

The old basement steps screamed in protest as Danny flew down in a hurry. He tripped on his way down, but it didn't stop him from quickly rummaging through a few boxes to find the lightbulb his mother had demanded. He had no time to be gentle, he was late for his appointment at the repair shop. His beloved, vintage camera had broken down yet again.

While moving boxes he heard a rolling sound from the cement floor, and a moment later, felt a tap on his boot. He looked down and saw a single green marble. Danny bent down and retrieved it, only to see that the marble was painstakingly familiar. The glass was tinted green, but on the inside there were orange, red, and yellow swirls, that gave a mystical aura to the green glass. Danny immediately went back 8 years, when he and Gogo, at the age of nine, cherished that marble like it was made out of gold. The young man thought back to the last time they played with it, which was that very basement. He remembered clearly how much they played with it; always in their hands. Until the day when Gogo died, and then Danny didn't really care about anything.

The day of the accident was the last time Danny thought of the marble, so seeing it now was quite peculiar. Something that really bothered Danny was that he did not remember a single thing from the day of the accident. Doctors said that his mind couldn't process to shock, so it erased the day. Danny always felt guilty about Gogo's death, blaming himself for what happened, even if he couldn't remember what that was. Lost in thought, Danny remembered he had somewhere to be; he pocketed the marble and flew up the stairs.

An hour later Danny found himself wandering the pothole-ridden streets of the city with six hours to kill until he could retrieve his camera. Ever since that day, Danny took photos, so he can have everything recorded. With his camera on the sidelines, he found himself wondering what to do. The streets of the city, some days buzzing with action and some days completely desolate, spit Danny out at the park where he was told it all happened. The park with the old bench that seemed stuck to the ground, and the huge mass of a tree, was last place where Danny and Gogo played, because it was the very

place where Gogo died.

The trees in the park created a canopy so thick that even on the brightest days, little light came through. The shadows always gave off an ominous and sinister feelings. Usually, Danny would take some pictures, but now he just slumped on the old bench. He reached into his pocket and took out the marble, thinking about that unexplainable day. He layed back on the bench, and the next thing he knew, he was in a dream-like state, blurred by a fog of confusion.

*Running down the street after school, though not seventeen anymore, but nine again. Someone was running next to him; must have been Gogo. They run past a street vendor, and a woman grabs Danny's sleeve. "Beware, little boy," she says. "Don't you go where the light barely creeps, or your friend will get lost. It will come for you one day" At that time, Danny and Gogo were too busy racing to the park in order to pay attention to some old lady blabbering nonsense. But right before the two boys took off, the woman took Danny's hand and put a single coin in his palm.*

Danny opened his eyes, and sprang from the bench. He could feel the memory, and was sure the dream actually happened that day. He felt something biting into his palm; he unclasped his fingers and saw a coin instead of the marble. Panic formed in the pit of his stomach. He needed to know what happened. He needed to know if it was his fault. The park started to bother and disturb him. The branches clicked and clacked, moving in a ghostly way; creating shadows with disquieting silhouettes. He looked at his watch and saw that the time had stopped. Not a minute had gone by since he had entered the park.

He quickly made his way to the local coffee shop where he hung out after school and called up his school friend Niki. He got a sandwich and sat in one of the chairs. He let out a deep breath and closed his eyes and tried to collect his thoughts. The dream-like state took over him once again.

*They boys were running around the park laughing. They threw action figures at each other and impersonated their obnoxious math teacher with the weird wart. As they were playing hide-and-seek, Gogo knelt at the base of the tree and spotted an acorn lodged in a crook. Danny saw that Gogo was hard at work on something and went to inspect. As soon as he saw the acorn and the other boy chipping at it, his stomach dropped. The way*

*the acorn was embedded in the tree seemed like it wasn't ever to be removed. Danny started pulling at the Gogo, saying "Come on! Quit doing that, you can't take the acorn out." But the boy was set on taking the acorn out of its little cranny and pushed Danny off. "Jeez, Danny, its fine. Look, I'm almost done." With that, the acorn fell in Gogo's palm. The feeling in the pit of Danny's stomach grew. He knew something was up. It was just an acorn but it seemed like so much more. Suddenly, a hole opened at the base of the trunk. The vast emptiness radiated a dark filled with mystery. Gogo took a step forward.*

The smell of coffee was the first thing that flooded Danny's senses. He opened his eyes and once again confusion set in. When he realized what had happened, his mind went to a hundred different places. He couldn't understand if he was hallucinating or if he was going crazy. Strangely, everything felt real. He realized he was clutching something tightly. He opened his hand and saw that the coin that had been cutting into his palm, was now the acorn he saw in the memory.

