Heart Peace

“I think his leg is doing a lot better, Rebecca!” Joyce called, flicking her long, red hair out of her freckled face. “I think it should be able to heal better if we release him now and let him walk it out the rest of the way.” Joyce looked over her shoulder to see a fifteen-year-old brunette in another pen, checking on a litter of baby bunnies. “What do you think?”

“I think that is a great idea. That goat shouldn’t get used to us, he might become too dependent on us,” replied Rebecca, not looking up. She gently nudged a kit who rolled out of the pile of bunnies. It snuggled up beside the rest. Rebecca finally looked up at Joyce’s large, violet eyes. “What?” She asked.

“You sure have a way with bunnies,” Joyce replied, “but do you have the same talent with owls? If you are, do you mind checking on the burrowing owl? I think it’s almost time for his pill.” Joyce quickly unwrapped the bandage on the mountain goat’s leg. “It’s on the shelf in Cave Place. Next to-”

“I know where it is!” Rebecca jumped up and slid down the rope to the Cave Place. Joyce gently massaged the goat’s leg, making the muscles loose. The goat protested, not wanting her to touch him. “All right, all right. Take it easy! I am almost done-” Crash!

Joyce jumped, startling the goat. It leaped up and bounded to the edge of the tall fence, cowering in the corner.

“Sorry!” Rebecca called from below. “The tub filled with pills spilled!”

“Do you need help?” Joyce asked, getting to her feet. “I’m done with the goat.”

“Yeah, but first check on the bunnies! Make sure none of them have had a heart attack.”

Joyce unlatched the goat’s gate and closed it behind her. She knelt down to a little pen that held the baby bunnies. None of them seemed to be alarmed, just gently sleeping. Joyce got up and looked around. She quickly walked to the other pens, making sure none of them scared out of their wits. Beside the goat was a deer with a wounded thigh. It was now alert of any more noises.
Joyce moved on, looking at the perches above her. One of the eagles had fallen to the ground below his perch. Joyce looked over him, making sure she didn’t damage her wing. She gently put her back onto her perch, checking on her wing. She did another quick scan of the other birds and mammals and climbed down the rope into the cave. “There you are! I thought you would never get down!” Rebecca said, handing Joyce a broken container. “I need another one, please.”

“Ok, hold on.” Joyce took the broken container, brushed past her bed in the corner, walked past the closet, and threw the container in the trash. “Hey, Beck? Did you put the hiking boots back into the closet?” Asked Joyce, gazing into the closet in the wall. The closet was filled with coats, shoes, extra clothes in emergencies, and umbrellas.

“No, I left them in the Emergency Pet Room.” Said Rebecca, dumping a container of pens and pencils onto the rug on the floor. The rug was huge, filling up most of the room. Rebecca shrugged at Joyce’s questioned look, and placed all the fallen medicines into the container. Joyce looked at the mess on the rug. Scattered upon it was books, notebooks, pen, pencils, parkers, pictures, and undone posters. Joyce knew they had to clean soon.

“Did you find the burrowing owl’s pills?” Asked Joyce, scanning the labels of the bottles and containers. On the shelf was all they needed: medicine for different animal, bandages, first aid kits, several types of insect repellants, and more bottles of pills for numerous reasons. At the bottom was canned food, water bottles, a fire extinguisher, and dried fruit and meat. They were very prepared.

“I found it,” replied Rebecca, pulling out a bottle from her back pocket. “You give it to him, I’ll finish my mess.” Joyce grabbed the bottle, stuffed into her pocket, and quickly climbed up the knotted rope. She passed by the pens to the darker area of the cave. She flicked on her penlight and found a cage with a burrowing owl inside. He was picking at his feathers again, pulling them out. “No no no, don’t do that.” Joyce crooned, stuffing a pill inside a small piece of meat.

