

## Remembering How To Cry

“I haven’t cried in over five years,” Alex said, breaking the silence.

Matt quizzically looked over at him from the passenger seat, and then returned his gaze forward towards the road. The two friends had been driving in silence for the past twenty minutes, since the battery to Alex’s MP3 player went dead. There was nothing on the radio that either of them was interested in listening to, so they agreed to drive to the sound of the tires humming against the pavement. Matt looked back at Alex once more and looked forward once more before speaking.

“Why do I have the feeling this has something to do with Sarah?”

Alex didn’t respond.

“How did I know? God, it’s been what, a year? When are you going to let go?”

Alex glared at Matt. “It *has* been a year, and in that year, even though I’ve been so fucked up over her, I haven’t cried once. Isn’t that fucked up? Who doesn’t cry?”

“I don’t know; robots? Robots don’t cry. Right, tin man?” Matt reached over and knocked a few times on Alex’s rib cage.

“Funny, really. You’re right. I’m a robot. I’m a robot because I don’t cry.”

“You do remember that you were the one that walked away, right?”

“I know this. That was a mistake.” He paused for a moment, picturing himself walking out of Sarah’s apartment, closing the door behind him, leaving her in tears. “It was a huge mistake. I don’t know. Things got all messed up. I was graduating, she seemed distant, we were arguing, I wanted to try for that job in Philly, she didn’t want to go—“

“Yeah, that job worked out well, didn’t it? How much are your parents charging you for rent now?”

Alex sighed, defeated. “Forget it. Change the subject.”

Matt paused for a moment before he clapped his hands together and rubbed them back and forth.

“Freshman bitches,” he said, smiling, in an attempted to lighten the mood. Alex glared at him once again, and once again the silence returned.

Matt sighed and turned his attention out the passenger window. Alex focused his attention on the road, with both hands on the wheel. It was a perfect day for driving. Sunlight blanketed the beautiful green Pennsylvania landscape. The car twisted and turned along the winding mountainside road. Traffic was slightly heavier than usual today, as students were returning to town in preparation for the fall semester, which was to start in two weeks. Matt, who much prefers partying than studying, fell behind Alex and has a few semesters to make up. Alex offered to help Matt move into his new apartment at college. He hadn’t been there since he had walked out of Sarah’s apartment one year ago.

Matt sighed again. Figuring he owed his friend something for his help, he spoke up.

“What’s the big deal about not crying, anyway? Some people just don’t cry.”

Alex paused for a moment, afraid that he was being set up. He looked over at Matt and detected a hint of sincerity in his eyes. He cleared his throat and spoke up.

“I don’t know. It’s just...it’s such a release. Remember being young, and for whatever stupid reason, you would just cry your eyes out. You would sit there, bawling. Remember how good it felt afterwards? It would just stop coming out, and it was like, I dunno, like the storm was over.”

Matt chuckled. “Like puking. You keep going and going ‘til your stomach is empty, and bam, you feel a hundred times better.”

“Yeah, it’s kinda like puking,” he said, condescendingly.

They exited onto a stretch of road that leads into town. Slowly, they approached a long line of cars filled with parents and their all-grown-up children, both anxious to be free from each other. Other cars were filled with rowdy college kids, already free from their parents, blasting music and screaming out of the windows.

"Do you want to drop your shit off and grab some food at Rick's?" Alex asked.

Rick's was the famous twenty-four hour diner in town, which was the place to be at 2:00AM on the weekend when completely drunk. A night when something didn't happen at Rick's was a dull night, and a rare one at that.

“Yeah, man, definitely,” Matt replied. “I'm starvin'.”

Waiting in the traffic jam-slash-parade, Alex began thinking about Sarah again. He thought about the way her smile radiated, lighting up the room. He thought about the little gifts he would hide around their apartment, and how he would wait patiently for her to excitedly discover them. He thought about the way her hair smelled, and how, when he held her, the world around them seemed to fade away.

Alex snapped back to attention to the sound of his car horn blaring. Matt had reached his arm over to sound the horn as he yelled out of his window.

“Woooohooo! Lions, fuck yeah!” he shouted.

Alex shoved him against the passenger door. “Knock it off, man.”

The traffic began to pick up pace, and before long, they were riding down Main Street through town. The sidewalks were flooded with people young and old. Newly liberated kids were arguing with their parents while the returning students walked past, laughing at the dramatic scene. Beautiful sorority girls walked in packs down the street in their tight, brightly colored shirts and barely legal short shorts, eliciting cat calls and vulgar praises from all the horny frat guys. Matt proceeded to point out every beautiful girl and the ways in which he wished to defile her.