His appetite abolished, the sandwich abandoned. He was about to get up and leave, when his friend walked in. Niki was a short kid, with glasses, and a tendency to wear anything checkered. "Hey man, what's up? Why are you so freaked? It's the history essay isn't, everyone has problems with Mr. J's assignments." Danny wasn't the sharing type, but he had to spill to beans to somebody. He needed to see if he was actually experiencing all that, so he asked Niki, "Have you gone through something weird today?" "Look man, if by weird you mean a wicked hangover, then yes. That party last night was wild. Where were you, by the way?" Calling Niki was a mistake, staying wasn't an option. "Niki, I'm sorry, but I gotta go. I'll call you later and we can meet up, sorry about the bother," he sighed as he stood up and headed towards the door.

Danny couldn't stay still, so he headed down the cobble-stoned streets. The turmoil inside him was building, the questions and guilt amplifying. He felt that he was responsible for Gogo picking at that acorn. The memories only proved what he had felt since that day, which was the feeling that that day wasn't right.

It was almost dusk. Four hours had gone by in a flash of excitement and mystery. He needed more answers, so he headed back to the bench, the park, and the tree all that time clutching the acorn, making his knuckles white. As he stood before the ancient bench, he noticed that the the branches entwined and created a ceiling. The canopy of

leaves was so thick, that when you looked up, the only thing you saw was darkness. Danny felt exhausted. He thought his mind was playing tricks on him; his body filled with an excruciating ache. What had happened? The thought kept nagging him. Along with confusion, Danny felt relief. After all those years, it was nice to come to peace with the fact that Gogo's death was not his fault. He laid back on the bench, closed his eyes, and ran his fingers across the smooth surface. As his fingers skimmed the old wood, he came across indentations. He looked down to see what they were, when he zeroed in on two names; Gogo and Danny. That instant, Danny's eyes closed and he felt the approach of another memory.

*The darkness enveloped the whole park. It became so thick, Danny couldn't see Gogo anymore. He started to panic, thinking that he would most definitely die. He felt tentacles of dark air envelop him, caressing him to sleep. And just like that, the boy could see nothing.*

*He woke up to the sound of his parents' voices.*

Danny opened his eyes, his heart beating a million miles a minute. This time, he wasn't holding anything. Finally, all was revealed, but nothing made sense. He knew Gogo's death wasn't his fault, but then who's was it? As he kept skimming over possibilities in his mind, he landed on the old woman. She started everything. He went off, running towards that little shop. Jumping over pot holes, pushing past people. But before he took off, Danny turned around and took a single picture, capturing the engraved names, the tree, and the bench. He stood in front of the shop's door, taking a deep breath, he entered. The old woman was standing in the corner, flipping a coin; the coin. He rushed forwards, shouting

“ You knew about everything! It's your fault, you old hag!” Danny's rage was burning fierce. The lady looked up, calmly. She took Danny's hand once again, and put the coin in his palm, just like that day.

“Keep this my child, the day when the truth must come to light is here. Don't be afraid, all is well. You will see Gogo one day, keep this for now. Keep this.”

*Danny is holding a pocket knife, Gogo is next to him. The handwriting is sloppy and childish. They boys are joyously laughing. “Gogo and Danny”, scratched into the wood.*

The Bench, the Tree, and the Coin  
9-12

This time the memory was just a snippet, it came out of nowhere. Danny looked around, the old woman was gone, the coin still clutched in his palm. He left the shop, and headed home. Once he got there, he pulled his camera out, went to the little dark room he had built, and developed the last photograph. While he waited for it to be ready, he paced. He needed to know if the names were really there. Once ready, he started inspecting the photo. Everything was there, the tree, the bench, except for the engraving. What on earth was happening?

Before Danny went to bed, he placed the coin and the photo on the nightstand. The next morning, as the sun was flickering through the curtains, Danny propped himself up and noticed that instead of a coin, he had a marble on his nightstand. And the photo had two new elements. There were two boys, around the age of nine, holding a pocket knife, scratching into the surface of the old bench. Two smiles spread across their dimpled cheeks and a single marble placed on the seat between them.