The owl ate it greedily, not knowing a pill was inside. Joyce backed out, trying not to disturb some of the sleeping animals. She climbed down the ladder and her phone began to ring.
She dug into her pocket, trying to get her phone. Frustrated, she brought the phone to her flushed cheeks. “Hey, this is Joyce.”

“Joyce? Where are you?” Came the voice from the other line.

“I’m with Rebecca, Mom.” Joyce said, catching a glance at Rebecca. Rebecca raised an eyebrow. “Can I help you?”

“You said you would be back in an hour. You’re not home.” She said, sounding annoyed.

“I have a timer—” Joyce quickly swiped across the screen, desperate to turn off the blaring timer. “Hey, Mom! My timer went off! I am heading home right now!” Joyce hung up quickly, sighing in exasperation. She turned to Rebecca’s questioned face. “I have to go. We’ll release the goat in the evening. Hopefully he will make it on his own.”

“All, right. Stay out of trouble so we can release him together. I am still a little mad from last time.”

Joyce cringed. She had released a snake last month, which Rebecca had grown fond of. She didn’t know that Rebecca had planned to keep it after it was ready. Rebecca had the flu when she had to release it. Joyce had tried to call, but was unsuccessful. She now completely regretted it. “I promise I won’t release it without you.” Joyce said through gritted teeth. Rebecca would never let her forget it.

“Bye, Rebecca. See you later.” Rebecca reached for Joyce for a hug, and she gladly took it. Breaking free, she walked to the edge of the rock. She reached for a branch of the tree outside the cave entrance. She swung herself to another thicker, steadier branch. Getting a foot hold, she climbed down the tree. *Left foot, right hand, left hand, left foot, reach,* Joyce retraced her climb down, the bark slightly worn from so many climbs and descends.

As she reached the bottom, she heard Rebecca also coming down. She looked up, seeing her also swinging to the normal foot hold. Dropping down, Joyce ran to her nearby parked bike, jumped on, and raced to the RV park below. A gentle breeze came, whipping her hair behind her. She dropped her bike behind her RV and slowly walked to the front door. Taking a deep breath, she opened the door.

“Joyce? You there?” Joyce’s mom called from her room. As Joyce closed the door, her mom came into the living room. “You were gone all morning! Why do you just disappear?”
Joyce looked up into her mom’s kind, loving eyes. They almost looked worried. Joyce shook off the feeling of guilt.

“I was looking at animals with Rebecca.” Joyce shrugged. It’s true enough. I don’t want her to know about our cave. Who knows what she’ll do if she knew? “It was really fun.” Joyce brushed past her mom, not looking into her face. She had to get away! Joyce quickly scanned the room. The RV was always clean. On the left was the kitchen and the other was the living room/dining area. At the front of the RV was her parent’s room and the other end was the girls’ room. Joyce grabbed a sparkling water from the fridge and closed her door behind her.

Joyce exhaled the breath she had not known she was holding. She didn’t want her mom to know about her secret place. With her family and her all close together, she didn’t always have her space, and that was the only place she can go without anyone finding her. Joyce took out her phone and began to text Rebecca.

How are you doing at home? I just got back.
10:48 a.m.

Good. My parents never question me on anything. U?
10:49 a.m.

My mom is onto me again. She doesn’t like it when I “disappear.”
10:49 a.m.

Listen, I am free after lunch until 3. U?
10:51 a.m.

IDK. I’ll try to sneak away to help u w/ the goat.
10:52 a.m.

C U soon. Careful, K?
10:52 a.m.

K. Bye.
10:52 a.m.
Joyce turned off her phone. She quickly peeked out her door to see what her mom was doing. She was washing the dishes. Good. Joyce needed her to be distracted for a while. “JJ?” Asked a voice behind her. She whirled around to see a ten-year-old blonde looking at her from the bathroom. Karen looked at her through the door frame. The bathroom connected Joyce’s room and Karen’s room. “What are you doing?” She asked.

“Nothing,” Joyce said, closing her door. “What are you doing in my room? You didn’t even knock.”

