

I stood across the room from you as you ugly cried on our couch. It makes me feel uncomfortable. You never cried. Not when your father died of liver failure. Not when we had to put our dog down within a week of finding out he had a tumor in his chest. I didn't know how to react. My feet shuffled on our old shag carpet that you wouldn't let me replace. My arms cross over my chest defensively as I avert my eyes.

“Why.” You say, tears clogging your throat like a broken drain.

“I'm sorry.”

“Why.” Your voice gets louder as the tears run faster. You get up from the couch swaying on your feet under the influence of your second glass of whisky. You were never a drinker. I feel guilty that I was the cause.

I don't anticipate the glass flying past my head and shattering against our living room wall, until the whisky inside splashes onto the floor. Slowly I look behind me as my body begins to shake.

You take a few steps towards the kitchen before you fall to your knees. The sobs wrenching themselves from your chest in painful gasps. I can almost see the anguish in your heart. I didn't know how to fix it.

Stepping forward I kneel down, draping myself against your back, holding you to my chest. I thought for sure you would pull away. I deserved it, for what I was putting you through. Yet nothing happened. You kept crying on the floor as if you were numb to my touch.

Standing up I walk to the kitchen grabbing a glass to fill with water. I bring it to you, place it on the floor in front of you, and walk away to our bedroom. I couldn't stand to see you in this state.

~

You don't go to work anymore. Our friends come by bringing us food. Will tries to get you to go out with him.

"How about a hike? Fresh air would do you some good." He says. The silence that follows carves a hole in my chest. I attempt to break the tension.

"Will, he just needs some time." He ignores me. I watch as his heart breaks inside his eyes as he looks at the shell you've become. A heavy sigh escapes him as he turns away from you. Grabbing his keys he walks to the door.

"Please call me, okay? We worry about you." The door shuts behind him clicking into place. You don't move from your seat in the corner by the window. As you watch the clouds shift in the sky, Will's car starts and pulls away.

"I wish you would listen to him. He's only trying to help you. He's your best friend, don't shut him out." Still, I am ignored.

~

Your sister and mother stop by. They talk *to* you, never *with* you. It's starting to irritate me. I wish you would see that people care about you. How they want to help you, yet every time you refuse, choosing to wallow inside your own mind. I wonder if you know it hurts me too.

I sit in the windowsill, watching as your sister pets Francis. He rumbles in her lap happy to finally receive attention. It makes me smile. I wanted a cat, not you. You had always been a dog person, yet Francis grew on you. He preferred you over me, even though he was mine. Animals are funny that way.

Francis hops down walking over to me. I open my arms and pat my lap. He jumps, but not towards me. Instead, he curls up on the opposite side in the comfort of the sun beams coming through our windows. I try not to let it bother me. He hasn't wanted to be near me lately, I can't figure out why.

I watch as your sister rests her hand on your shoulder. You don't react as you stare at the sky past my window. She turns nodding to your mother. Getting up they head out. I watch as the tears slip from your mothers' eyes. I can't seem to find the words to comfort her.

~

Every night you sleep next to me. I stare at your back waiting for you to turn over and hold me in your arms like you used to. Cautiously, I reach out resting my palm on your shoulder blades. You shift in your sleep mumbling about being cold as goosebumps rise on your bare skin. You pull the covers up hunkering down like a child hiding underneath their sheets.

Getting up I walk the halls of our home as sleep avoids me. The walls covered in memories. I run my hands over every single one. Each frame bringing a smile to my face as I reminisce. You always had your camera with you. The moments you captured told our story. Half way down the hall the frames become scarce.

My hand rests on a bare patch. I imagine all the memories we could put here on this empty space. Maybe if we go out you would feel like taking your camera out of its bag hidden under the bed.

~

You went out today. Of course, not on your own accord. Will came to get you. You both were dressed in all black, I found it quite morbid. You looked worse than usual. As if the weight of life was more than you could handle.

I didn't like it. I chose not to go. I didn't want to see you like that. You were like a black hole, sucking all the life from the room. I couldn't stand to be near you in fear of being lost in your abyss. Will didn't seem to notice the way I did.

