

I'm Here Now

Eyes shut. Enveloped in a deathly peace, surrounded by a pall of impenetrable fog.

Suddenly, I hear Ralph's soft, soothing voice. A voice which I had not heard in so long. I could hear him whispering my name, in the same way he always had, "Tristan," with a delicacy and care only he seemed capable of achieving. I could still picture the way his lips moved when he said it. He treated my name as if it were a precious, fragile object which he dared not break. It is now the memories of him which I hold in the same careful and delicate way, that I dare not let go of, for I fear they will fall through my fingers and shatter just as I have through his.

As soon as I hear his voice, I forget everything else, time no longer passes. Everything around me is dark, yet at the same time I cannot remember ever seeing this clearly. All the fear I felt before has evaporated and I feel safe in a way only he ever made me feel, and for once, I know exactly what to do, I am no longer lost. I follow his whisper until it becomes louder and louder, until I know that I am about to see him, until I can feel his presence, until I know he is standing right by me, until I feel his hand brushing against mine, until I can smell his scent, until I can hear his breath.

I lie in the darkness; time no longer passing. And I let him take my hand and lead me into my dreams.

It is a bright evening in summer and I'm waiting for him in our regular spot, on a white wooden bench, in the park by my house. My eyes are immediately drawn to the white flowers he's carrying in his hands. Suddenly, I smile and remember what day it is...

It is early one morning; the alarm goes off by our bed. My arms scramble around trying to find the button to switch it off while the rest of my body lies stubbornly refusing to wake up. Eventually I turn off the alarm and unsurprisingly, he has slept right through it. I lie there and watch him sleep completely forgetting what I was supposed to wake up for...

*It is a bleak and grey January day. I come back to our home in the evening and the moment I step through the doors it is like I am in another world, a world of warmth, love and comfort. He has lit up the fire and made hot chocolate. We sit together on the sofa drinking the chocolate and he puts on *Some Like it Hot* by Billy Wilder. We couldn't stop laughing all evening...*

More than ever, I want my eyes to stay closed, to never have to reopen, to stay with him forever...

A tall young man walked through the doors into a hospital reception. His eyes were red, his hair scruffy and his shirt way too big. He shuffled his feet around and couldn't seem to decide where to put his hands. He kept on moving them from his front pockets to his back pockets, swinging them in the air, touching his face and hair, before putting them back in his pockets, only to restart the routine. His eyes seemed to be the only steady part of his body, they stared unwaveringly at the door in front of him, waiting for assistance.

An elderly nurse walked through door. She was dressed in a blue nurse's gown and her hair was white, yet she radiated an incredible warmth. Just through her presence, the coldly lit reception seemed to brighten up. She looked up at the young man and smiled, before leading him through the door into the hospital corridors.

"It's a lovely day today, isn't it Ralph? Finally, some sun! and we thought it would never stop raining" she chuckled.

Ralph smiled, yet his smile seemed forced and sad.

The nurse then added, "I told you it would get better eventually. How has your day been? Did you manage to get some more sleep in?"

Ralph shook his head before the nurse replied with the utmost confidence "Well I'm sure tonight will be better."

Ralph then whispered, "Did you ask, Sister?"

"Ralph, I'm sorry, they won't let you sleep overnight, you technically aren't allowed to even visit him, it's family members only."

"But Sister, surely no one would have to know."

Nurse Smith replies softly "I'm sorry son, I tried my hardest."

"Thank you," replied Ralph, so quietly nurse Smith probably wouldn't have heard. They both came to a stop outside a door.

Nurse Smith looked up at Ralph and put her hands on his cheeks and whispered, "Ralph, I'm sorry, but sometimes you have to move on. He needs you now, go in there."

Ralph goes and sits by the bed and takes the hand of the patient lying unconscious. He is a young man but has the gaunt, hollow cheeked face of someone four times his age. He may have been handsome once but now seems unkempt, lifeless and cold, any energy remaining locked away deep inside. Ralph opens his mouth to speak. His voice breaks and stutters, but he manages to say the patient's name with an incredible delicacy and care: "Tristan, I'm here now."

The time came for Ralph to leave. He slowly got up and walked out the door without looking back. As the door shut Tristan whispered... "Ralph."