

Nothing but Net

A terrifying screech of tyres. A heartbeat of shock.

Then nothing.

Ryan had opened his eyes again for the first time as the ambulance arrived. Bright, flashing lights and a squealing siren filled his head, which was already beginning to throb.

"Ryan! Ryan! Oh, thank goodness you're alive!" He recognised the voice as his mother's. She must have been nearby but his sight was so blurred that all he could do was reach up a hand. She grabbed it.

"W-wh-what happened?" he managed to mumble. Saying even that much felt like an immense effort.

"Ryan, honey, oh Ryan! You've been hit by a car. But everything's gonna be ok, you hear me? You're gonna be fine. The ambulance is here. You're safe. The ambulance men know what to do. I'll be with you. You'll be fine. You'll be ok. Everything's going to be ok. Oh Ryan I'm so sorry! I'm so sorry!"

After all the operations were complete, the events began to piece themselves together in Ryan's mind. He had been scooting. Nothing too crazy. Just trying to land a tailwhip off the ramp he'd built with Scott on the front driveway. He'd managed it too! Absolutely nailed the landing. Perhaps too well. Like an idiot, he'd looked back to celebrate with Scott and see his reaction, but had not slowed down. He rode straight off the driveway. There was no way the driver could have seen him; he had appeared in an instant from behind a parked car.

Scott said it was the scariest thing he had ever seen.

The paramedics said that if Ryan was not wearing his helmet he probably would not have survived.

Ryan's mum just said "I love you, everything's gonna be ok" a lot.

She was right. Maybe. In one sense everything was ok. He was alive. He was not going to have any lasting effects from the injuries to his back and neck. He knew he was very fortunate.

That did not make him feel much better about his leg.

It was gone.

His left leg had taken most of the impact from the car. The doctors had tried to save it, but the surgeries had not worked. Now, at ten years old, Ryan Lamotte was going to have to learn to walk again. With half a left leg.

Everyone was being positive, but Ryan did not care. It did not help, nor change the fact that his life was changed forever. He had already been shown some prosthetic lower legs and everyone had talked about how efficient and comfortable they were. People had talked about how he would be able to walk again, or even run again if he wore a special 'blade' leg. However, listening to doctors talk about how great fake legs were did nothing to change the fact that Ryan would much rather have his own leg back. Nor did it change the fact that his wish would never be granted.

Several days later, Ryan was asleep in bed. He had become quite good at sleeping sitting upright since the surgery. Apart from watching TV and talking to people, that was all he had to do.

However, today was different. He was gently woken by a smiling nurse.

"Hello Sleepy! I've got you a glass of water to help you wake up. I just thought you wouldn't want to miss the treat. There's a very special and amazing person here to meet you."

To meet him? Ryan was confused. His family and friends usually let him sleep if he wanted to. He had never been woken up for anything other than medical tests or meals.

A few minutes later the kindly nurse poked her head through the curtain around his bed.

"Are you ready to meet your visitor?" she asked, a twinkling grin on her face.

"Meet who?" Ryan asked, but the head had disappeared. The curtains were thrown back. A confident middle-aged man walked into view. In one hand he held a basketball; in the other, some sort of jersey.

"Ryan, it's a pleasure to meet you. I'm Blaise. I hope you don't mind me visiting. I heard about what had happened to you, and because I know a thing or two about what you're going through, I wanted to come and say hello. I've also heard you're a Raptors fan. Is that true?"

It certainly was. The Toronto Raptors were Ryan's hometown basketball team. They were the only Canadian team in America's top basketball league, the NBA. Ryan loved the Raptors. He loved basketball. He was heartbroken to think he would never play it again.

"I love the Raptors!" he smiled.

"Good. That was the right answer! I love them too! So we can stay friends now." Blaise laughed as he held up the basketball. "I thought you might want this," he said.

Ryan took it, but was still confused.

"Thank you," he said, "But I won't be able to play with it."

Sympathy filled Blaise's eyes.

"Do you know what this is?" He asked, holding up the jersey. Ryan shook his head. "It's a Team Canada Wheelchair Basketball jersey from this year's Invictus Games. The Games are happening right here in Toronto. All of us on the team have signed it!"

"Wheelchair basketball? Team Canada? You mean you...?" Ryan could not help glancing at Blaise's legs. The older man nodded. Reaching down he rolled up his trouser leg. He had a prosthetic foot!

"I lost it in Afghanistan," he explained, "I was out there with the Canadian Army. It's hard to get your head around losing part of your body, isn't it?" Ryan nodded. He would not have guessed the man was missing a foot. He also could not believe there might be basketball in his future after all.

"So you play wheelchair basketball?" Ryan asked. Blaise smiled and nodded.

"I can hit a three-pointer. Nothing but net. Not many NBA players can do that sitting down! Have you heard of the Invictus Games? No? Not really? Well, it's a competition involving members of the armed forces who have been injured. Loads of men and women from seventeen different countries are coming to Toronto in September to compete in a bunch of different sports. I wanted to visit you because I want you to know that your life isn't over because of your injury. Achieving success is as much a part of your life now as it ever was. Hitting a three-pointer can be as much a part of your life as it ever was. The only difference is you'll be sitting down. And sitting down is more relaxing anyway!"

Ryan laughed for the first time in weeks. He and Blaise talked for a long time after that. Perhaps there really is a silver lining to every cloud after all.

Section A

1. When you reach the sentence 'That did not make him feel much better about his leg', stop and answer the following question: what do you think Ryan's worst injury will turn out to be?

2. 'She was right. Maybe.' Having a full stop instead of a comma between 'right' and 'maybe' makes it seem as though Ryan: Is *more* sure his mother is right/Is *less* sure his mother is right. Choose one.

3. Who do you feel the most sympathy for in the story; Ryan or Blaise? Why?

Section A

These words have been taken from the text. Match each word to the correct meaning.

<u>Word</u>	<u>Meaning</u>
1. mumble	a. achieving maximum productivity with minimum wasted effort or expense
2. fortunate	b. a garment with long sleeves worn over the upper body
3. efficient	c. say something indistinctly and quietly, making it difficult for others to hear
4. kindly	d. feelings of pity and sorrow for someone else's misfortune
5. jersey	e. in a kind manner
6. sympathy	f. favoured by or involving good luck or fortune; lucky