

FROM ON HIGH

by

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FADE IN

INT. VICTORIAN HOUSE - DAWN

LIVING ROOM

A MAN stands looking out of a large bay window. Soft snowflakes are falling and have already covered the garden in a white blanket.

Only the decorative fishpond is visible as a black hole in the stark whiteness. Distant fields are all white with snow. No other buildings are visible as far as the eye can see.

FLASHBACK

SUPER: 3 YEARS EARLIER

EXT. GARDEN OF VICTORIAN HOUSE - DAY

The same man and a YOUNG WOMAN hold hands and rotate around each other, smiling happily. The garden is lush, the sun is shining. The ambience is one of happiness.

It is Fall. Piles of leaves are scattered about. In a tree-swing sits a YOUNG GIRL, (about 5). She swings gently back and forth, smiling as she watches her PARENTS dancing in the sunshine.

END FLASHBACK

LIVING ROOM

The man turns around. The room is scattered with Christmas tree decorations. Various boxes lie open. A six-foot Christmas tree stands in the corner of the room. It is partially decorated.

A young girl, AUTUMN (8) sits on the floor. She is happily playing with a string of colored beads. She looks up at her FATHER and smiles.

He returns her affections.

FLASHBACK

SUPER: 3 DAYS EARLIER.

INT. AIRPORT TERMINAL - TELEPHONE BOOTH

The FATHER waits anxiously as the telephone rings in his ear. The receiver is picked up by AUTUMN.

AUTUMN  
Hello?

TELEPHONE INTERCUT

FATHER  
Hello? Autumn? It's daddy.  
How are you, sweetheart? Are  
you and NANNY okay?

AUTUMN  
 DADDY! DADDY! Where are you?  
 We're here waiting for you!

Autumn smiles radiantly. She twirls the telephone cord in her fingers. She is hopping on one leg.

FATHER  
 I know, sweetheart, I know.  
 I was delayed but I'm nearly home. Just one more short hop and I'll be there with you.  
 (pause)  
 I promise. A few more hours.

Autumn's expression falters a little.

AUTUMN  
 Okay, daddy. We were both really worried in case something bad had happened.

At the end of the hallway stands a middle-aged woman, wiping her hands on a pinafore.

She smiles and nods at Autumn.

Autumn returns the smile and also nods.

FATHER  
 No, honey. Everything is alright. I'll be there in just a few short hours.  
 (pause)  
 I love you, sweetheart.

AUTUMN  
 I love you too, daddy.

Autumn's face registers the merest flicker of doubt as she terminates the call.

INT. AIRPORT TERMINAL - LATER

MONTAGE

1. Autumn and the NANNY meet her father from the flight.
2. They ride in a taxi, laughing.
3. They enter and leave various stores, carrying packages, laughing all the while.

END MONTAGE

END FLASHBACK

BACK TO LIVING ROOM SCENE

Autumn holds out the string of colored beads so that her father can see them.

AUTUMN  
 These were mommy's favorites, you know.

Her father sits beside her and places an arm around her shoulders. They watch the Christmas tree in silence.

He brushes some stray hair out of her face and strokes her cheek. She smiles at him.

FATHER

Yes, honey. I know they were.  
She loved them all.

He looks around the room at the tree and the boxes of decorations. His eyes begin to well with tears.

EXT. VICTORIAN HOUSE - DAY

Snow is falling heavily. It settles.

BACK TO SCENE

The open fire in the room crackles. Autumn and her father's shadows are cast across the floor.

FLASHBACK

INT. HOSPITAL HALLWAY

(silence)

The father sits in a chair. He leans forward, wringing his hands. Down the hallway, a door opens. A surgeon in scrubs approaches in slowed motion.

The father stands up and looks up at him. The surgeon's face is deadpan, serious.

The father looks mortified. He shakes his head and sinks to his knees, clutching his head. He opens his mouth as if about to scream.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM

A beautiful woman lies on a bed. Her skin is pale, her lips already cyanotic.

