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Age: 15 years old.

Theme: Moving Forward

Frozen in Time

When I look in the mirror, I see a girl, encaged. Her eyes are frozen to the floor, legs worn out, hands wrapped around her torso in a futile attempt to shield herself from the threat of cold. Her body, weak and limp. Her heart is in my grasp, and the tiniest amount of force would shatter it into pieces.

What I see beyond the glass is that the room is so dark. Curtains are closed, with an opening small enough for just some moonlight to seep in. That light gently illuminates the space, but will never be enough to drive away all the shadows.

The ticking clock is the only moving entity. Without the clock, you could believe this was a picture; the room could have been a piece of art by a despondent creator meant to illustrate his or her sorrow, but unfortunately, no. The reflection of the girl sitting on the bed was as real as myself – or to be more specific, it was *my* reflection sitting there, frozen, weak. The laws of physics state that time only moves forward, so I guess I'm a stranger to this universe whose time has stopped completely.

We've all been there – drowning in the depths of our worries, taken hostage by fear, encaged between one mistake and the next. There are times when you miserably failed, and now your confidence has run away to play hide and seek except you don't reach out to bring it back. Some days after, you wake up feeling terrible, thinking *you failed, you shouldn't have done that, if it hadn't happened, I wish it hadn't happened, what can I do, I don't know, I failed.* And the thoughts go

on in a cycle as you contemplate. Your body seems to move along with the flow of time, but your heart is glued to the spot. No, you can't move. You feel too numb to move.

This room I'm in is becoming so cold without all the light. I begin to budge, a tiny action – I shiver and hug myself tighter. I can't bear to stay like this anymore, but what can I do? I need help, but no one reaches out. Am I supposed to curl up tight and wait, since someone will definitely come around someday? *Will anyone ever care enough to come?* While I think, the room gets colder.

When you're feeling down, you tend to think. But the more you think, the deeper you fall into the dangerous black hole known as worry where you are crushed, little by little at a time, and the only way to survive is to struggle. If you don't do something, it'll be too late, won't it?

*Yes, I know that something needs to be done.* But other thoughts circle in my mind, from my past mistakes to my reputation to how things went wrong. The story of how things went wrong is especially persistent, it comes back to me and won't go away no matter what I try. It hurts. I feel chains all around me; they are the reasons for my suffering.

But wait, what exactly *are* these chains? They have no physical appearance, but for me they are as real as they can be: heavy, iron shackles leaving a strain on my wrists every time I try to budge. They restrict me from healing my pain or leaving the spot; they have such a power over my soul. After trying with enormous effort to lift my right hand up for inspection, I realize – it was my reflection.

The chains holding me back were myself.

The cage enclosing me was my mind.

The stress on my heart was my very own grasp.

Though the curtains are closed, sunlight finds its way into the shadows. A gentle warmth is conveyed across the rays of sun to my fingertips, to my wrists which aren't so heavy anymore. I recall the story of failure I had been

contemplating one last time, and with light, all of it seemed very different to me. My mistakes, my failures were lessons to be learned, not deep sins to be ashamed of at all. These chains that bounded my limbs, the tight grip on my heart – they could have been used as weapons, to fight off future obstacles, to become stronger. I was the one who allowed them to restrain me; I had locked myself up in a cage I constructed myself. No one could press the pause button to my time but myself.

In the mirror, I see a girl leaving her bed. She is determined to go on, mightier and stronger, to face whatever lies in her way. My grasp on her weakens, until I let go, letting the pain die down to its last where the heart finally heals. She disappears from the mirror as I take a step from the bed, then another, and with my own hands I pull apart the curtains that once left the room so dark, and so cold.

How can shadows disappear if you never even let the sunlight in?

The room is bright, warm, and the clock is ticking. Time has come back to me, at last.