward.

COLE

It was graduation day and I was up early, which was a struggle with the late shifts. I'd managed to eek out passing grades in

all my classes, which at the time I was pretty proud of. That was, until one of the teachers pulled me aside on the last day of class. He leaned in and said, "Hang in there bud, things will get better."

COLE

It made me sick. Just then I realized the hidden meaning behind all the hushed chatter and side-glances. I felt like everyone was looking right through me.

A knock sound plays.

COLE

Then there was that knock. But it was different from the thud of the angry landlord. It was lighter, more considerate. I nearly fainted when I saw Robin's face through the peephole.

Robin fades in, patiently waiting on the right side of the bench.

COLE

I started fixing my hair. As if good hair was going to make up for all the shit I had done.

COLE

She knocked again and I had no choice. I felt a tidal wave of words building up, as soon as I opened the door I would let loose with the heartfelt apology she deserved.

COLE

"Hey"

COLE

Not one of my smoothest moments.

ROBIN

"Hey"

COLE

"Look im really sorry--"

ROBIN

"I know. Come on, let's go."

COLE

"Go?"

COLE

Then she grabbed me by the hand and took me to the roof.

The sunrise moves forward. Robin slides closer to Cole. The two look at the sunrise.

ROBIN

"You know, you really pissed me off, ignoring me like that."

COLE

"I didn't know what to say. I thought you'd never want to see me again."

COLE

She got a kick out that one. Then she looked me dead in the eyes with a stare that could pierce diamonds.

ROBIN

"I don't care about some stupid dance, Cole. You should have known that."

Robin puts her hand on Cole's.

COLE

That really got to me, but to be fair I think she was tearing up too.

ROBIN

"Focus up, I brought you here for a reason. I want you to do something."

ROBIN

"I want you to leave."

COLE

"Huh?"

ROBIN

"Leave with me. I got into this school in California. I was going to tell you the night of prom before you went all Casper and ghosted me."

ROBIN

"My parents are getting me an apartment out there. Come live with me. Apply to school, get a job, it doesn't matter. We'll be together and figure the rest out later."

COLE

"I want to, but what about my Mom? She can't live here by herself. She can hardly even get off the couch nowadays."

ROBIN

"I'm so sorry Cole, but you can't save her. Look at what it's cost you already. You could have made it into any school in the country. Hell, you managed to make it through high school all while supporting your family with a full time job. Nobody works as hard as you."

COLE

"Come on, they just let me through because they knew about my Mom."

ROBIN

"No! They passed you because they saw your potential. Every person in that school knew that you have the drive to do anything you set your mind to."

COLE

Then she said the words that set me on the path to the rest of my life.

ROBIN

"Cole, you have to make a choice. You can start living life for yourself, or you can stay here and die for someone else."

Robin and Mom both appear on the bench. Mom is asleep, Robin is facing Cole.

STAY | LEAVE

STAY:

COLE

But I couldn't do it. I couldn't leave Mom. It wasn't her fault she turned out the way she did. I never saw Robin after that day.

Robin fades out. Mom stays asleep on the bench.
FADE OUT.

LEAVE:

COLE

I left in the Fall. Robin's parents took a little convincing, but they eventually came around. I called every relative that I could remember to ask for help with Mom. Eventually we pooled enough money to get her in a facility. She went AWOL a few weeks later. I never saw her again after that day.