

Mary-Augustus did not enjoy living per se but there was a quiet dignity to the way she moved through life. Her clothing was always perfectly tailored, her skin smooth and light, wavy brown hair cut perfectly at the shoulder, nothing ever out of place.

When she wasn't doing everything she could to make herself look just right, she took pictures of anything and everything. Sometimes they were to be used for painting references or school assignments but most often they were for herself to stare at when she was in a mood.

The apartment Mary inhabited was small and quaint, two rooms and a bath. One room was a small kitchen that she hardly ever went into aside from making coffee. The other was the first room you came into, it had a bed pushed to the side with a desk right next to it and an easel next to that. There were several windows on the opposite side of the room that she liked to sit next to and contemplate life. Every floor in the apartment was rustic looking wood that you could tell was cheap to put in.

A few blocks away from her building was the university she went to. She was in her last month of university and about to get a major in Studio Art. Her favorite professor promised her that she would get an artist residency very quickly once she graduated so she was trying to hold out until then. Everything would be perfect once she graduated with honors and got a residency. Everything would be right again like it was before.

This was apparently too much for her to expect. Despite graduating at the top of her class, there were no residencies or jobs lined up for her choosing. It had been a month already and every application had been rejected. She was in one of her moods again. She spent nights combing through photographs of times she was less sad, when she was fine. Days passed in a haze, there were applications sent and portfolios mailed but there was nothing. The world had collapsed around her and she felt so utterly stuck.

Nobody wanted her. Nobody liked her.

She had no friends, not really.

She was tired.

So tired.

And then there was the tree.

One of the few times she went outside was to walk around in the local park to take more and more photos. On this particular day, this tree stood out to her. It seemed ordinary enough yet it felt special.

Out of curiosity she brushed her fingertips along the front pieces of bark. It felt strangely soft so she tried to lightly scratch the bark instead. That was the beginning of the end apparently because a soft light illuminated her hand and she felt a warmth fill her gut to the brim.

A flash of something came over her eyesight, like a life told in snapshots or a vivid dream you had and then forgot about when you woke up.

And then just as quickly as it happened everything was dark. When Mary finally ripped her eyes open, it was to two distinctly different bodies leaning over her. Then her eyes blinked shut once again into pure darkness and it was silent.