

*After a head injury, Kaito starts suffering from a mild form of PTSD that triggers him to have obsessive-compulsive-like symptoms to "avoid" that event from happening again. He also has thoughts about being sick and clean.*

September 5th, 2018:

I'm almost there, I can see the top from where I'm standing. I grinned to myself, stretching my arm up to the next branch. Only a few more to go! I go up the next branch, and the next one, and finally-

"Kaito! Get down from there now!"

Miyu.

My pesky little sister who always seems to know what's right. I ignore her, and continue on. As soon as I reach the top branch, I smile down at her tiny figure. I hear her screech as I remove one hand from the limp branch to wave at her. "Mom!" I hear her shout. I scramble down quickly, just before mom gets outside. "Kaito..." Her warning mother voice on full blast. She points me to go inside, and Miyu sticks her tongue out at me as I walk by. My dad is on his phone, probably looking at the news. He never gets off the news. So many things happen every day. There was an earthquake back in June, and then the floods that followed in July, luckily none of them were near us. It was all over the news, I saw mountains crashing down, roads cracked and houses leaning to one side. I couldn't help but think what if that happens to us? I quickly dismissed those thoughts though, and focused on my homework.

"Kaito, dinner." Mom calls me from my desk. I walk down to dinner and sit down at the table.

"Kaito, aren't you forgetting something?" Dad smiles and nods towards the sink. Right. I've got to wash my hands. There are so many other things to do in the world, I always forget. My mom laughs and calls me a "typical teenage boy" whatever that means. I wash quickly and start to pick at food in my bowl. Tonight, we are eating a tuna sashimi rice bowl. I eat quickly as always, and ask mom and dad if I can go outside and read near our ginkgo tree (although, no reading will be done). They reluctantly agree, but tell me to get inside before dark. I practically blot out of the house and run to the tree. Unfortunately for me, Miyu joins me, bringing two books in her arms. "You forgot your book." She says, dripping with sarcasm. I roll my eyes and she throws me the book. "Lonesome bodybuilder? What is this about?"

"It's new, came out this year. It's about a female bodybuilder who-"

"Okay, okay, I get it." I skim through the pages. Boring, boring, boring. Who thought reading was a fun pastime? Clearly my sister's best friend. I sit, picking at the grass pretending to

read for another 20 minutes. I check my watch. It's almost 8 pm. It will get dark soon. I say goodnight to my mom and dad, and then go to bed.

September 6th, 2018:

**BANG!**

I start awake. What is going on?

**BANG!**

I roll over to see my shelves shaking. A rush of ice runs through my system.

Earthquake!

My mom and dad and sister are already awake. They are huddled under our dining room table, right outside my room. I start to run over, but stop quickly because I realize my shelves will fall. They have all my favorite things on them. My glass jar filled with shells from the beaches we have visited, my rock collection, a branch from the tree, my drawings, books (but comic books, obviously). I throw my hands in front of my two large, tall shelves. Something in my mind screams at me that this is a terrible idea, but I ignore the anxious feeling. Everything will be fine. My mom and dad are yelling at me to come under the table, but I stay put.

**BANG!**

The shelves dip forward and I start to run, trying to grab my things.

**THUNK.**

I fall forward, my head must have hit the shelves. Down I go, my head throbbing as it hits the hard floor. I faintly hear my mom and dad rushing over and pulling me under the table.

I close my eyes.

Darkness.