As they reached the end of Main Street, Alex made a right turn towards Matt's new apartment. They pulled into the lot and stepped out of the car for a stretch, after which they began unloading the car. It took a couple trips to unload the few boxes and bags that they were actually able to fit in Alex's cramped car. Once they were done unloading, they walked down to Main Street and headed towards Rick's Diner.

The scene at Rick's was business as usual. The symphony of clanging plates and glasses, hissing from the grills in the kitchen, and the rumbling of a hundred voices was nearly deafening. Alex stood on his tip-toes as he surveyed the place.

“Packed as always. I don't see any open tables.”

“Man, don't you miss this place?”

“You know, there's really not a lot I miss about this town, but when I think about it, I definitely miss Rick's.”

A busty blonde sorority girl sauntered directly in front of the two in her tight shirt and short shorts.

“And that's what I miss,” Matt said, his eyes drawing a straight line directly to her ass. Alex smirked and playfully shoved him. A moment later, Alex spotted a group of kids getting up from their table. He nudged Matt's arm and pointed it out.

“Go, go,” he urged.

The two squeezed their way through the crowd and rightfully claimed the deserted table. Neither of them picked up the menus. Moments later, a forty-something brunette with a world-weary face approached the table, a notepad and pen in her hands.

“Elizabeth!” Alex and Matt shouted in unison. In recognizing them, her face instantly lit up.

“Hey fellas! How ya' been?” she asked, putting her free hand on Alex's shoulder. Elizabeth ate, slept, and breathed the diner. Despite the ever-revolving roster of hundreds of college kids each semester, she has a gift for remembering nearly every one of them that sets foot in the diner. “How'd the summer treat you boys?”

“It wasn't the same without you, babe,” Matt said, winking.

Elizabeth slapped him gently on the head with her notepad. “Oh, stop,” she said with a smile. “How about you? Gosh, it's been a while since I've seen you,” she said, looking at Alex.

“Oh, you know, same old.”

“Still with that girl, what’s her name—“

“Sore subject,” Matt interjected.

“Oh, I’m sorry,” she said, slightly awkward. “Anyhow, what can I get you guys?”

Alex and Matt placed their orders. After a long twenty minutes, Elizabeth brought it out of the kitchen. They dove into their food as if they hadn't seen any in days. After plowing through his burger, Alex began picking at the fries. He stared down at his plate as if the fries spelled out a hidden message. Matt noticed this.

“For fuck’s sake, man, cheer up. Look around you.” He extended his arms and pointed them around the room. “There’s a room full of Sarah’s here, my friend, and they all want to fuck you.”

“God, is that all it's about? Have you ever been in love?”

“I don't know. I think so. There was this one girl I actually called the next day. I think she had a boyfriend, though.” He shrugged.

Alex guffawed and shook his head. “You wouldn't get it.” He paused, looking down again. “I think I should call her.”

Matt shrugged, defeated. “All right, man. Be my guest. I can’t stop you.”

Matt proceeded to wolf down his fries as Alex stood up and walked outside. He pulled his cell phone out of his pocket and scrolled through his contact list. He came to Sarah's name and paused for a moment. He thought about the first night they spoke on the phone. They ended up going to class the next morning on two hours of sleep. His hand shook as he hit the SEND button. He pressed the phone to his ear, listening to it ring, his heart pounding in his chest.

Across town, Sarah's cell phone vibrated off of her nightstand and onto the floor. Fifty miles away in her car, Sarah was still upset over having forgotten her cell phone at her apartment.

The phone rang a sixth time before Sarah's voicemail message played. Alex's heart leapt in his chest as he heard her voice for the first time in so long, and then quickly sank as he realized that it was only a recording. He closed his phone and put it back in his pocket. As he slid it into his pocket, his phone began to beep. He excitedly pulled it back out.

"Fuck," he said, as he noticed the low battery warning flashing on the screen. Just as he turned to walk back into Rick's, Matt came through the door, followed by a short, curvy brunette.

"Alex, this is my lovely new friend, Janet."

"Janis," she corrected him.

"Janis. Sorry."

"Hi, Janis," Alex said, somewhat distracted.

"Janis is new in town here, and I thought I, being the charitable tour guide that I am, would give her a tour of the campus. Would you care to follow along?"

Alex knew this was his cue to depart. "Nah, I was thinking I would take a walk on my own before heading back home."

"Suit yourself, my friend." Matt patted Alex on the shoulder, and then turned back to Janis. "Excuse me for a sec, babe. I've gotta send my friend off here." They walked partly down the street, out of Janis's range, who stood there thumbing messages on her cell phone.

“Look, I’m sorry for giving you such a hard time about Sarah. But seriously, look at this fucking girl. You could get someone just like her.”

