Super Nova

977 words

I gazed out the window, observing the countless trees we passed in our rented SUV. They felt dark and oppressive, towering over everything. The empty road and heavy fog did nothing to calm my unease. When my mother suggested the two of us go on a camping trip, I was, at first, ecstatic. Once we left home, I only felt the crushing sense that something awful would happen.

I averted my scrutiny from the window to my mother, who was driving us through Olympic National Park in western Washington.

“How much longer until we get to the campsite?” I inquired, fiddling with the hem of my shirt.

“It should only be about half an hour,” my mother answered. “Why? Do you need something?”

“No, I'm okay. Just wondering,” I said, turning back to the window.

We drove in silence for a while. My mother focused on getting us to our destination, and I focused on trying to ignore the ever-growing sense of unease in my stomach.

The fog outside had thickened. It felt like a portent, warning of some terrible fate.

“Hey, Mom, do you think the weather will be okay for camping today?” I asked, secretly hoping she would say no. Maybe turning back would quell the voice in my head screaming about foreboding danger...

“I think we’ll be okay, Nova; a little fog never hurt anyone,” she said, glancing over at me briefly before returning her attention to the road.

Soon after, we arrived at our campsite. It was rather quaint - a picnic table, a fire pit, and a stretch of ground just large enough to pitch our tent.

Once my mother parked the car, we unloaded all our camping supplies. Not being in the car caused the sinking feeling to evaporate. The best thing I could do was focus on having fun camping. We set to work pitching the tent, arranging chairs around the firepit, and designating a meal space.

“Welp, I think we’re done,” I said, looking at my mother, and dusting off my hands.“Let’s go for a hike.”

“I think that’s a great idea!” my mother said. “We should hike the Sunrise Point Trail; it’s only three miles.”

“That sounds fun!” I ran to the tent to grab my hiking bag, then we headed off for the trail.

After about an hour of hiking, my mother and I reached the end of the trail. Looking out, we saw Mount Angeles in the distance, tall trees covering the mountain like a blanket.

“Wow…” I exhaled. The view was breathtaking and serene.

It was already dusk by the time we arrived back at camp, and the rest of the night featured a fire, stories, and an unhealthy amount of s’mores. When the sun was long past set, and the crickets were chirping, we settled in for the night.

The next two days of camping consisted of a similar schedule. After hiking through heavily forested trails, swimming in vast lakes, and star-gazing with a clear night sky, it was time to pack up camp and head home.

The sick twist in my gut sprung up as my mother and I packed up camp. At first, I attributed this to the fact that I wanted to stay longer, but as we finished loading everything in the car, the feeling only worsened.

We climbed into the car and shut the doors. Turning to me, my mother said, “Ready to go? You got everything?”

“Yep, everything’s in the car.” I replied, trying to appear relaxed.

With that, my mother started the car and pulled onto the road leading us out of the national park.

I focused on trying to take deep breaths, to calm myself down. Anyone who has ever given me advice about emotional regulation said deep breaths would help consternation. It helped as much as a princess band-aid on a bullet wound.

My mother, who noticed my clear distress, looked over at me with concern. “Nova, are you okay?”

“Honestly, no. I have this horrible feeling that something terrible is going to happen, and it’s really freaking me out,” I said, as I twisted my seatbelt in my hands.

“Okay. Well, is this feeling about anything in particular? Or is it vague?”

“It’s vague, but it's incredibly distressing, and I want to write it off as nothing, but it really feels like something awful is going to happen!” My fidgety hands switched from twisting the seatbelt to tapping on my knee in a frantic pattern.

“Does anything make the feeling worse? Is it constant or is it sometimes better?”

“It’s only this bad when we’re in the car. When we were camping, I felt fine, but now it’s a constant sense of impending doom!”

“Sometimes when our brain senses something is off, but it's not obvious, we can feel distressing emotions for seemingly no reason. It's important to trust yourself, and if you feel so strongly that something is wrong, you should believe in yourself.”

Out of the corner of my eye, I saw something move in the shadows of the forest.

“Stop the car!!!”

My mother slammed her foot on the brake, bringing the car to a screeching halt. A massive bull elk bounded out of the forest, stopping directly in front of the car. It turned its head towards me, making direct eye contact.

We stared at each other for a moment, the elk and I. Then, he dashed the rest of the way across the road, disappearing into the forest.

“Nova, are you okay?!”

I was so startled I couldn’t speak, I just nodded aggressively.

My mom took a deep breath and turned to me, her lips parting as though to say something. She paused, then spoke, “That was too close. Your instincts were right; I’m so glad you told me you felt something was wrong. You really are my Super Nova.”