

Set 3000 years in the future

Thunder rumbled and rain glistened off the lone figure, running through the darkness. She was stuck, she was stranded, and she was lost. She was an explorer. And she explored, oh yes, she did. She explored continents, countries, and life. She made friendships and relationships and all that lovely stuff but, in the end, she left everything behind like everyone does. That was the future. A mirror of our world today, but without all the compassion, hope and dreams. Things were efficient. Life was efficient. Potential and talent were important. Happiness was not. She loved and cherished so many people that she ended up foolishly leaving behind for glory and fame, for “happiness.” She was wrong. But alas, she continued exploring planets, getting her fame and glory because she knew no other way. The girl was barely an adult, still fighting her way through her teen years, completing an apprenticeship. That is when everything changed the one day that she met a tree. That was the day she changed, and vowed to make others change just as she had.

The planet inhabited a single tree. It was ancient and old, like it was about to wither into the ground, ready to give up on its life. The explorer stepped forward surveying the land as she had done to so many planets before. Everything looked cold and dreary, all the life and color sucked out of it. She could hear voices whispering in the wind, calling to her. She seemed to get sucked in, every step feeling like she weighed a thousand pounds. In a matter of seconds, she was standing next to the tree shivering rapidly.

“Hello,” the tree said monotonously.

“Hi,” the girl cocked her head to the side as she observed every part of the ancient tree jotting down notes. She cut straight to the point, “What’s wrong with you?”

“Everything. Everything is wrong because I regret what I didn’t do and what I didn’t say.”

The explorer scoffed. *What a silly tree. He doesn't understand. In this world, in this life you must regret nothing. You must move forward, or you will fail. Hold on to nothing or you will fail. Be the best or you will fail. And failing is bad.* She repeated the words that she had repeated to herself for as long as she could remember. This tree didn't understand, for him, nothing could ever be wrong because well, he was a tree!

"I regret nothing," The explorer gazed at the tree, pride shining in her eyes.

The tree rustled as if it was doing a double take. It was a rather funny scene, watching a surprised tree. Ridiculous, you would think, but it was happening. The explorer brushed cold, crisp leaves off her face, pulling back her golden-brown hair. Showing off her icy blue eyes. The tree looked deeper and saw beneath her pride, a young girl. Someone who chose nothing but could have had everything because of pride, greed, and selfishness. *Pride.* Greatness, glory, and fame. The tree trembled sadly. That's all anyone could think about these days. Who had more, who had less. Society was truly messed up. The tree had seen the Golden Age. The tree had seen care, compassion, and **love**. He knew this girl could do it all. The tree was about to die. But, just maybe, he could leave this world knowing he changed one person. Maybe he could leave the world a gift. This girl could change the world and bring out the glimmers of humanity in it. Yes, he would try to make her understand. A last gift from him to the future generations. *Oh boy. For the future generations,* The tree reminded itself. He looked back at the prideful girl and smiled softly. *One last gift.*

"That's not true. Everybody regrets something. Because nobody is perfect. You have failed at least once in your life. You regret something. Something big," The tree shuddered, and its leaves continued to fall on the explorer.

As soon as the leaves slowed their flutter, everything turned to chaos. The wind began to whip around her. The explorer watched as the whispers in the breezes turned into violent, aching screams of longing. She doubled over, feeling as if she was punched in the gut. Her thoughts began to spiral. Everything was beginning to spiral. That's when she realized, those were *her* screams. That was her pain and her longing. The gusts spun faster, faster, and faster around her until she could barely see the tree. The voices coming from the wind filled her with doubt and despair. It was as if a small tornado of fury, and sadness, and pain, was settling in her soul, burying deep inside of her.

"I should have- I should have- I should have-" the wind whipped around the explorer.

She stumbled on the cold uneven ground, and that's when she saw her. Her planet exploding all life on it gone, her life withering and crumbling with no one left in it, all her loved ones that she left behind. She could see all the people she let down all because she too was scared and too young to know how to love them. Now she knew, she knew what regret was. And she regretted it all. She regretted leaving, she regretted everything.

"I never should have left," she admitted, lips trembling, "I should have-"

"And there you see, girl, the most important lesson you could ever learn. Don't you think it is better to fail, to lose, than to regret not trying at all? You've left all your friends, all your family, your whole life behind because you gave up on them."

The explorer sat on the rocky terrain and pondered. She took in the wise words of the tree standing before her. The more she thought, the more her determination grew. The more it grew the more ready she was. It grew and grew until it was as big as the sun. And with each breath she took she accepted it. She accepted her failures, her losses. She let go of her foolish pride to make room for the determination, the love, and compassion growing inside of her. She let go of the

greed and hunger for glory. The tree watched her as she thought. He grew overjoyed. *Yes. She understands. And she will make the rest of the world see it too. She will change the world.*

The girl stood up.

“Go back to your planet Earth,” the tree suggested, “And make them understand too. Your society, your world, is deeply flawed. And show them. Make them see one person at a time, what is inside of them,”

The girl wished she could say more. Something more to this tree that she could never forget. She began to talk.

“Listen, um, tree-”

The tree cut her off and the girl knew. She gave him a small smile. He understood her. “Go make the world what it used to be.”

The explorer stood up and dusted herself off. She began to walk. She walked for a long time, away from the tree, off the planet and into the sky, ready to begin her long journey home.

-A while later-

The tree is still alive. But the girl is doing remarkable things now. She went home to Earth; she fulfilled her promise to the tree. The tree watched from afar, watching the girl with so much potential change people. And with each person the girl reached she felt the tree’s leaves falling down her face again. She would always remember the tree that showed her who she was supposed to be. He watched as the glimmers of compassion and love grew bigger and bigger through her till it practically poured out in streams from people. Yes, the journey was long, it was tough, as steep as a mountain. People were still greedy and selfish but at least now there is

something to combat it. With that the tree could finally fade from his long and ancient life.

Knowing that his job was done. He had changed a girl. And with that he changed the world.