

Remember When It Rained

Beads of rain pummel the paneling of the newly developed house and threaten to shatter the windowpanes of my three bedroom, two and a half bath. Thunder aggressively rumbles in the darkness of the outside world and aside from three or four flickering candles, the only source of light is that of the occasional bolt of lightning. Bright enough to illuminate the dim pages of my book.

The power has been out for hours and the lack of batteries in this new dwelling of mine keeps me from the use of a lantern. As for the previously mentioned candles—well, they have more effect on my sense of smell than that of my sight.

I sit, reading the latest novel in a series of young witches and wizards in one hand while my other fiddles with the gauge in my left ear. My feet are kicked up on the coffee table—my mobile device sits silently next to one foot. It's been there for the past five hours. Anticipating the phone call of someone rather important to me.

The caller ID waits to read the name: Hals.

Hayley James.

A dear friend of mine since primary school. Best friend, actually! The last we spoke, she was making her way over here to play a few rounds of Scrabble but had to make a stop someplace else first. Though, she didn't tell me where. Or why.

And now, I sit...as patiently as I can.

Forget that.

More forcefully than I'd meant to, I close the thick book and toss it aside, leaning forward to check my mobile device.

It's on.

No missed calls. No new messages.

I sigh, placing the communicative technology back on the table beside the box; that which contains the board and letter pieces of her chosen game. I don't know what it is with her, but she's obsessed with words. Word games are her specialty. Anything that keeps up her vocabulary. I guess that's what you get from an aspiring editor. A smile tugs at one corner of my lips at the mere thought of her. Her dreams. Aspirations.

She's going places. And I wish her all the best.

With a sigh, I glance around at the deserted room and spot my guitar case wedged between a wall and a bookshelf. For a split second I debate fiddling with it, or even attempt to work on the next big hit for my band's new album. But when the wretched grumbling of my stomach reminds me that I haven't eaten since lunch, I peel myself off the sofa.

It takes a moment, being sat for so long a period.

Ugh, so stiff. I crack my back as I straighten out.

Scuffing my bare feet across the hardwood floor, I make my way to the kitchen. I barely begin opening the first cupboard, when suddenly, I hear a cry from the living room.

"TOM PICK UP!" the mobile rings.

I jolt with surprise.

It's her voice!

Playfully, it cries for me to answer the call. Something she recorded years ago and I never had the heart to delete or record over it. It was the ringtone for her; for whenever she called me. Which she was doing so now!

I slam the cupboard shut and dash for the small gadget in the living room, leaping over the armchair and other obstacles in my way.

I don't know why I bother checking the screen. I know it's her! I suppose it's just extra reassurance. A full grin spreads across my mouth as I press the Accept button and press the phone to my ear. "Hey!" I cheer.

There's waves of static as the thunder roars from the other end of the call. I can hear heavy breathing in the background of a person stuttering, "T-T-T-Tom..." The voice doesn't belong to Hayley, but her friend, Emma.

Emma is also the younger sister to Hayley's rotten boyfriend.

No. Not rotten. Scum of the Earth.

Emma's voice breaks me from my reverie. "Need h-help...out...side." Her voice is weak; almost as if she's crying. Choking.

Fear immediately washes over me as my round eyes flick to the front door. Air catches in the back of my throat, and I can't bring myself to breathe. Before my mind has time to catch up with the actions of my body, the phone drops from my hand and I sprint to the front door—slamming it open with a crash against the wall behind it. A flash of lightning illuminates the front lawn, revealing two dark figures crossing the grassy patch of the new yard, heading toward the porch of the house.

They walk towards me. No, not walk. Stumble.

Emma assists Hayley as she limps and shuffles her way forward.

"Hals?" I call out over the angry storm, utterly confused with what I'm seeing.

What's going on?

The two young women are entirely soaked through.

My mind scrambles to piece the puzzle together before either have to try and explain. I don't see a car. They must have walked here from Emma's house.

Hayley tries to break away from her friend's side. She begins to stumble. "HAYLEY!" I shout, panicked. Without a moment's hesitation, I leap from the porch.

Everything around me slows down as my mind processes that she's falling to her hands and knees. I beat her to it, sliding—legs first, as if into home plate—under her and onto the drenched blades of grass and rich soil. I catch her just in time and hold her dripping-wet, shivering, limp body close to mine.

I search her face in distress.

With her lying in my arms, I now clearly see the deep purple and blue ring around her left eye. As well as the scratches on her right cheek and the blood dripping from her mouth. I feel my dark eyes round with painful shock. My jaw drops from wanting to say something but being too stunned to actual form words.

"Tom." She coughs. The rain gets in her eyes, making it difficult for her to see me clearly. I maneuver my head over hers to shield the pale face from further drops of water. Gently, I sweep a hand across her forehead to pull the stuck strands of hair from her face.

I cradle her head like I would a baby's.

A stickiness slips to my fingers, and I retract my hand for a moment to see a crimson liquid wash away from the space between the tips of my fingers and the side of her head.

A chilling sensation flows like an icy river down the inside of my body.

Horrified, I glance up and, for the first time since their arrival, I notice Emma just standing there. Concern. Despair. Worry. Fret. Whatever dumb expression is plastered across her young face. She hasn't the faintest idea as to what to do.

How! How can she just stand there, soaked, and worrisome?

“Call for an ambulance!” I bark.

Her eyes darted from Hayley’s weak body to my dark irises. She doesn’t listen—I’m not a hundred percent certain she even heard me. She shakes her head uncontrollably. Afraid.

