Shattered Hope

By: Sonya Mcguire

You will stand, you will watch, you will wait. There will be seven of you, and once you realize that you are the only ones leftfrom the village, you will weep. You will cry because you survived the fire. The inescapable smell of burning flesh will be haunting. You will be too close to the village to mourn, so instead you will walk. It will take you an hour to get somewhere where you won’t have heavy smoke tormenting your lungs. You will make it right outside Aokigahara Forest; the forest that those who are informed well enough, stay away from, in fear of being tempted. Tempted to take your life or let others do it for you.

When you make it to the outskirts of the forest, you will sit down so that you don’t pass out. You won’t move for three days straight. You all will not be able to make the journey after the exhausting fight to save your lives. You will be too terrified to watch other friends die. You will be terrified of the Aokigahara Forest. You will be scared of the illusions and fears developed there. It will be much scarier than anything you have ever witnessed. There will be monsters waiting for you to come in alone, especially the woman with the paintbrush. She walks through the forest seeking souls who wish to escape their bodies.

When the sun rises on the third morning of resting, you will notice it, it will be beautiful. It will show that in all the darkness, hope and achievement will rise. At least that’s what it will look like to you. But there will be a similar look in everybody’s eyes.Sun beams will shine through the darkness as they slowly become more awake to the world around you. You all will stand, hesitantly, as if you are trying not to startle it. But it will be the kindest of things and it will approach you slowly. It will bring you warmth and strength. It will hardly ever be so appealing to those who take it for granted.

The first person to speak will be a young boy, Porter, “Why has history come back?” he will question as he looks to the distance.

Everybody will turn their heads towards him. The next to speak is Adale, age 18, a girl that will act as a mother to many children in the village. She will take his hand while looking into his eyes, trying to see through his words, “What do you mean child?”

“The candle’s light showed me the parents’ death.”

Then you will look to the ground perplexed and awed. You will ask yourself why the candle’s light would show such a young child such a dark story. They usually tell tales that portray happiness and joy. Like the great story of Cinderella, or the little mermaid.

“Do not speak of that!” the eldest of you all will say. Her name will be Jill and she will be 20. People will consider her the wise one.

Then a boy you will know from school, Dominick, will speak, “There is nothing we can hide from him, he already knows. So do we.”

“That does not give him the right to make us remember.” Jill will shout.

Porter will step back. He will be afraid of the dispute he may have caused.

But they will stop, knowing that a fight will not be proper in such a time of grief.

Then the twins that have never left eatchother side, Erikan and Erik, will speak, “How are we to get to Beatitude?”

You drop your head, knowing the answer, but not wanting to admit it. You will have to go through the Aokigahara Forest, the one place that seven people will have to split up into groups of two. That means that there will be a group of three. Porter will be in that group, along with you and Adale. The twins will no doubt go together. Then Jill and Dominick Will go together since they will be the only ones left.

You will not have the energy to go in yet, so you will search for resources: food, water, and weapons. You will find anything that will get you through the woods. When you come together again after an hour, you will discover that you are not with a talented group. You and the twins will gather the most useful items. Then you will have to split your findings up into three groups. You and your group will get the most since there will be three of you. If you go through alone it is suicide and if you go through with more than two, it is murder. You will take the chance of bringing Porter with you because he is the smallest and will be the easiest to manage. For the next few days you will be in charge of keeping two other people alive, and you will not take the job lightly.

You will know what the next day will hold for you, so you will sleep so that you can receive as much energy as possible.

When you wake up Adale will be making breakfast for all of you. She will make a soup made of mill worms, rice, and deer that Erikan will hunt with her bare hands. She will be an extraordinary addition to the group.

While you are eating you will be making plans so that you will be able to navigate the forest properly. You will use a map that Jill has been carrying with her since her mother died; all of your mothers. Each group will travel 35 miles every day and you will meet back up in designated locations on the same nights with eatchother. Once you all wake up in the morning you will all split up again; you will all leave in 30 minutes intervals so that you won’t be too close to each other. Erikan and Erik will be the last ones to leave, since they will be the fastest.

When you venture into the woods at noon, you all will say goodbye to the land that once held happiness.

You will grab Porter and swing him on to your back. He will hold on for dear life and Adale will take the lead. You will have to run from anything that looks as though it is trying to tempt you.

If you will look at the trees too long, or touch them for just a second you will see things that will depress you. Your memories will start to mix; each of them will turn dark. You will be reminded of pain and much worse than anything you will have experienced. The forest will make you insane. You will eventually kill yourself, unless the people that live there catch you first.

Porter will keep talking while Adale will try to shut him up.He will not now about the real dangers of the forest. He will not know how to find his way out if he was captured by a trap. He will not have the mental strength to get rid of the foggy memories being manipulated by the fog that creeps through your nose and unplugs the cord that puts all the joy in your life. Adale will tell him to keep his eye hidden.

