

Finch

I am awake again. Day 6

Is today a good day to die?

This is something I ask myself in the morning when I wake up. In third period when I'm trying to keep my eyes open while Mr. Schroeder drones on and on. At the supper table as I'm passing the green beans. At night when I'm lying awake because my brain won't shut off due to all there is to think about.

Is today the day?

And if not today-when?

I am asking myself this now as I stand on a narrow ledge six stories above the ground. I'm so high up, I'm practically part of the sky. I look down at the pavement below, and the world tilts. I close my eyes, enjoying the way everything spins. Maybe this time I'll do it-let the air carry me away. It will be like floating in a pool, drifting off until there's nothing.

I don't remember climbing up here. In fact, I don't remember much of anything before Sunday, at least not anything so far this winter. This happens every time-the blanking out, the waking up. I'm like that old man with the beard, Rip Van Winkle. Now you see me, now you don't. You'd think I'd have gotten used to it, but this last time was the worst yet because I wasn't asleep for a couple days or a week or two-I was asleep for *the holidays*, meaning Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year's. I can't tell you what was different this time around, only that when I woke up, I felt deader than usual. Awake, yeah, but completely empty, like someone had been feasting on my blood. This is day six of being awake again, and my first week back at school since November 14th.

I open my eyes and the ground is still there, hard and permanent. I am in the bell tower of the high school, standing on a ledge about four inches wide. The tower is pretty small, with only a few feet of concrete floor space on all sides of the bell itself, and then this low stone railing, which I've climbed over to get here. Every now and then I knock one of my legs against it to remind myself it's there.

My arms are outstretched as if I'm conducting a sermon and this entire not-very-big, dull, dull town is my congregation. "Ladies and gentlemen," I shout, "I would like to welcome you to my death!" You might expect me to say "life," having just woken up and all, but it's only when I'm awake that I think about dying.

Finch

Day 65 and 66

At school, I catch myself staring out the window and I think; *How long was I doing that?* I look around to see if anybody noticed, half expecting them to be staring at me, but no one is looking. This happens in every period, even gym.

In English, I open my book because the teacher is reading, and everyone else is reading along. Even though I hear the words, I forget them as soon as they're said. I hear fragments of things but nothing whole.

Relax.

Breathe deeply.

Count.

After class, I head for the bell tower, not caring who sees me. The door to the stairs opens easily, and I wonder if Violet was here. Once I'm up and out in the fresh air, I open the book again. I read the same passage over and over, thinking maybe if I just get away by myself, I'll be able to focus better, but the second I'm done with one like, and move on to the next, I've forgotten the one that came before.

At lunch I sit with Charlie, surrounded by people but alone. They are talking to me and around me, but I can't hear them. I pretend to be interested in one of my books, but the words dance on the page, and so I tell my face to smile so that no one will see, and I smile and nod and I do a pretty good job of it until Charlie says, "Man, what is wrong with you? You are seriously bringing me down."

In U.S. Geography, Mr. Black stands at the board and reminds us once again that just because we're seniors and this is our last semester, we do not need to slack off. As he talks, I write, but the same thing happens as when I was trying to read-the words are there one minute, and the next they're gone. Violet sits beside me, and I catch her glancing at my paper, so I cover it with my hand.

It's hard to describe, but I imagine the way I am at this moment is a lot like getting sucked into a vortex. Everything dark and churning, but slow churning instead of fast, and this great weight pulling you down, like it's attached to your feet even if you can't see it. I think, *this is what it must feel like to be trapped in quicksand.*

Finch

Day 75

"The cadence of suffering has begun." –Cesare Pavese

I

am

in

pieces.