

Leap of Faith

Thick, fat raindrops smack crimson tiles, dulled by the dark gray clouds that fill the sky. Rain slithers down the window, blurring the colors together into a dull, reddish-gray mess. Lightning cracks, illuminating the classroom for a split second. I reposition my elbow on my desk as my vision flickers from the soggy scene outside to the warped reflection of desks stretching towards the door under the golden glow of lazy classroom lights.

“Rory?” A distant voice calls.

“Rory!” The voice repeats. I snap out of my hazy trance to see Ms. Murrow’s disdainful eyes on me, her hand resting next to a complicated proof.

“Um, triangle whatever theorem?” I blurt to a chorus of giggling. Ms. Murrow sighs before continuing the lecture, and I lean towards Jared’s desk to crack a joke about our dull teacher. However, my best friend’s chair is vacant, his folders are still in his desk, and his notes are barely filled. He must be in the restroom. I return to the window and let the rainfall lull me into dreariness. After a few minutes of dreary drizzle, I hear the click of a latch, signaling Jared’s return. I turn around, and my breath hitches on a gasp as my eyes widen in shock. It’s Jared, and he has a gun.

Bang! Screams. Panic erupts through the room as my head fills with the fog of fear. I don’t know what I’m doing. My heart beats in my ears to a chorus of panicked breathing. I need to find a way out of here. Alarm bells ring in my head as I crawl across the grimy school carpet, shots ringing in my ears. I can’t stop. The banging ceases, and I glance over to see Jared reloading the gun. Now is my chance. I sprint out of the classroom door and stumble into the hallway.

Shouts echo through the hallway as students race through long corridors. Blindly, I run into the chaos, neither knowing nor caring where I’m heading. I have to run away. Dully, I hear the sound of fire alarm ringing in my ears. Over the intercom, the principal is speaking in a shaky

voice. Students flood through the hallway, and I let them carry me towards the stairwell. I hear shooting ahead. How could Jared have possibly arrived here before me?

No. It's not Jared.

"Alfred?" I gasp, horrified. Alfred is an acquaintance of Jared's, a kid who has always seemed the wrong type. I am frozen in fear and shock. He changed Jared. I can't breathe. I am frozen. My arms feel numb and icy as I hear the click of the gun. Other students shuffle away, and I can feel a million eyes on me. Alfred points the gun at me and shoots.

Suddenly, I am on the ground. A throbbing pain rockets through my leg, and I notice a bullet has graded my leg, but I am not dead. Someone's hand has a strong grip on my arm, and I realize they must have pulled me to the ground. Alfred is confused, staring through the crowd for me.

"Rory," A voice pants. I'm stunned to realize it's Maddie, my friend through elementary school, until we'd drifted apart. I sit there, simply staring at her, stunned into silence.

"Let's go, quickly," Maddie whispers, and although fear tints the edges of her voice, her composure remains calm. My head pounds as I dully nod and stumble into the crowds. Alfred's gun cocks, and a fresh wave of fear rushes through me. One quick glance over my shoulder, however, reveals that his gun is trained on some other unlucky student. I only am allowed a sliver of pity before we hear a bang, and we run.

Maddie by my side, I jog through the crowded halls, the pain only a light throb in the face of adrenaline. Shots seem to ring from everywhere. The bathroom. The stairs. A classroom. How many shooters are there? We'll never escape. We'll die here. Today. I'll die because of my best friend. The world suddenly tips as pain rockets through my leg and I stumble. Collapsing to the ground, I let my tears stain the carpet.

“Where do we go now? There’s nowhere to hide! We’ve got to get out!” I sob, the numb of reality freezing my body, the alarm bells ringing at full force.

“I have an idea,” Maddie mutters quietly. “We jump out the window. There’s bushes outside. They’ll break our fall.”

“Are you crazy?” I blubber, “We’ll never make it to a classroom!”

“Rory, remember on the playground? When we were little? I thought I could never climb all the way up to the top to go down the big slide,” Maddie recalls, stroking my hair.

“That was only a playground, Maddie! It was, like, twenty feet!” I cry.

“It felt like a mile to me,” Maddie says quietly. *It felt like a mile to me.* Her words echo in my head, each repeat strengthening my resolve.

As I grab her coattail and drag myself up onto my left foot, I announce, “You’re right. I can do this!” Maddie smiles as I drape my arm over her shoulder and I hop into the classroom and towards the window. Step by step by step. Closer and closer to my goal. I can survive. I can. I can. The alarm bells have ceased, my mind silenced. I laugh at the irony. Then, we are facing the window, wind and rain blowing into our exposed faces.

“I love you, Mom!” I call into the wind.

“I love you, Dad!” Maddie cries.

“I love you Amy!”

“I love you Jimmy! I love you Henry!”

The wind carries our voices away, but not the sound of Jared’s footsteps behind us. Glancing back, I feel no pity, only acceptance. He chose his path, and I’ll choose mine.

“I love you, Maddie!” I cry as I stand on the windowsill, hugging my new best friend. Then, we jump.