Her eyes are closed, her expression peaceful. A man's hand picks up hers and strokes it.

EXT. FUNERAL - DAY

(silence)

A graveside funeral. Thick snow covers the ground. The trees are bare. A coffin is slowly lowered into the ground. A single yellow rose lands on the coffin and bounces. Petals scatter, flipping over.

The father stands beside the grave. His face is ashen, drawn, and gaunt. He looks exhausted.

His daughter is holding his hand, looking into the hole. Several people stand around the graveside looking forlorn, lost.

END FLASHBACK

## LIVING ROOM

The father composes himself. He stands up and surreptitiously wipes a tear from his cheek.

He forces an awkward smile for his daughter.

FATHER

Come on, sweetie. Let's get this tree finished before Santa Claus gets here. We only have a few hours left.

Autumn grins and jumps up. She busies herself with boxes of toys, unpacking them. They laugh as they begin decorating the Christmas tree.

EXT. VICTORIAN HOUSE - DUSK

Snow falls heavier than ever. Huge, fluffy flakes.

BACK TO SCENE - LATER

The Christmas tree is almost finished and looks beautiful. Autumn and her father stand together, admiring their handiwork. A large gold star sits atop the decorated conifer.

Autumn looks up at the tree and points.

AUTUMN

We don't have an angel, daddy. There should be an angel up there.

The father peers up and nods in agreement.

FATHER

You're right, honey. An angel WOULD be perfect.

He squats down in front of her and places his hands on Autumn's shoulders.

FATHER

Maybe next year. Next year we'll have an angel.

Autumn stares into her father's kind face.

AUTUMN

Alright, daddy. Next year.

They continue decorating around the room. Each adding their own personal touch. They laugh and play, chase one another around the room.

LATER

The father, preoccupied with the final additions to the tree, suddenly turns around. Autumn is curled up on a sofa. She has fallen asleep.

He glances at a carriage clock on the mantelpiece.

FATHER  
 Wow. I hadn't realized the  
 time. Poor little mite. She  
 must be exhausted.

He picks up a small glass of sherry, swallows the  
 contents and then slumps down into an easy chair.  
 He stretches out his legs.

He looks around the room, admiring the beautiful  
 tree with its glittering tinsel and flashing  
 colored lights. They are mesmerizing.

INT. HOSPITAL - A PRIVATE ROOM

BEEEEEEEEEP . . .

Autumn lies on the bed. Various medical hardware  
 is attached to her. Her father is slumped over the  
 tiny form. His body jerks up and down as he weeps.  
 A cardiac monitor shows a flat line.

A doctor enters the room. The father looks up.

FATHER  
 Why, doctor? WHY!

His eyes are bloodshot, tears stream down his  
 face.

FATHER  
 She was doing just FINE only  
 a few hours ago.  
 (pause)  
 So why! Tell me WHY!

The doctor looks distraught, embarrassed.

DOCTOR  
 I'm very, very sorry Mr.  
 Forsyth. This new bug is  
 vicious-- relentless. We  
 tried everything we could for  
 Autumn but--  
 (pause)  
 Her immune system was just  
 too weak and immature to cope  
 with the onslaught.  
 (pause)  
 I'm very sorry. If there's  
 anything we can do--

The father's eyes are wet, his voice quiet.

FATHER  
 No. There's nothing anyone  
 can do now, doctor. Not any  
 more.  
 (pause)  
 Two people died here tonight.

He holds up two fingers and shakes his hand.

FATHER  
 Two people.

He turns to Autumn and strokes her hair, weeping again. He picks up her hand. It hangs limp in his. He kisses it, places it back on the bed and pats it.

Then he leans over and presses his lips against her forehead. A single tear drops onto her face.

The doctor, looking sorrowful, is silent. He turns and quietly exits the room.