*Later that same day*

I awake with a start. I don't exactly remember what happened to me, but I see mom, dad and even Miyu looking relieved to see me, so I imagine it was pretty serious. "You hit your head pretty hard, Aniki. Those shelves are huge! And then, you hit your head on the floor, and then mom and dad had to carry you under the table. But we're okay now. Some nice people are helping us fix our house and the neighbor's too. Mom and dad were so worried but I wasn't because-"

"Easy Miyu, let him breathe." Mom says with a small, relieved chuckle. I hit my head on big shelves and the floor? Wow, this is so cool! I'm gonna look like a hero, like Toshio Eto in my favorite comic book, Super Friends! When I go back to school. I can imagine what I'll say, "Yeah the shelves were like, this thick, and then I hit my head on the ground. In the middle of an earthquake. But I'm fine." Maybe I would even have a cool scar! My head still hurts

though. It feels fuzzy, like someone stuffed a bunch of mom's cotton balls in there. I sit up, but I feel really dizzy, I try to make it to the bathroom, but I fail and throw up. Miyu turns away in disgust and mom and dad take me back to bed. I sigh sadly when I see my glass jar is broken. My room looks disheveled, but mom and dad start picking things up as I lay in bed. They tell me to try and stay awake, and that they are going to call the doctor when everything clears up. They offer me that "lonesome bodybuilder" book I falsely read yesterday. It's crazy how yesterday seems so far away. I decline and they leave the room for a moment to check up on Miyu. I sigh and look out my window. There are parts of roofs, glass and wood outside. Maybe some of our roof fell off. Even cooler. What isn't cool, though, is how I feel. I feel... Odd... Like for some reason something is wrong with my head, even though I know everything is fine. *Mom and dad are going to call a doctor soon, so even if there's something wrong, they'll fix it. Everythings fine. Everythings fine.* I stop my inner dialogue. Why am I saying everythings fine over and over? I never used to do that. I feel the need to get to the number three, and for some odd reason. I say it again. *Everythings fine.* Three? Why three? And why do I feel like I have to say it three more times, or else everything won't be fine? *Everythings fine, everythings fine, everythings fine.* Well this is weird. "Mom, dad?" I call out. They come back in with some Daikon salad and green tea. One of my favorite meals. "Yes Kai?"

"I keep repeating what I'm saying in my head."

They laugh.

But I don't understand why they find that funny, and why I feel the sudden need to do it again. *Everythings fine, everythings fine, everythings fine.*

"Kai?" My dad says, looking concerned.

"What?"

"I asked if you were feeling well enough to eat."

*I have no idea.*

"Yeah I'm fine... Thanks." I take the food, and start to eat.

*Don't eat that.*

What is going on?

*It's dangerous.*

I eat this all the time and have never had a problem, so why is it dangerous now? I try and shut off my brain, like when I was thinking about the earthquakes.

But this time I can't.

I sit still, wanting to eat it, but for some reason, just sitting there. I drink the tea. "Oh, so that's okay?" I mumble aloud to myself. I look at the salad again. What would be dangerous about this? It doesn't make any sense. I pick up my fork, put it in the salad, and hold it up to my mouth.

*You shouldn't eat that, you'll get sick.*

Frustrated and confused I yell for my parents. They come barreling in. I ask them if I can have something else instead. They bring me back a tomato and cheese sandwich. I wait. Nothing. I take a bite slowly, and nothing happens. Why the salad but not the sandwich and tea? It doesn't make any sense. I sigh and finish my food. Mom and dad are off talking to the neighbors about the damage. *What if that sandwich makes you sick?* My blood turns cold. No, no way. I've eaten this a million times and everythings... Fine.

*Everythings fine, everythings fine, everythings fine.*

I try to get up out of bed, but my head throbs and I sit back down. Miyu comes in, with a book in her hand. I fight down the urge to ask her if the page number has a three in it. "Are you alright?" She asks me.

*No of course I'm not alright, I think I'm going to be sick from eating a sandwich and I'm obsessed with the number three.*

"I'm fine. Leave me alone," then, "please." Miyu rolls her eyes and leaves my room. I sigh, and watch as my parents point to me and then to their head. Great. They're explaining my injury to our neighbors. I don't know what there is to explain, or what it's called when you're obsessed with sickness and numbers. This didn't happen before I hit my head. Did I mess my head up? A surge of nausea runs through me and plops down in my stomach. I rush to the bathroom as the fear brings it's way up my throat. *You shouldn't have eaten that sandwich.* My brain instantly supplies, even though it has nothing to do with why I'm sick in the first place. I trudge back to my room and lay down. Soon everything goes dark.