Karen looked at Joyce as if she were dumb. “I’m not in your room. See?” She motioned dramatically at her and the door. “So where did you go today? Out with Rebecca again?”

“That’s none of your business! Get out, out!” Joyce pushed Karen into the bathroom, and held onto the knob to make sure that Karen didn’t try to come in again.

“Come on, Jo! Let me in!” Karen whined. Joyce gritted her teeth. “No, and don’t call me Jo.”

“Hey, that rhymed!” Karen said in a sing-song voice. “No Jo, no Jo, no Jo.” She sang into her room. Joyce groaned and climbed onto her top bunk bed. Joyce and Karen’s rooms were meant for two people each, having a bunk bed in each room, but they refused to be together. So Joyce made the bottom bunk a place to put her books, her clothes, her stuffed animals, her drawing items, and everything else she had. Karen had taken over the closet that they were supposed to share, but their mom had bought so many clothes for Karen that she needed the entire closet for just her clothes. Their mom couldn’t give away any of Karen’s clothes.

Joyce read until it was time for lunch. She crept out her window, which was a fire escape, and rode her bike until she could barely make out the tree in the distance. She dropped her bike facing right and ran the rest of the way to the tree. She quickly texted Rebecca and started to climb. As she jumped onto the edge of the cave, her phone buzzed.

U there?
12:24 a.m.

Yea. In the cave. Where r u?
12:24 a.m.

On my dune buggy right now.
Joyce kept her eyes on Rebecca as she came closer. As she climbed the tree, Joyce walked to the end of the cave where they kept the medicines. She squatted down to where they stored canned and dried food. She took out a package of dried mangos and ate a few pieces. She sealed the bag and went to the left end of the cave. There, a rope led up and out of the room. She climbed when she saw Rebecca about to climb out of the tree. She went over to the goat’s pen, and looked inside. The goat was pacing, not liking the idea of being locked up.

“Do you want to lead him or me?” Asked Rebecca beside her. Joyce looked into Rebecca’s ecstatic eyes. Rebecca loved releasing the animals, and Joyce knew this. “Sure.”

Rebecca’s entire face was covered by her smile. She ran to the end of the room to fetch the lead rope. She gently crooned at the goat, trying to draw it near to her. She was still talking softly as she slid the harness over him. She opened the gate and carefully led it out. She walked slowly beside it, gently talking to it.

As they neared the opening, the goat began to walk a little faster. He knew that he was about to be free. They led him away from the cave and into the wild. They reached close to the spot where they had found him, on the side of the stream by a tree. Rebecca took off the harness and backed away. The goat almost seemed confused, being out in the open. But then his tail and ears perked up, and he bounded off to the stream. He began to bleat, and as he did, another goat came from below and bounded to him. He rushed off past her, and she chased him.

“Good job, Rebecca!” Joyce smiled. Rebecca was still looking at where the goats had disappeared, beaming.

“That’s going in the book! Come on!” Rebecca ran back to the cave. Joyce sprinted after her. They climbed down the rope and ran to the bed. “Come on.” Rebecca moved the bed aside, revealing an opening only big enough to crawl through. Joyce went first, on her hands and knees. With Rebecca right behind her, they crawled until they came into a dark room, only big enough to sit in. Sitting in the middle of the floor was a big, dark blue binder. After the girls’ situated, Joyce opened the binder. At the beginning of the binder was a sheet of names.
“We forgot to name him!” Wailed Rebecca. “I can’t believe it! How could we forget!”

“Hey, you just named him!” Said Joyce, putting her hand on Rebecca’s shoulder.

“Howe.” She wrote down the name, the date they found him, the date they released him, and a page number. She scrolled until she found an empty page. “Have the picture?” Asked Joyce. Rebecca nodded, and handed her a picture of Howe. Joyce glued it to the page and wrote down some things about the him.