INT. HOSPITAL WARD - LATER

The father leaves a room and walks down the hallway. His expression is blank, lost in thought. His hair is mussed. He drags his feet and weaves from side to side, as if slightly intoxicated.

He stops. His eyes widen, his mouth opens.

INT. HOSPITAL WARD

A young girl stands in the hallway. She is looking directly at him.

It is AUTUMN. She is wearing normal, everyday clothing.

The father looks around, his eyes wild. Everything in the hospital looks normal. He looks back to his daughter. He clutches the side of his head.

He watches Autumn in silence. His features register a variety of emotions, from utter disbelief to incomprehension and confusion.

His chin twitches as his lips move apart to speak.

FATHER

Autumn? Is that you?

He turns around, looks back to the room he just left, and then back to Autumn. He holds out his hands, as if reaching for her.

Autumn's smile seems unnaturally radiant.

AUTUMN

It's okay, daddy. Don't be sad. I am alright. Mommy is here with me. We're happy. She says she loves and misses you. I've been playing with the angels.

(pause)

They're beautiful. Really beautiful.

The visage fades. The father sinks to the floor. He places his head between his knees and weeps uncontrollably.

A nurse helps him to his feet. He is unsteady. The nurse supports him. They walk down the hallway and through some swinging doors into bright daylight.

## BACK TO LIVING ROOM SCENE

The father jerks awake in his chair. He is in a cold sweat. His hands are flailing. His actions awaken Autumn, who was still asleep on the couch.

She sits up and groggily wipes the sleep from her eyes. She looks at her father.

He drops to the floor and crawls over to her. He wraps her in his arms and hugs her tightly.

AUTUMN

I had a funny dream, daddy.

Her father looks away momentarily to wipe his eyes.

FATHER

You did? What was it about?

Autumn looks around the room, as if thinking. Then she looks into her father's eyes.

AUTUMN

I dreamed I was with mommy  
and there were angels  
everywhere. We were playing.  
It was fun.

(pause)

Mommy said that she loves and  
misses you.

The father's eyes fill with tears. He makes no effort to wipe them away. His voice cracks.

FATHER

That's wonderful, honey. I  
love and miss her, too. But  
it was just a dream.

AUTUMN

I know, daddy. But it felt so  
real.

FATHER

Dreams often do, honey. It's  
often hard to tell them apart  
from real life.

Autumn looks at the Christmas tree, gasps and then squeals with delight.

AUTUMN

Oh, daddy! You got one!  
I KNEW you would.

The father follows Autumn's gaze. On top of the Christmas tree is a beautiful golden angel where before was the star. It appears to be looking down at them. He stares at it in disbelief.

FATHER

No, honey, it wasn't me. I  
didn't put it there.



Autumn runs over to the tree, gazing up at the latest addition. She stands; marveling at the incredible figure perched on top of the tree. It is easily the brightest object in the entire room.

She turns to face her father.

AUTUMN  
Then where did it come from?  
(pause)  
Anyway, she's beautiful.

The father is lost for words. He puts his arm around his daughter's shoulders. They stare at the angel in silence. The spell is eventually broken.

FATHER  
Maybe Santa left it for us.  
You know? An early Christmas  
gift? Perhaps he thought it  
was time we had an angel.

His expression drops as he stares back at the angel. The angel's features are remarkably similar to those of Autumn. Autumn looks from the angel to her father. Her expression is one of pure joy.

AUTUMN  
Or maybe the angels left it  
for us. As a special gift.

FATHER  
I think you're right, honey.  
I think they did.

AUTUMN  
It's beautiful.

She looks from her father, back to the tree.

AUTUMN  
I will treasure it forever.

They stand side by side, marveling at the angel.

FATHER  
I will too. Even more now.

He kisses Autumn warmly on her cheek.

FATHER  
Merry Christmas, my angel.

Autumn hugs her father tightly around his neck.

AUTUMN  
Merry Christmas, daddy.

She looks up towards the ceiling.

AUTUMN  
And you too, mommy.

FADE OUT