I thought some time away from the house would do you some good. Later, when the door swings open, Will walks inside. You trail behind him looking hollow, yet different than before.

Will heads to the kitchen starting our electric kettle. You take a seat on our couch pulling off your suit jacket. Francis comes over nudging at your leg. Reaching down you scratch at the scruff on the back of his head.

“Hey Francis.” Your voice hangs in the air like a melancholy tune.

A chill runs up my spine as my mind narrows. Those were the first words I had heard from you in a long time, and they were directed at that stupid cat, not me. I step forward aggravated with you, opening my mouth to speak.

“Do you want Peppermint or chamomile?” Will cuts me off. My mouth closes as my shoulders sag. Everything’s quiet as you raise your head.

“Remy used to like Peppermint tea.” I stare at you confused.

“I still like peppermint tea.” I say.

“He did, didn’t he. Always had a cup, even when we used to pull all nighters in college. Said coffee was disgusting.” Will shifts on his feet in the kitchen.

“I’ll have Peppermint.” You say. A small smile crests Will’s face as he fills and brings you a mug. He sits next to you, in my spot, on the couch.

“Hey,” Will says. “You okay?”

“I think so.” You say as you take a deep breath, breathing in the aroma drifting up from you steaming mug.

“Good. We were worried for a while there.”

“Me too”

I don’t know why but I can’t be here right now. Something tells me that I need to let the two of you be alone. Without saying anything I slip out the door to take a walk through the park down the street. The world seems to slow as snow starts to fall from the sky. I forgot my jacket at the house, but I was never one to get cold easily, that was always you.

You start to go to work again. Every morning you get up with a solum face. After a shower, you head to the closet to dress.

“What should I wear?” You mumble to yourself.

“What about your gray slacks? Those always looked good on you.” I brush my hand against them. You turn staring, head tilted to the left as they swing a little on their hanger. Gingerly you grab them. I turn to your shirts. “I think your green polo would go well with them.”

You stare at the shirts before reaching out for the one I suggested. When you’re all dresses, you stand in front of the mirror hanging on our wall. For some reason you look sad as you observe yourself. With a heavy sigh you turn away heading into the living room.

I stand at the kitchen window waving goodbye as you pull away. You don’t wave back. I don’t mind though; you have things to work through. Everyone handles things differently.

Once again, I’m drawn out of the house. I follow the paths through the park, staring at the ground, the lush grass freshly cut. I could have sworn we had a good half foot of snow the other day. Maybe I dreamed it.

~

Every day you seem to be closer to getting back to normal. I don’t know how much time has passed. It doesn’t feel like that long to me, but every other day you seem to have a full beard, then it’s gone the next. Life seems to have come back into you face. I tell you about my day as you scroll through your phone. When a knock comes at the door you get up to open it. Will stands on our stoop waiting.

“You ready to go?” He asks.

“All set.” Grabbing your keys, you look at a picture of me hanging on the wall. Your fingers come to your lips. Kissing them, you place them over mine with a soft smile. Will’s face is serious until you turn to him. He corrects it lighting up as he grabs your shoulder and urges you out the door.

I sit down on the couch to watch a documentary I’ve been into lately. It’s good to see you go out with the guys again. I forgot to ask you where you were headed. Maybe I will when you come back. I stare at the screen and let time pass me by.

When you come home, you’re propped up between Will and some girl I don’t recognize. They haul you into the bedroom as I follow behind anxiously.

“Is he okay?” The girl and I say.

“Yeah, he’ll be fine. He’s just dealing with a lot of stuff right now.”

“I heard about what happened. I can’t even imagine what he’s going through.” Will sighs as he guides the girl towards the door. I want to hug him and tell him that you’re going to be okay, but I stay where I’m at. The girl pauses at the doorway looking at the same photograph of me you kissed this morning.

“He’s very handsome.” Will smiles as he stares at the picture. It wasn’t taken that long ago, at least I don’t think it was.