“But she won’t be Sarah,” Alex paused. “I don’t know, man. Sarah’s that girl you spend your whole life trying to replace. I really fucked up by walking away. I know it’s been a year, but I can’t just let it stand like this. I need to know that things are really over.”

Matt sighed. “I guess your heart is set on that, then. Me? I’ve got something else set on her,” he turned and looked back at Janis, who was completely engrossed in her cell phone. “Thanks again for helpin’ me move. And hey, if things work out with you and Sarah, maybe I’ll actually see you up here this year.”

“Yeah, I hope so,” Alex smiled.

“Good luck, man.” They slapped their hands together and shook, patting each other on the back. “Give me a call soon. Let me know how shit turns out.”

Matt returned to Janis, who happily welcomed him. He put propped his arm on his side, leaving a hole for her to put her arm through. They began to walk down the street, away from Alex, as Matt pointed out the buildings on either side of the street.

Alex began walking through the crowd down Main Street. He walked to the light at the corner and crossed the street onto campus. As he walked on familiar territory, he kept his eyes open for people he might recognize, especially Sarah. He wanted nothing more to arrive at their favorite bench underneath the giant elm tree and find her waiting there for him with her radiant smile. He could hear her sweet voice breezing through her soft lips.

“It took you long enough,” she would say.

The dream melted into reality as he found the bench, empty. He stopped for a moment and stared at it, picturing the two of them sitting there, holding hands, laughing, smiling, staring into each others' eyes. He lowered himself onto the bench with a heavy sigh and sat there alone, watching the groups of people touring the campus. As time slowly drifted on, clouds began to populate the sky, hiding the sun.

"Fitting," Alex said to himself, looking up through the trees.



Sarah pulled her car up in front of Alex's house and parked. She sat there for a moment, staring at the porch swing they used to share breezy summer nights on when visiting Alex's parents. She was disappointed when she noticed Alex's car missing from the driveway. She stepped out of the car and opened the back door, pulling out a large cardboard box. She struggled up the walkway, set it on the porch, and rang the doorbell. Moments later, Alex's older sister, Natalie, arrived at the door. She noticed Sarah and was somewhat taken aback.

"Sarah, hey. What's going on?"

"Hey Natalie," Sarah replied nervously. "I was um, getting everything ready to move and I found some of Alex's old stuff. Is he here?"

"No, he isn't," she replied, sympathetically. "You know what; he's actually up at State helping Matt move in. You probably passed him on the way here."

"Oh, really?" she replied, trying to hide her disappointment. She mustered a smile and shook her head. "Duh, it's move-in week. I should have

known.” She paused for a moment, and an uncomfortable silence crept in.

Natalie noticed the box at Sarah’s feet.

“Here, why don’t I help you with that?”

Natalie stepped out onto the porch and lifted the box with Sarah. They carried it into the house and set it at the bottom of the stairway.

“Can I get you something to drink?” Natalie offered.

“Nah, I probably should be going—“

“Don’t be silly. It’s been a while; I want to know what you’re up to these days.”

Sarah hesitated for a moment. “All right, I guess a glass of water will be fine.”

Natalie headed into the kitchen as Sarah gazed into the living room. She felt as if she had never left, looking over at the couch and seeing Alex holding her closely as they cuddled and watched movies together. She ran her hand along the banister as she remembered the time Alex carried her piggy-backed up into his bedroom, dropping her onto the bed and pouncing her in the warmth of the sunlight beaming through the window. She snapped back from her memories as Natalie handed her a tall, cold glass of water.

“Seven ice cubes, right?” she smiled.

Sarah chuckled. “That’s funny; you remembered.”

“How can I forget? Alex always teased you about that.”

Sarah’s smile wavered slightly. Natalie noticed this and quickly chimed in.

“Come on in, sit down. Tell me everything that’s going on in your world.”

Natalie led Sarah into the living room and plopped down on the wooden rocking chair to the left of the couch. Sarah looked at the couch, hesitated, then settled for the recliner across from Natalie. She took a sip of water and set the glass on a coaster on the table. She paused for a moment and looked at Natalie, who was waiting intently as she rocked back and forth in the chair. She then began to speak about her past year, her failed attempts at dating, her boring part-time job at the mall, her increasingly heavy class load and the stress that had been building up. As Sarah began to feel more comfortable, she brought Alex up in the conversation. They shared a few laughs and a few memories, stories of when Alex and Sarah would come to visit from college. As the laughter died down, silence crept back into the room. Sarah took another sip of water.

“Do you miss him?” Natalie bravely asked.

Sarah held the water in her mouth for a moment, staring down into the glass, before swallowing in a single, loud gulp. Her heart began to speed up slowly in her chest. She remembered the way she would press her ear up against Alex’s chest while she kissed his hand to the beat of his heart. She didn’t answer.