But Porter will not be a child that listens very well. He will be curious of the fear of the forest that you will portray. His eyes will be peeking out from behind your back. He will stare at the mist that forms at the trees trunks and devours the trees rough brown bark. The roots will be emerging from the earth and peeking only an inch above the mist in some places. Ferns will be grabbing your feet like hands of the waking dead. He will be interested in the fine lines between the true ground and the unknown.

You will hear a high pitched scream echoing off the leaves and through the air. You will drop, flat onto the ground, startled. Porter will roll off you back, unconscious, but breathing. Youwill feel as though there is much more to Porters scene than being winded and tired. Adale will want you both to wait for Porter to wake again. But you will know the danger of stopping.

You will stare at her with passion and intensity because you will not be able to articulate your thoughts to her. She will understand what you are trying to say. Fear will strike her and she will run. You will pick Porter up and cradle him as you once did, then you will run with full all the strength in your body to get Porter to the camp so that Jill will help him. You will run for a long time. Stopping will keep you from reaching your destination on time, so you keep running.

Adale will ask for breaks constantly, so that Porter will have time to rest. You will allow one resting point of five minutes. During that break you notice dark marks on his neck. Bruises will be splotched around his neck. Each one will represent a finger, and then when you move towards the front there two extended thumb prints. The bruises send off a terrible feeling. They are hand marks that look as though they were created by a five year old, Porters age.

He will be gasping for air most of the journey to the camp. You will not be able to do anything until you are warmed by the camp fire and the ache from your calves has diminished. You will stumble towards porter, knowing that he hurt himself. You will bend down. Your heart will begin to race as you feel the pain he is in. You will try to help. You will wander from the camp until you will find a spring. The spring will look refreshing and you will find a number of leaves scattered next to the stream. You will try to make a basket out of them. You will fail many times before you realize it is impossible.

When you will try to find your way back to the camp you will come upon a rope. You will know that this means the forests is tricking you. But you also will know that you will not be able to live if anything happens to Porter. You will grab the rope. Your first instinct will be to tie it to the limb of the tree that will be large around the trunk with low branches that will allow you to climb to the top.

 You will take hold of the lowest limb. It will feel like the long icicles that you used snap off of the roofs around your town and lick until your tongue went numb. Then you will hoist yourself up until your fingertips find the next icicle. You will not stop moving until you get to the thickest branch. You will look down and the ground will zoom away. You will look at it from the height that would scar any child. Your feet will start to tingle. Memories will race through your mind.

*[11/12/1789](tel:11/12/1789" \t "_blank)*

*You are lying in bed and you’re here a screech. Your eyes squeeze together this is the ninth one tonight. You know she needs your help. You tear a chunk of hair off your head and this time, the scream is your own.*

*Then the man comes in to your room. He sees you lying down and he drags you out of bed. He takes you out of your house and pushes you to the ground. You scrape your nose against the sidewalk.*

*You hear the door slam shut.*

*“Mason, is that you?”*

*“Daddy, what’s going on?”*

*“Nothing baby, just plug your ears.” You do as he says. “Now come over here baby.”*

*You crawl over to his voice. You see he has been tied around a tree. His elbows were twisted so that he couldn’t remove himself from the knot. His eye is surrounded by a black circle. His hair is matted and there is blood dribbling from his hairline onto his face*

*You hear your mom scream, “Get off of me”*

*You close your eyes and your dad is hushing you and rubbing the top of your head with his chin.*

*3/22/1792*

*“Mason run!”*

*“Dad, no!!!”*

*“Listen to me! There’s nothing you can do except save yourself.”*

*He was burning. His skin was disintegrating right in front of your eyes. You run towards him wanting to protect him from the evil flames licking up his legs towards his stomach. His screams were painful.*

*You could tell there was no saving the man that raised you. He made you understand the beauty in the dirt on the ground, the bark on a tree, the rain from the sky. He made all the pain from the world disappear. He held everything on a golden platter. Even the snake that snuck into your home and into your parents’ bed so he could beat your father and molest your mother.*

*You run to save him but there was a stick twisted around your ankle. You fellforwards onto a pole. It cut through your neck and stayed there until you closed your eyes.*

*3/23/1792*

*You wake up. Your throat is swollen and puffy. It feels wet with puss. You try to touch it.*

*“I wouldn’t do that if I were you, wouldn’t want to spread an infection.”*

*You try to speak but words don’t come out.*

*“I wouldn’t do that either, you might hurt it even more. Here use this.”  She hand you a note book. You write on it.*

“What happened?”

*She explains that a pole went through you throat and stabbed*your*voice box disabling you so that you won’t be able to speak.*

*“*What is your name?”

“*Adale and yours?”*

“Mason.”