“Remy was always a looker. Liam won’t admit it, but he had a crush on him long before he let on.” Will points towards a picture of the three of us graduating. “We met Remy in college. I had

classes with him, we became good friends. I introduced them to each other. It took Liam a good year before he made his move. Thankfully Remy liked him right from the start.”

“His heart must be broken.”

“It is. Liam and Remy were inseparable.” Will says as he ushers the girl out and shuts the door locking it behind him.

I head into the bedroom laying down next to you. Unintentionally, you face me for the first time in ages. Memories pass through my mind as I embed every line and curve of your face. I find myself falling asleep as I watch your steady breathing wondering why Francis hasn't jumped on the foot of the bed recently. Actually, it's been a while since I've seen Francis.

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When I wake everything's different. I can't quite figure out why. As I get up from the bed, I realize you're not there. I stare out the windows. I could have sworn Will had come by the other day to rake the leaves in our back yard. Now as I look out, I find the flowers in my garden blooming in the morning mist.

I head out to the kitchen. I find you drinking peppermint tea at the table as you eat. I grab a cup for myself. I still can't quite pinpoint why our home feels different. Your phone pings. You stare down at it, smiling at whoever messaged you. I look over to the living room as I sip my tea.

Resting on the arm of my side of the couch is a hoodie. I know it's not yours because you were never into hockey. I set my mug down on the counter. Your head whips up staring into the



kitchen as I head over to the couch. My fingers brush against the sleeves as you slowly reach out to the mug I left behind.

For a moment your face is sullen as you stare at my mug. Gingerly you place it down into the sink. I frown as I stare back at you.

“I wasn’t finished with that.” Your phone pings again. Looking over at the clock your eyes go wide before you hurry to finish your tea and head out the door. I’m left to ponder whose hoodie sits on my side of the couch.

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On a Saturday, I can’t say exactly which one, I wake up to find you whistling as you dress for a hike.

“Where are you going.” I say as I rub the sleep out of my eyes. I’ve been sleeping a lot lately. I’ll fall asleep on a beautiful autumn day just to wake up to the garden in bloom again. I don’t understand it, maybe I need to go to the doctor. I sigh when I notice the headphones in your ears. You couldn’t hear me.

Your phone keeps going off on the dresser. You hurry over to it responding with a smile. I wish you would pay attention to me not whoever’s making you smile like that.

I shouldn’t say that. I’m happy to see you smile, I really am. It’s been so long since a smile stuck to your face. Yet I find myself jealous.

The doorbell rings as you grab your camera bag from under the bed. I get up grabbing your robe. I walk into the living room as you open the door. A man stands on the other side dresses similar to you. His smile is bright, face handsome as he looks towards you.

I know that look in his eyes. I used to look at you that way. Will would nudge me with a snicker. I'd slap him upside the head. You'd look up from your notes curious asking what happened. We both said, *nothing*, as we got back to studying.

You head out the door getting into the passenger seat of the handsome man's truck. I watch out the window as you leave. You feel farther away than usual. Like you're drifting out to sea and I can't quite reach you.

I don't like seeing you with someone that isn't me. But he made you smile, the smile that I have always loved.

Our house feels colder, or maybe it's just me. I shiver grabbing a blanket as I sit down on my side of our couch. My body feels heavy and I find my mind spacing more often than before.

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Things have started to change. The handsome man, whose name I have come to understand is Kensy, has started coming over for dinner quite often. During those times I tend to go on long walks through the park.

The blank space I wanted to fill is less empty, but the memories are not ours. The pictures are lovely. I can't hate them, they're something you put your love into after all.

You changed the bed spread. The pale green I loved so much replaced with a light gray comforter. I don't mind it; it matches well with the new curtains you put up. You've been cleaning the house a lot more lately too.

Two tooth brushes sit in the cup next to the sink in our bathroom neither of them mine. I turn away walking through the rest of the house. It doesn't feel like our home anymore. It hurts to look around and see everything changing.

Kensy's here this morning. He looks handsome as he sits on my side of the couch. I want to throw things at him. Tell him to get out. That the spot he's in is mine. I grab the mug he used for coffee this morning. It's my favorite mug, I should have told him he couldn't use it. I lift it in the air as my eyes burn. Just as I'm about to throw it you walk around the corner.