“I don’t know if he would want me telling you this, but...he talks about you all the time. If you miss him, if you still have feelings for him, don’t let him get away.”

Sarah solemnly nodded her head in acknowledgement, still staring down at the glass of water.

“I was just afraid. I was so afraid of losing him that I ended up pushing him away. I made him leave town.”

“That was his mistake for leaving, and he knows it. He regrets it.” She paused. “Why don’t you call him?”

Sarah’s heart sped up once again in her chest. She looked up at Natalie.

“Should I?”

“Why not?”

“I, uh, left my cell phone—“

“Use the house phone.” Natalie stood up and walked into the kitchen, and returning with the cordless phone, handed it to Sarah. Sarah held the phone in her hand for a moment, staring down at it, remembering the first phone conversation that Alex had recalled an hour ago, seventy miles away. She nervously punched his cell phone number and brought the phone to her ear. After a brief silence, his voicemail message clicked in. She frowned and pulled the phone from her ear. She hung up.

“Voicemail?”

“Yeah.” She handed the phone to Natalie.

“Then run after him. I’m pretty sure he said he was going to stay at Matt’s tonight. Hold on.”

Natalie ran up the stairs into Alex’s bedroom, and returned minutes later with an address scribbled on a torn piece of paper.

“Here, this is Matt’s apartment. I’m sure you’ll find them there.”

“Is this a good idea?”

“There’s only one way to find out.”

“Thank you so much, Natalie.” Sarah stood up from the chair and embraced Natalie in a hug.

“It’s good to have you back,” Natalie replied.

Sarah walked excitedly out of the front door and ran to her car. She sat behind the wheel and, with her eyes closed, took in a deep breath.

“Here we go,” she said, turning the key in the ignition.



The clouded sky caused the darkness of night to come sooner than usual. Alex had abandoned the bench and was walking around campus when he decided it was time to head home. He walked back down Main Street towards Matt’s apartment, where his car was parked. Sitting in the car, he pulled his cell phone out, hoping the battery had just enough juice to make one last call. It was turned off.

Reluctantly, Alex started up the car and headed back to the highway. He searched the airwaves for a listenable station, but after his second trip through without finding anything, switched the radio off. He settled on driving in silence, alone with his thoughts.

He thought about all the drives they took late at night to nowhere in particular, about how he would look over just at the right moment to catch her tender eyes looking back at him in the moonlight. He thought about the road trip they had planned to take last summer. He thought about their shared dream of eating breakfast together on the beach, in the salty ocean breeze, in the light of the rising sun, as the world around them slept.

A half hour out of town, along the winding mountain roads, which were all but vacant, Alex looked over at the passenger seat. He saw Sarah there

looking back at him, sending a chill down his spine. He turned back to face the road as he heard her voice whisper softly in his ear.

“The world has never been this beautiful.”

Alex’s throat began to swell, and his lips began to quiver. His eyes fluttered and began to water. His chest began to heave.

“Sarah,” he said, his voice choked.

As he lifted his hand to clear his eyes, a flash of lightning crossed the sky, followed by the rumble of thunder. Seconds later, the sky ripped open, unleashing heaven’s fury to the Earth below. The rain pounded against the car, filling it with a deafening roar. Alex flicked on the windshield wipers and gripped the wheel with both hands. In the distance, hidden behind the twists and turns, Sarah held her wheel tightly, occasionally lifting one hand to wipe the tears from her cheeks.

The rain’s pace increased, as if challenging the cars below. The two cars plowed forward through the savage rain, undaunted. Bound together by fate, both Alex and Sarah wiped the single tear remaining on their faces as they rounded the corner. They both blinked in time to see a pair of white lights powerlessly warning them. In an instant, as if betrayed by the order of the universe, the cars collided, fusing together, becoming a single mass of steel and glass, flesh and blood. The roar of the collision shot through the sky, momentarily overpowering the white noise of the rain pounding down upon the Earth, followed by an eerie stillness. Had the rain ceased animating the world around the chaotic mess, time itself would have seemed to be frozen. The taillights remained glowing in the night, illuminating the surrounding landscape in an eerie blood red.

Moments later, Alex wobbled away from the wreckage, as if he wasn't used to his legs. He appeared completely unscathed. He walked forward slowly to the other half of the wreckage which was once Sarah's car. She appeared without a scratch on the other side of the heap. He walked around towards her, and without a word, took her hand in his. They looked in each other's eyes and smiled an eternal smile. They turned their gaze up towards the sky, into the rain, up past the eerie red glow which stretched to the tops of the trees. Looking back into each other's eyes once again, the two souls floated from the ground, hand in hand, above the trees, over the mountains, above the clouds, floating through space, together, forever, in death.