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Regrets, Struggles, and Misinterpretation

First, I must admit the fact that my life is one with no surprises: no secret identity, no superpower, not even an accomplishment to show off. I'm just your average high school student. The only thing I possess worth mentioning is a past filled with regret and failure. It is so abysmal that I want to share the unimaginable difficulty that a mediocre student encountered when he decided his life was unacceptable.

To start with, my name is Sonne. I live in Los Angeles. It's a very well-known city so I will skip describing it. My family is a typical middle-class family. My mom works as a nurse. My father is an engineer. They met when my father was having a physical at her hospital. I was born in 1999 and began this life that is now full of painful memories.

My parents are the people I love the most in this world, but also the ones I would blame the most for what I became. I remember when I was five, I would fight with other kids a lot merely because of losing a game. Sometimes it got so bad that I would hurt for days after a fight, though I had never lost one. Sometimes I couldn't win, but it was, at worst, a draw. My father was definitely not happy about this. One day after I picked another fight with a boy two years older than me and ended up pushing him into a fish pond — the boy was definitely taller than me — my father told me this, "Son, I want you to know this — it's okay not to win every time. The world is a forgiving place and even if you don't succeed every time, no one will consider you a failure." Of course, I didn't listen to him. But as I grew up and entered school, my parents would tell me the same thing again and again. Whenever I failed an exam, they would say that they would never consider me a failure just because I got bad grades. Most children can only dream that their parents would praise them more. But my own experience enabled me to notice that is not the case — at least not for me — because eventually, I drowned in the compliments. I really began to believe them and let my will to win go. It proved to be the worst thing I had ever done.

Because of my parents, I became a merely average student. I didn't fail, but I couldn't climb to the top either. I was assured so many times that it was fine, that I didn't need to change. Things really turned bad in the eighth grade. Everyone was sacrificing all of their free time to work tirelessly on high school applications. Even my parents started to lecture me on the importance of education. Yet I failed to recognize it. I would still waste my time on my phone, thinking things would turn out to be fine as usual. But they didn't. My sloth eventually had consequences. All of my applications were declined, except for one place that put me on a waiting list. And there was nothing that I could do about it but pray. It was the worst week of my life and my future hung in limbo. I remembered the days when I would be frustrated by losing at anything. And I finally realized that I had let the best part of me slip away — my determination.

Here's what I found in this agonizing experience: just like rivers, compliments can carry you forward, but they can also drag you down forever in ways you could never imagine. I ended up getting off that waitlist just as I felt that something in me was coming back. I knew that my parents had good intentions, but blindly believing them had only done me damage. I thought that my realization would take me out of this nightmare, but it was merely the beginning of it.

My desire to succeed was even higher than when I was younger. I spent all the time I could studying in the library in order to raise my grades. Though I put so much effort into my academics, I saw little progress made. Instead, the more I studied, the more I found myself stuck at where I had started. I could stay up until three o'clock in the morning writing an essay and still get a B- on it. Other students could easily get a full score on the things I struggled

with. When I began to think about it, the problem was that I never had practice in working hard at schoolwork. Back then, this was not exactly a situation that would encourage a person to move on. Most of the time, I found myself in a depressed mood. A teacher noticed this when I suddenly burst into tears after scoring a seventy on a test. He asked me to come and see him for a chat. After I told him about my dissatisfaction with my grade, he enlightened me with the following, "There will never be a guarantee that you will succeed at anything. You can't expect that your work will always be rewarded, but you have to keep on trying. If you don't have determination, it will be very difficult to keep going." In that moment, everything he said made sense to me, either because it just naturally clicked or just because I desperately needed that kind of motivation. I stopped feeling sad for myself. *No more of that!* On my way back home, someone told me that I looked like a hungry animal, with my eye whites turning totally red. I was on a mission.