*[10/11/1792](tel:10/11/1792" \t "_blank)*

*You run with her as far as you can. You find a house that has sunken into the ground but is still standing.*

*You both enter. You survey the building. There is nobody there. It will be a safe place for a child to be born.*

*“Mason this is it.”*

*Then you write down something on the paper.”*It’s perfect Adale.”

When you start thinking of the happier times in your life all you will be able to see are the faces of your loved ones with burns etched across their face like an x-ray looking through the skin and cloudy skies. The rope will be in your hands and youwill tie it to the tree. Then you will climb down the tree trying to make the least amount of contact with it as possible. You will always see the rope as an opportunity and as a way out.

When you return to camp the sun will be peeking over the horizon reflecting shattered light among the horizon.

Your hope will return once you see it streaming through the trees. The hope of flame that has lasted thousands of year, inspiring people to write poems throughout history.

The tents have been put down and the fire out. Jill and Dominick have already left and Adale and Porter will be awaiting your arrival.  You will find that all of your things have been put away in your tent bag.

Porter will be awake and waiting for you. You will be expected to start traveling right away but after numerous hours of wandering around the woods there will be no way you will be able to give the day more strenuous work.

Erikan suggests that she runs and tells Jill and Dominick to come back for the day to rest since they left only an hour ago.

You will give her permission and she will run through the thick trees alone.

Suddenly, after laying down for the night and morning, Erik will jerk up. “We let Erikan go out there alone! She is all alone! Oh my god what have we done? We just killed her!”

“Erik, stop yelling she will be fine, Erikan is strong enough to get through the forest on her own.” Adale, your dear Adale, will try to talk him down. The only way you will be able to get through this day will be if everybody is calm and doesn’t draw attention from the forest.

Erik will stop yelling but doesn’t give up. “We have to go after her! There is no way she will survive.”

“Erik you can’t say that.”

Then Porter will stride towards Erik with a toothy smile and hand behind his back. He will look like an angel that has dropped from heaven and is coming to take revenge. His childish face will show a maniacal characteristic that you will have never seen. His eyes will show a crazed thirst for death.

“Porter, don’t!” Adale screams.

She will run towards him, but you will stop her by wrapping your arms around her waist when she tries passing you. She will jerk away and swing around like a sock monkey in the arms of a child. Her face will be furious as she will try to escape your clutch.

You both will watch as Porter continues to approach Erik. You both will cry as Porter places his tiny hand onto Erik’s face. Erik will be petrified, Porter will lean over Erik’s shoulder and he will say, “She is a strong woman, she will be okay.”

Erik will burst into tears; his knees will crumble under his body; and his face will fall to his hands. Despair surrounds the area and Erik is uncontrollably sobbing. Sadness blankets the whole forest and everything falls dead, even Erikan.

Adale will hush Erik until there is no life left in him, no fight, no anger, no happiness, he will give up. But he will still bebreathing. You will feel somebody moving in on you. You will see light shining of something onto Adale’s face. When you will try to find the source all you will see is a small dagger, then it will disappear. You will be forced to move. Your hope will be gone; your chances will be wiped.

 Porter will start screaming, making you more protective ofeverybody. You won’t let him witness anymore pain. He will be so young and you will be positive he would have nightmares for life.  You will take Adale’s hand and pick Porter up. Erik will catch onto the plan as well. He will be right next to you in a split second. You will run as fast as you can up a hill. A stair casewill start forming under your feet. It will take you four minutes to get to the top and when you do you find more forest to run through. As you will run the golden hope will begin to show through the trees, it will be a sign that you will be safe. You will make it to a meadow filled with gilded wheat.

You will stop as soon as your feet catch up to your minds. Porter will start sneezing. His eyes will get puffy and he will start scratching them. You will turn your head to all directions looking for a way around the meadow. Realizing there will beno way out you will run; there will be no end to your running the field will keep going, on and on. The sky will fill with clouds, and rain will start falling. It will burn your skin and incinerate your clothing. Adale will let out a shriek and drop to the ground. You will have to get out of the field, but you will not leave her. You will pick her up and put her over your shoulder, Porter will be crying in your arms, begging you to help him. Tears will be falling down your face; you will see Beatitude before your eyes. There will be no way you will make it carrying them both; you will start stumbling realizing the fate of your family. You will fall, only to be picked up again. Your desire to get to the gates of Beatitude increase.

 Porter will be taken from your hands. Then you will only have Adale. You will look up into the dark light and see him, Erik. He will be covered in light. He will be your hope. You will take Adale in your arms and you will run as fast as possible. Porter will cling to Erik’s shirt. You will make it to the gates, and the end of the field. Erik and you will be the only ones who will be conscious at this point.

You will bang against the heavy wooden doors with your feet while Erik will scream to let you all in. When the doors are opened you will be blinded by sunshine that hasn’t been blocked by clouds or pollution. You will feel like this is when all the fight for your family was worth the heart ache.