_When we first found Howe, he was sitting underneath a small tree beside a stream. He had hurt his back leg, and we quickly took him back to the cave. We released him today, June 22, and he looked happy to be back in the wild. He was first confused, but then a female goat came up the mountain side and they ran off, happy to be together again. We will never forget our little Howe._

Joyce showed it to Rebecca. “How’s that?” Rebecca nodded. “Great, let’s go.” They pushed and bumped into each other, leaving the binder behind. Joyce pushed the bed back into the wall, concealing the hole.

“Listen, I snuck away. So I have to go. Do you mind looking after the animals today?” Joyce asked Rebecca, her eyes pleading.

Rebecca smiled sympathetically. “Of course. You go, don’t get caught.” Rebecca gave her a quick hug. Joyce smiled and ran to the tree.

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Joyce moved from her bed to the bean bag chair on her bottom bunk. She plopped down, taking out her phone. She had a new text from Rebecca.

_Dude, where r u? I didn’t see you today or the rest of yesterday! What’s going on?_

4:11 p.m.

_I am in serious trouble. My mom caught me coming back through the window when I was coming back. I am grounded._

4:12 p.m.
OMGoodness. I am so sorry! If I had known...
Idk. U don’t worry. I took care of the animals today. But I need to release the burrowing owl today.

4:13 p.m.

OK. U do that. I need to go. It’s a miracle she even let me keep my phone.

4:13 p.m.

K. Bye.

4:13 p.m.

Joyce set her phone down. She had to avoid her mom at all costs. She doesn’t need to worry about her dad. He’s always gone. He’s either at work, or fixing the truck, or playing with his friends, or just plain avoiding his family. That left mom to do all the housework and raising kids. Joyce took out her journal to write.

I am now grounded. I snuck out the window yesterday to help Rebecca release a goat. I was caught when I came back. Mom says I am not allowed to leave my room except for meals and chores. I do school in my room. What makes things worse is that Karen loves to torture me. She’s always trying to find some way to try to drive me crazy. Mom is always onto me but never her. Either Karen is really sneaky, or Mom just doesn’t care. I don’t know which.

Knock Knock! Knock Knock!

“Now what?” Joyce grumbled. She opened the bathroom door to see Karen grinning at her. “Yes? What do you want?

Karen pushed by her and grabbed my journal. “Hey!” Joyce screamed, grabbing her journal back. “Why are you in here? Get out!” Karen sat on the toilet lid. Joyce tried to slam the door, but found a towel jammed in the door frame, preventing her from closing the door. Joyce glared at Karen. “What is your problem?”

Karen just stared at her. She seemed to be enjoying this. “I have a lot of problems. The real question is: What is your problem?” She sneered.

Joyce clenched her fists. “My problem is sitting right in front of me.” She said through gritted teeth. Karen rolled her eyes.
“Whatever, Miss Problem. You say what you want.” Karen continued to stare at her, almost challenging her to do something wrong. Joyce flared inside.

“Just get out of here! I don’t want you here!” Joyce yelled, trying to yank out the towel.

“Well I don’t want you either!” Karen screamed, jumping up to grab the towel back from Joyce. “So get out of here! Oh, wait! You can’t, because Mom grounded you! Serves you right!” Karen stuck out her tongue.

Joyce had enough. “Just get out of here! No, get out of my life! I never wanted a sister anyway!” Joyce stopped, seeing Karen’s stunned face. She had a sinking feeling that she had gone too far. Karen tried to blink back tears.

“Fine.” She whispered. She shrugged off Joyce’s hands off her shoulders and backed into her room. She closed the door quietly. Joyce groaned and slammed her door. She felt her own tears welling up in her eyes. She blinked them away. *She gets what she deserves. Now she knows my mind. But was that really it? Do I feel better? If I did, then I wouldn’t have a stomachache.*

Still blinking back tears, she grabbed her phone. She quickly pushed Rebecca’s number.

“Rebecca?”

“Joyce! What’s wrong?”

“I need you.” Joyce said through a choked throat. “Meet me at the cave.”