Eventually it sets in—I can see it in her expression, that she finally registers I’m glaring at her. Biting hard on her bottom lip, she breaks out of her reverie. “Tom, it was Jordan.” She nearly spits. “She tried breaking up with him and he got angry!” She adds quickly before biting her lip again, tears forming in her eyes. She takes one final look at Hayley and dashes into the house.

Jordan?

I glance back down at Hayley, whose deep green eyes seemed to have never left my face. I can’t wash away the feeling of helplessness, and I know it’s written all over my face. Hayley doesn’t say anything, just stares. So, I ask, “Why didn’t you just come to me?”

She offers no response, only a deep frown. Her eyes glazed over with tears.

“I could have been there.” I tell her. “I could have protected you!” I state, anger tainting my tone, tears threatening to escape my, highly likely reddening, eyes. I shift, pulling her closer to me, not wishing to let go.

Anger. No! Rage! I feel it coursing through my veins. Burning my face.

Hayley weakly smiles. “You were...there,” she whispers. The smile inches as best as she can manage, across her lips. It was still too weak to persuade me to not be upset. She tries again, managing a wider, almost convincing smile. “Forever and today.” She quotes lyrics to me.

A line, from a song by her favorite band, and it hits me like a cricket club to the abdomen. A sickness latches itself in the pits of my stomach.

Tears escape her fading gaze and with the last bit of strength that she contains, she stretches, lifting her head. I lower my head to meet her as she gently presses her lips against mine.

So utterly unsure of everything—still trying to process the hard truth of the moment—I nearly want to pull away and tell her to save it for when she survives this horrible crime. But I don’t. My subconscious doesn’t allow me. Because it knows better. Because I know better.

Instead, I just kiss her back—hungry. No! Desperate for it to last.

Was this why she’d gone to Jordan? Is this what her true reason for breaking off their relationship was all for? Could it be so simple that it’d all been because she holds the same, strong, regard for me that I hold for her? The feelings I’ve held for her over the course of many years but couldn’t find the courage to let her know.

If only I had.

Then she wouldn’t be lying in my arms. Not like this! She wouldn’t be out in the middle of my lawn with the rain beating at our bodies. She wouldn’t be...

Dying. The voice in the back of my head states. I tell it to shut the fuck up!

I can’t bring myself to believe it.

The simple kiss begins erasing all thoughts from my mind. Worry drains from my shoulders. Even the idea of her dying seems like a lie momentarily.

For a fleeting moment it’s all not true. For a moment, it’s...

She sniffs, trying to part away from me but I gently slide my hand to the back of her jaw and keep her there. Making it last longer than I know it could ever last again. Though faint, she manages to reach a hand up to weave her slender fingers through my drenched, dirty blond hair. Burning tears flow freely from both our eyes, mixing with the drops of rain staining our faces.

Just as a blip of hope crosses my mind, there's a subtle tremble from her body and the hand around the nape of my neck slides down my arm, thudding to the damp grass.

No. No. No. No. No!

After a beat, I pull away and whisper, "Hals..." My eyes remain closed.

Maybe if I don't see it, then it won't be real.

Without a response, I slowly open my eyes and find her in the darkness, "...Hals?" I question when her eyes don't open back up. This horrible feeling of sickness churns in the pit of my stomach. Nausea. Bile threatens my esophagus. I continue to be in denial until I brush a few more strands of her dark hair from her pale drenched face. My hand lingers over her slightly opened mouth.

No breath.

I can't help choking back tears. I try again, "Hayley!" My voice is forceful. I was demanding her attention now.

She has to wake up. She just has to. She's fainted, is all. Fell unconscious. It's been known to happen to victims of a traumatic incident. Any moment, she'll start breathing again.

I hear the thudding footsteps of Emma on the porch, finally rejoining us out on the soaked lawn. I twist slightly, stretching my legs out on the grass, keeping Hayley's body close to mine—a childish hope of keeping what remaining warmth was left in her, there. Turning my face up to the sky, letting the rain fall hard against my cheeks...

The drops blind me.

I let them wash away all but one emotion. Rage.

Shaking with all my frustration, I scream up at the heavens until my throat runs hoarse.

Eventually, I turn my head toward the porch, my dark irises find Emma's just in time to witness her collapse to the wooden planks beneath her, a waterfall of tears stream down her face, staining her cheeks. She buries her face in her hands.

I'm stuck with hopelessness. The sight of her causes me to lose all faith. That deep, dark...inevitable...sadness I had been pushing back finally surges through me. The sudden urge to free the remaining tears I tried so desperately to hold back takes over and I do just that.

Everything around me instantly blurs.

Flashing lights of the emergency vehicles approach the front of my house. Their sirens, a distant sound to my ears.

I cradle the lifeless body of the girl I loved. The girl I still love. Knowing I can't have her; that it wasn't destined to be.

A childish rage consumes me as paramedics approach. I push them away, pleading them to leave us be. I'm not about to let them take her from me. One person has already accomplished that tonight.

Isn't that enough?

Just let me hold her for the night. It's the last time I'll ever get the chance.

Hayley...my best friend since the age of nine. The one I wrote most of the band's songs about. Wrote the songs for! For her amusement. For the tale of her life's stories. Plainly for the sake of expressing just how much I felt for her.

Now she'll never hear them again. She'll never hear me sing at a sold-out gig. I'll never see her shining face amongst the crowd of adoring fans. I'll never get the chance to surprise her with another simple Happy Birthday tune. No more karaoke. And she'll never hear me sing at any of our friends' weddings.

She'll never hear me sing at a funeral.

The funeral.

Her funeral.

“Hayley.”