

Anomaly

by: Kai Levenson-Cupp

Her twin brother Aaron is scared to give her a mirror. She keeps asking for one, but he doesn't want to see her cry. Aviva has not seen what she looks like in four weeks.

She is not exactly disfigured, but at the same time she is. Aviva is not unrecognizable, but it would come as a shock to see her as she is. Open burns creep up the sides of her face, the outsides of her arms, and cover her legs, or what remains of them. Her right leg was amputated below the knee soon after she arrived at the hospital. It was charred and dead; even the best doctors and nurses at the hospital couldn't save it. She knows about her leg, but she has yet to realize the extent of the burns on her face.

The doctors say that Aviva is healing well, but it's hard for her to agree when she gets into a wheelchair. Aaron has to gently lift her out of her hospital bed and into a wheelchair. It's difficult to not disturb the raw burns under layers of gauze on her thighs, hips, and her one remaining calf, but he's working on it. The first time he lifted her into her chair, she cried from the pain. It broke Aaron's heart. For the first two weeks in the hospital she would cry twice daily from the pain of wound care, which is when her burns are redressed. It involves ripping away cloth that had bound itself to her skin and replacing it, just to repeat the process twelve hours later. But Aviva has not cried in two and a half weeks. She is getting used to the pain and will soon be taught to do it herself, but before she does, she has to see her face.

Aviva is not scared. Aaron is. Aviva doesn't realize how different she looks. Aaron knows that her rosy cheeks are gone, one of her ears has melted into her head, and that the edges of her eyebrows were singed off and will not grow back. But Aviva knows none of this. All she knows is that she wants to look in a mirror.

Aaron gently lifts her from her bed and into a wheelchair. "You know, you're going to have to start learning how to get out of your bed by yourself soon."

Aviva looks at the white tiled floor and whispers, "I know." Her feet have not touched the ground in four weeks.

"You ready, Avi?" Aaron asks.

"Yup." Aviva replies. She's excited, but won't be for long.

Aaron takes a deep breath and starts to wheel her towards a mirror.

☆

She is silent at first. Just stares at her reflection. Her head was shaved for skin grafts. Her long curly hair that she loved so much - gone. There is still gauze covering much of her face, but she knows what's underneath. She lifts her right arm -- something she just relearned to do in occupational therapy -- and tries to bend it at the elbow. Something that seems so easy is difficult when it feels like your skin is being ripped off when you move. Just two months ago Aviva would never have been able to imagine pain like this. Two months ago, Aviva was doing back handsprings. Now, she is putting all of her energy into slowly bending her elbow. She shakes from the pain and lack of muscles. Aviva never realized just how *heavy* arms are, but now that the muscles have atrophied she notices.

She slowly pulls a bit of gauze down from her cheek, gasping from the pain and the shock of seeing her face. She then puts the gauze back up, horrified. In her mind, her beautiful Mediterranean skin has been marred. It was something that she and Aaron shared, but now it has

been taken away from her. She used to love it. It was smooth and tanned, but now it's bumpy and uneven. She knows that nothing will ever be the same.

She will never have all of her right leg back.

Her face will be permanently scarred.

Her skin will never look the same.

She will never look the same.

Now Aviva is not just horrified, she is also terrified. Terrified for the future. Terrified for herself. Terrified to have to relearn how to do everything that she could once do.

"Please take me to the window." Aviva squeaks.

Aaron does not understand why. He used to understand nearly everything, but now he understands nearly nothing. They both feel the shift. Aaron is swimming in his sister's sinking emotions. Aviva is drowning in dry words. What the doctors say will not change what happened, can't take away her scars. They can try, but they might just give her more.

The view from her window is of a highway and dead grass, and the window is permanently shut. Aaron wheels Aviva over to the window. She studies the sky. The clouds are flat with no texture. There are no ripples, no swirls, no imperfections. The sky is a blindingly bright blue. It is a picture perfect day, the type of day that you want to float in your memories like a lone inner tube on an empty lazy river.

Aviva used to see herself in the sky. No matter what color, no matter the state of the clouds, she could find herself in there, somewhere. But today, she can't see herself anywhere but in her hospital room. The bright blue sky and smooth clouds seem to mock her scarred skin. Outside the hospital, the day is perfect, and Aviva is not. She can't stop focusing on her imperfections, and now there are so many of them. She no longer sees herself in the sky.

Aaron sees that yet another thing has changed, but he's not sure what exactly. Aviva's brow has furrowed, her brown eyes dark even though light is hitting them. The gauze covering parts of her face can't mask her disappointment.

Aaron wants to make things better, but he doesn't know what to say. He was not there when Aviva was burned and doesn't know what it was like for her.

☆

He saw her get on the bus; then he went to baseball practice. That's where he was when he heard the screams. He thought nothing of it at first. But the screams were different and he realized that something was wrong. He motioned to his friend Michael to follow him and started to run towards the yelling. When he approached the bus he froze. The heat was radiating off of it, and even though he was twenty feet away, he was sweating buckets. Firefighters had already arrived. One emerged from the bus with a nearly lifeless form in his arms. Even though half of her body was charred, blackened flesh Aaron recognized his twin sister. He started to shake. Michael touched his friend's shoulder, at which Aaron sprinted towards Aviva. Another firefighter stopped him right when he was about to reach her. The fireman had to drag a screaming and crying Aaron away from his unconscious sister, but at the last possible second Aaron latched his fingers to a small section of Aviva's hair. Aaron yelled Aviva's name through tears and shook his arm in hopes of waking her up. It had no effect on Aviva and only angered the firefighters. Michael walked up and untangled Aaron's finger from Aviva's hair. At that, Aaron collapsed in tears. He did not want to lose his twin, but at the same time he knew that if she lived her charred body could never go back to the way it was before. He was so inconsolable that he was taken home in the back of a police cruiser.

While Aaron was running to the bus, Aviva had curled up in a ball towards the back of the bus while what felt like thousands of people pushed past her. The flames approached her, curious, and stroked her legs. They attached themselves to her arms, and some little baby flames suckled on her cheeks. She woke up in the ICU two weeks later missing part of a leg and a whole lot of skin.

☆

Aviva now knows that she will be the person others stare at when walking down the street. She will be the person with three limbs instead of four, the person with a giant scar covering much of her body.

She is scared. She is exchanging normal for unusual, ordinary for odd. Aviva is not sure what she has become. She is no longer typical, more of an anomaly. She had a 10% chance of living and 65% of her body was burned, and she's beating the odds. She was never tough before this, but now the girl who would cry from a small scrape can endure wound care. Even though she can no longer see herself in the sky, she is realizing that she can see herself in fire.