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“I couldn’t control myself. I told her I didn’t want a sister, that I wanted her out of my life, and I almost meant it until I saw her face.” Joyce shook with sobs. Rebecca continued to listen to Joyce. “I really hurt her. I don’t feel better, I feel worse. I can’t do anything to change what I said.” Joyce was crying so hard now, she couldn’t speak anymore. Rebecca hugged Joyce closer. What else could she do? After Joyce calmed down a little, Rebecca spoke.

“I kind of know how you feel. I had a fight with my friend once, and we have not spoken since. I want you to know that we all make mistakes, we all fight. But maybe I could have
changed our relationship if I had apologized sooner. Now she hates me. I could have changed that if I had said something in the early stages.” Rebecca sighed silently. “I want you to try to make up with your sister. Yes, she did all those things, but you have to forgive her! Or else you guys will have conflict for the rest of your lives.” Rebecca squeezed her a little more. “And we don’t want that.”

Joyce had started to cry again, so Rebecca just stayed with her until she was okay. “Thanks, Beck.” Was all she could say. Joyce sat up from her bed in the cave. “I need to talk to Karen. Thank you.” She hugged Rebecca again, and went down the tree. Joyce rode her bike down the hillside, carefully dodging the rocks and still plants.

Joyce parked the bike in front of her window. She climbed through, careful not to make any noise. She closed her window, wondering if she should just walk into Karen’s room and apologize. She decided that was too sudden. Joyce thought, and thought, and thought. She finally decided to write her a note, to see if that would loosen the tension before a confrontation.

Joyce took out her notebook and a pencil and started to write.

Dear Karen,

I am really sorry I said that I wanted you out of my life. I am sorry I said that I didn’t want a sister. I didn’t mean it. Not one word. I blame myself for being a bully. I need you in my life. I want you in my life.

Joyce crinkled in up and started a new page.

Karen,

I am sorry. I

Joyce didn’t even finish when her phone buzzed. She picked it up and found that Karen had texted her.

I can’t believe you said that. So if that is what you want, then I will. I will not be your sister or in your life. Bye.

7:33 p.m.

Wait, NO!!

7:33 p.m.

I want u with me! I didn’t mean what i said.
I promise! I am so sorry! I was angry and that is not even an excuse! What I did was wrong! I c that know! I need u! I need u in my life! I would be so lonely without u! Do u even remember how I became such good friends with Rebecca?

7:34 p.m.

Yes, I remember. I waltzed right up to her RV with you running after me to stop, and I knocked and there was Rebecca. Man, she was bewildered! I wish u could have seen her face! Then we became friends.

7:36 p.m.

But that still doesn’t change what u said.

7:36 p.m.

I know. But listen, without u, I probably would have never been friends with her! U helped me be friends with her! U did that!!! I need u. I really do. Please forgive me. I am sosososososo sorry.

7:37 p.m.

. . .

7:39 p.m.

I love u. I wish I had said that sooner, so I am saying it now with all of my heart. I love YOU. And I never meant what I said. Not on my life. I really am sorry.

7:40 p.m.
Yes, but only if u can forgive me. I am sorry I called u names and was mean to u. I have equal blame. So can u forgive me?

7:41 p.m.

Yes, I forgive u! :D

7:41 p.m.

The bathroom door opened. Karen stood there, holding her phone in front of her and a backpack on her shoulders. Her eyes were puffy and red from crying and her eyelashes were clumped together. But her eyes shone and her smile lit up the whole room. “Then I forgive you to.” She croaked.

Joyce shot up and hugged Karen. She hugged back. Joyce saw a movement outside and broke away from Karen. She looked out her window to see Rebecca peeking out and watching them, smiling. Joyce opened her window. “Good job.” Rebecca said. Joyce smiled at Karen. She had put her backpack on the ground.

Joyce had a warm feeling in her heart. She still had it when she told Rebecca all about it. “Peace,” said Rebecca. “You are feeling peace in your heart.” Joyce smiled with peace in her heart.