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A Letter of Hope. As John sat in the bustling coffee shop and gazed at the blank paper in front of him, beads of sweat broke across his forehead and trickled slowly down his face. How was he meant to write down what he was feeling when he couldn't explain it? He knew his emotions were in there somewhere but he just couldn't reach them. They were locked tight, stuffed somewhere deep down. He was comfortably numb and that was something that terrified him. It was as if the numbness was pulling him into a black hole. He was trapped, unable to get out. His thoughts were jumbled and out of sync. He couldn't tell if what he was feeling was real.

Was he capable of feeling emotions anymore? It was as if John was a ghost. Doing what he had to do to get through the day. Doing what he could to make his father proud. That wasn't living in his opinion. It was merely existing. His hands started to tremble. Looking up at Josie he studied her. She had a look of pure concentration on her face as she wrote everything down. He couldn't help but envy her. Sure her life wasn't perfect but it was a hell of a lot better than his. She could choose her own career without being screamed at for hours on end. She could get one bad grade without being told she was a failure.

She didn't have to be perfect, and she was beginning to slowly understand that. That was something John would kill for. Even his best wasn't enough. John had tried his best to please his father; he studied harder than anyone else he knew. He'd sacrificed so much to try and make his father proud, but nothing was ever good enough. John closed his eyes and leaned his head back thinking of all the times he was put down by his father. Pain welled up

from deep inside him. He thought of the times he was told he was hated or not good enough just because he'd been beaten in a math competition.

He thought of the times he had come home to his father opening his mail then calling him worthless when the results weren't up to his standard. The times his father wouldn't speak to him because he hadn't got the perfect mark. Maybe his father not talking to him would have been a relief if it lasted more than an hour. John was starting to get more and more tired every day. Tired of the constant pressure, tired of not meeting expectations and of not being able to live his life the way he wanted. But most of all he was tired of the constant nagging voice in his head. The voice that wouldn't leave him alone.

The voice that was the cause of so many nightmares. If John could be who his father wanted him to be then he would. But he just wasn't capable of that anymore. He was sure of it; there was no way that he could reach his father's larger than life expectations. It just wasn't possible. His father always wanted that little bit more. He finally decided that it was time to share how he was feeling with someone else and that person would be Josie. He bounced his legs absentmindedly, took a deep breath and with his heart pounding in his chest he started to write down the words that had plagued his mind for the last few months.

He wrote the words he hadn't had the courage to say to himself. Can you see what I see? No I don't think you can I see images of nothing and I attempt to make that nothingness mean something as hard as I try there is still nothing and that nothing is meaningless I am somewhere else now, outside I am surrounded by people and the blueness of the sky but still nothing has

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changed everything remains the same I am still alone. As John finished writing he let out a breath. He raked his hands through his hair nervously. He thought it over one last time. Was he really ready to bare his soul to Josie?

Taking another deep breath to help calm his nerves, John folded the letter and sealed it with some sticky tape. With his hands trembling he handed over his most private thoughts to Josie. After they had exchanged letters they said their goodbyes and went their separate ways. Once John got outside he looked up to the hazy sky and let out a shaky laugh full of relief. Maybe just maybe Josie would be the one to save him before it was too late. He hoped that she would open the letter before graduation and help him put back together the shattered pieces of his life. Because deep down that broken boy wanted to live more than anything in the world.