The look in your eyes as you talk to Kensy gives me pause. The mug slips from hand falling to the floor. You both turn to look at it. Hurrying over you pick it up. There's a chip in the rim now, but it didn't break.

"I'm sorry, I must have set it too close to the edge." Kensy says from your side. You set it back on the counter.

"It's okay. Just don't use this one again, it's Remy's." Kensy smiles at you. It's a soft smile, one that knows the pain you've gone through. I take a few steps back hurrying to the guest bedroom. I didn't want you to see me cry.

I'm happy for you, I really am. You deserve the best, but I can't stay here. This morning was particularly hard. Kensy stayed the night again. Our bedroom is no longer our bedroom. There are two cars in the drive way and neither are mine. The house is unrecognizable to me. I see all the pieces we created together but they just don't fit into the puzzle like they used to.

There's a bouquet of flowers laying on the counter. They're beautiful, just like the ones you used to give me. A ring sits next to them. Your ring. The one I gave you when we said out vows to each other.

It hurts watching you flip through the photo albums telling Kensy our story. The last one-half empty. A newspaper clipping of a car crash on the final page. A short article about a memorial service next to it. The tears flow from my eyes as I look at you.

As I decide to head to the park for a walk, Francis bumps against my leg. I look down at him.

"Where have you been? Did you go on an adventure? Catch any mice?" Francis meows at me before walking out the front door. I get up following him.

"Where are we going?" He grumbles as he guides me through the streets. I take in the city. All the memories of my time spent here flash before my eyes as we pass each place. We walk past the college where I met you. Then the coffee shop we had our first date. The botanical garden you proposed to me in. Each pulls at my heart bringing a smile to my face.

Finally, Francis stops in front of a tall rod iron arch. He sits while I catch up before walking down a gravel road. I don't understand why we're here until he stops in front of a grave stone. My names on it. With the date of my birth and a date after it. I stare at it a long time. My lip quivers as I cry.

“I’m not ready Francis. I don’t want to leave Liam. He needs me here. I can’t go with you.”

I wipe the tears from my face as I try to breathe. “I can’t.”

Francis just stares off towards the entrance. I hear it then, the crunch of gravel under foot. I turn and watch as you approach me. Kensey waits a few steps behind. You rest the bouquet in front of my gravestone. The ring I gave you hangs from a chain around your neck.

“Hey Remy.” Sadness soaks your eyes as you look towards me. “I’m sorry it took me so long to visit you. It’s been hard since you left, but I’m getting better. Will said he stops by and talks to you a lot. Told me five years is too long to go without seeing you. Said you would hate me for not visiting you. Well, finally I made it.”

You turn back looking at Kensey, waving him to your side.

“I have someone I’d like you to meet.” Kensey grabs your hand leaning in. His smile is soft as he looks at me. “This is Kensey. I know you want to keep me to yourself, always have, but Kensey’s helped me realize that I still have a life to live. He’s special to me.”

He smiles at me as you take a deep breath.

“Don’t worry Remy,” Kensey says. “I’ll take care of him for you. I hope you can help me when you have time. Come visit, maybe move the blanket on the couch to the window sill again, or drop your favorite mug. I’m sorry I used it; I didn’t know. I’m glad I get to meet you.”

You both stand there for a while. Kensey lets you take your time. I can tell when you’re ready to leave.

“Okay Francis, maybe your right. Just let me say goodbye.” I step up to you resting my hand on your cheek as the wind blows. Your eyes widen as if you could feel my touch. It makes me happy.

I feel it, the moment you realize I’m there with you. I wrap my arms around you. I’m delighted by your warmth; I had been feeling so cold.

“I love you Liam.”

I let go of you brushing a kiss against your lips before I follow Francis away. I look back only once to see you two standing together. The smile on your face makes butterflies take flight in my stomach. I try to hold back the pain in my heart as I force myself to keep walking.

“Okay Francis, I’m ready.”