September 10th, 2018:

It's been a few days since I last wrote here. The doctor came by and urged me to drink green tea for my head. Except my head isn't hurting anymore. Something else is wrong, something bigger than just a bump on the head. I have to-no, need to- repeat words in my head. My mom and dad haven't seemed to notice anything is off with me. Maybe it's because I haven't told a soul. *If you tell anyone, they will think you're crazy.* My brain supplied. It's the morning, and I am about to have breakfast when I get up from my seat and go over to the sink. "Ah, our Musuko has finally remembered to wash his hands!" My dad and mom laugh. I turn the faucet on. *Once.* I turn off the sink. *Again.* I take a small step back from the sink, hoping to resist, but-*Do it again or else there will be another earthquake.* I step back over, scrubbing my hands harder this time, in hopes of not having to do it again. But, as soon as I finish. *Do it again.* I do. My mom and dad look confused, and so does Miyu. But

they laugh it off, claiming I was making up for all the times I hadn't washed my hands. I want to tell them that I washed them so no harm would come to us again. But I didn't. What is going on with me? Am I crazy? I must be. I probably screwed up my head because of those shelves. *Stupid, stupid why did I do that?* I wanted to save my things, but instead, I messed up my head and now my brain never shuts off. I slump back down in my seat, and eat. For dessert, mom brings out some matcha cookies and more green tea. I eat two. I go upstairs and get ready for bed. For some reason, after those cookies and tea, I feel a bit better. I found a book in my mom's room, and it had the recipe of the matcha cookies. Underneath the recipe, it says that matcha is great for stress and anxiety relief. I smile slightly to myself, and can't help but wonder if that's why I feel a bit better. I head to my room, and fall asleep.

September 11th, 2018

It's back to school today, but it seems strange because we have makeshift desks and most of our books are torn or missing. My friends are here though, Dai and Akio. We greet each other and I tell them about the shelf-not everything though. In school, we are learning about mathematics. I can't wait until my Juku (my after school class). Then, I have baseball practice! During Language arts class, my mind starts to wander into horrible scenarios. Like a carousel, the thoughts keep swinging back around.

*What if there's another earthquake? What if there's another earthquake? What if there's another earthquake? What if there's another earthquake? What if there's another earthquake? What if there's another earthquake? What if there's another earthquake?*

"Kaito!"

I tense up, my teacher is calling on me. I don't even know what she was talking about.

"Yes?" I squeak out. I hear the other students laugh at me.

"Can you summarize the passage we read a few weeks back?"

"Yes." *No, I don't even remember reading a passage a few weeks ago.*

I make something up, and try to conjure what very little I remembered. She didn't look impressed, but she said nothing else. After Language arts class, it's time for my favorite class, Physical education! Today, we are doing Kendo, which is like fencing! Except, we don't use real swords. Yet. After Phys Ed, It's time to go home. I always liked walking home because of the scenic route. The walk home from school is stunning. There are rows of flowers of all different colors in the rolling fields. Mountains as high as the sky and rolling

rivers. I don't tell my friends this, for fear of being made fun of, but I think it's beautiful. My mom and dad always look outside at our Gingko trees and the mountains every morning while they sip their Sencha tea. Due to the earthquake, though, now the mountains are crumbling, the flowers are smushed and the rivers are rapid. I sigh and look down to the road to avoid the sight, but the street is cracked too, everything around me is wrong and broken. I get home, and mom and dad are at the table eating Onigiri. They are talking about the aftermath and how we are going to piece the house back together. I sit next to them and drink some tea, grabbing a few rice balls for a snack. "How's your head, Kai?" My mom asks. I think about lying and not saying that I'm obsessed with washing my hands or that I can still feel the aftershocks of the earthquake when I walk. "It's okay." I say, not having the courage to. That night when I go to bed, I look out my window at the clear sky and think that one day, I will have the courage to tell them what's going on with me.