I continued struggling my entire freshman year. I tried not to expect any rewards. Every now and then when I would fail at something, whether it be a competition or a science project, I would feel the depression return. I made six A's out of my eight courses, but that wasn't enough for me. I was really afraid of getting nothing back because I didn't give it my all. I got greedy and wanted to have it all. The problem was that it became hard for me to see my own improvement.

So, I was surprised when I told someone I had messed up the history test again. "You are the most progressive person I have ever seen," she said. "I can see how a student can keep making good grades, but I have never known anyone who's able to turn three C's into two A's and a B+. Your resolution to improve yourself and your speed in making progress are just beyond imagination, you know that?" I told her to stop being sarcastic and leave me alone, though somewhere in my heart knew that she was being sincere.

That night I didn't work at all, which was an unusual occurrence. Instead I thought about the things I have done in the past two years. I recalled my middle school self when I had often ignored a teacher's advice to work harder. But even now, when the professor tells me that I am doing a good job, I would still find my work unsatisfying, seeking to finish my work perfectly. The more I think about it, the more I found my past and present selves two different people. I began to understand my personality has been totally shifted. But does this mean that I have become what I always wanted myself to be? I don't think that's the case. The peak is what I am aiming for, anywhere beneath it is still the same abyss I had fallen into.

At the end of my sophomore year, it seemed like the tide finally began to turn, at least I thought so. After two years' hard work, my grade had significantly improved, leaving only one B+ in history. If I can get a score around ninety on the final exam, I can end the year with straight A's and achieve my goal. I could even end this nightmare that has been haunting me for two years. Again, I put my full effort into it and I was so close to the place where I had always hoped to be, that I didn't even think about losing.

But things didn't turn out to be the way I thought it would be. Later that night, I locked my bedroom door and began sobbing. My mind was completely torn apart. I have failed many times, but none of it hurt me as much as this time. It felt like I finally had my fingers clinging to the edge of a cliff about to haul myself onto the platform yet I felt like I was being pushed down and about to shatter when I hit rock bottom. Not only did I fail to get the A in the history class, but my English also fell to a B just because my partner failed to do his part on the final project. How am I even supposed to prevent, or even foresee, that kind of thing coming? Is this as far as I can get? Am I destined to fail and make peace with my demons? I laid in my bed drowning in a sea of self-doubt.

I have already done so much, but in the end, it seems like I am back to square one. I felt helpless. Am I destined to fail? Should I give up? *Don't give up.* A voice suddenly echoed in my head. It took me back to a really distant scene that I had buried deep in my memory. I am immediately transported back to 2007. I had just thrown away Rubik's cube because I messed up the only face I had completed when I tried to figure the face adjacent to it. My father picked up the cube and passed it to me. "Why did you throw it away?" I told him I had spent so many hours completing the first face and now it's gone, and I didn't want to work on it anymore. "Listen, Sonne, this is a harsh world; not only will you sometimes pay a lot and end up gaining little, but you may also lose what you currently have as you make decisions." I replied with, "Will I let you and mom down if I ever make the wrong choice then?" My father answered, "We will always love you as long as you put your effort into the things you decide to do."

As long as you put the effort.

For many years, I thought my parents were just blindly praising me and that's why I failed so hard, but I was wrong. I couldn't see that all of their compliments were made based on the presumption that I had been dedicated to my work. But I wasn't. I decided to take an easier way to live on my own accord and now I am paying the price. My failure was not anyone else's fault but my own. And now, I must take full responsibility for it, even if I have to try many more times to make things right. I looked at the clock, it had just struck midnight. A new day is beginning.

I won't let this one bad semester stop me from trying harder just because it is worse than other semesters. I won't allow for all my efforts to die in vain just because of a few mishaps. Stopping here would make me the person I used to be again. The biggest difference between the present me and the past me is that the present me believes that if I don't give it my all, I gain nothing. If I give up now, how would I be any different from the past, learn from the mistakes that I had made? I don't know how many more rounds of struggling I have to endure, but I know that I don't like the idea of stopping here. I can't be bargained with about this.