

Morning Light

Getting up just to go to the bathroom was one of the hardest things he's ever done. It took *far* too much effort just to carry out the devastatingly *simple* task. Everything took too much effort, every task, *breathing*, felt like attempting to climb Mt. Everest.

Holden had to spend time wandering the unfamiliar halls, it hadn't occurred to him that he might not know where the bathroom was. He didn't think he could speak so he didn't ask anyone. He just kept wandering aimlessly, blindly. Just like he felt. Just like life felt after last night.

The memories are still fresh, he feels like they might always feel fresh. Like a wound that might never close. *The phone call. The panic. The fear. The rush. The lights. The carnage. The tears. The noise.*

Finally, an unknown amount of time later, it was still dark out, still night. So that was good, he found a bathroom. On the way out Holden caught a glance of himself in the mirror. He looked dreadful. His hair was all over the place, it hadn't been brushed and his clothes were ruffled and wrinkled for having been worn since yesterday morning. His face had tear tracks and his eyes were red; the bags were very visible. He looked just as he felt, *broken* and *scared*. Not stopping to look at himself for too long, not wanting to see the reality of the situation on his face, he exits the bathroom.

Somehow, he finds himself back to his parents, he doesn't know how but he thinks it takes a little less time than the previous trip to the bathroom. They are both sitting where he left them in the plastic hospital waiting room chairs that they have been sitting in all night. They both look about as bad as himself. His dad has his arm around his mom, holding her, they are both trying to hold each other together. Even though Holden is fifteen, last night was the first time he

had ever seen his dad cry. He didn't like seeing him cry, it was something Holden was sure he could've gone his whole life without seeing.

They are all tired, having been up for far too many hours, but sleep won't come. None of them will sleep until they find out how the surgery went and if she will be okay.

He sits, waiting, trying to keep the thoughts at bay, the fears. The fear is what's going to get him, he thinks. The mind-numbing, overwhelming, eating *fear*. Not knowing what's going on, not knowing what's happening. That's the hard part right now.

He doesn't know how much time passes; it all feels endless. "Family of Elizabeth Sanders?" A doctor has entered the waiting room. He walks over to the family and drags a chair to sit in front of them once he sees that they are the only people there. We are all frozen, too afraid to ask the question that hangs in the air. Holden's dad reached over and grabbed his hand, gripping it. There's a beat of silence and it feels like the longest and most foreboding moment of Holden's life.

Then the doctor speaks and changes all their lives in the worst possible way. "I'm so sorry, but your daughter didn't make it. She passed away on the operating table. Once again, I'm so sorry."

Holden is crying, he's *breaking*. Lizzie is, *was* his sister, *his best friend*. *She's gone*. **How can she be gone?** It doesn't feel possible, this can't be happening, it just can't be. His older sister can't be gone. He can hear her laugh in his head, see her smile. She was always smiling, always laughing, always *happy*. She won't be now, she will never laugh again, never smile, never joke, or make someone feel good again.

They sit there, not moving, just feeling the world, as they know it, crash and burn around them. Holden doesn't know if he'll ever feel like or even be able to move again. Maybe he won't

want to. Maybe he can just stay in this very spot and try to desperately claw himself back to *before*. Before he was told that his sister wasn't going to be coming back.

The sun comes up, the light is coming through the windows. *They have been here all night, it's a new day*. This is the first day without Lizzie. The morning light coming through the windows feels like a mockery. It shouldn't be bright, the world shouldn't keep turning and the sun shouldn't rise; not when his world feels so dark and his pain so endless, the complete opposite of morning. How dare everything continue on when it feels like nothing should go on. When it feels like everything has stopped and crashed and like his life just won't be able to go on anymore. His dad puts his arm around him and pulls him to his chest. He cries more than he ever has. He cries like the child he feels like.

Miles and miles away, a heartbroken girl sits in a holding cell. She can't figure out what hurts more, her head and the injuries or her heart. Last night was a mistake, she made a mistake, one she can never take back. She doesn't even know the full extent yet, they haven't told her what happened to the other girl - if she made it or not. Worse yet, she put her friend, her *only* friend, at risk. She could've killed her. Even with the hangover she can remember most of the details. She wishes she couldn't remember as much as she does.

The pain is still there, still fresh, the pain of losing *him*. The pain that she was trying so desperately to erase. On top of the pain is now the intense feeling of *guilt*. What she did was wrong, *stupid*, and dangerously reckless. Why doesn't she *think*? What does she never think? Everyone has always told her to think, why does she never listen? She *never* learns.

How could last night go so wrong? She doesn't quite know what would qualify as the *right* chain of events for last night, but not this, never what happened. A part of her, something

just under the surface knows that she hadn't planned to be here today. Her goal was to join Jayden, to see him again, but she never planned on dragging her friend and a stranger in on her death wish. She just wanted to spend one more night with her friend, one of the only people who had stuck by her even though it probably would have ended up better for her if she had run from Tempest like the disaster she was. But even that simple goal failed, failed miserably. She's a *failure*. She *failed* to be enough for Jayden. She failed in her attempt to join him. All she does is *fail*.

She should probably be more scared, she thinks. The consequences of what happened, of what still could happen, are huge. She could be sent away for a very long time; it was a very serious offense; more than one very serious offense. But oddly enough, she can't find the will to care all that much. She'll go where they send her and do what they tell her because it doesn't matter. She's going to be miserable and in pain either way, why does it matter where she is? Maybe she'll get to where they send her and she'll try again to get to Jayden, maybe she won't. It doesn't matter. There's no one left to care what happens to her anymore, least of all her.

Her body hurts, and all the injuries and hangover symptoms don't mix. Her ribs are bothering her the most. At the hospital, they gave her some pain medicine, strong stuff, but it won't last forever. She's thinking that might be all she gets too. The physical pain is nothing compared to the emotional and it's almost a welcomed distraction, but it doesn't end up distracting all that much.

Sometime later a guard comes to her cell and gets her. She doesn't know what time it is. If it's still night or if it's turned to morning yet. They bring her to a room; it looks like some kind of interview room and through the tiny window she can see that the sun has risen and it's morning out. *The next day, a new day*. Two police officers come in the two that were at the scene

and arrested her last night. With them and the morning light comes another life-changing moment for the girl.

They tell her that the girl in the other car didn't make it and that she should look into getting a lawyer. Tempest doesn't even know where she could get one. She didn't even use her phone call because the truth is there's no one for her to call. No one at the jail cares about that, they don't care about her or her situation in the slightest. They shouldn't. She doesn't deserve to have people care about her after what she did.

There was another girl mixed up in the disaster that night. The girl who had been in the car with the heartbroken girl.

She had injuries, but they were minor considering the circumstances and what could have happened. The hospital had taken care of them and given her a prescription for pain medication, but they wanted her to stay for observation for a few hours so as of now she was stuck there. The hospital smelled like antiseptic, and Madeline personally wanted to go home and be with her family, especially after all that had just happened.

It was personally very hard for her to digest, just how close she had been to dying, and the events that happened. They were still clear, and she could clearly remember what happened. Hell, she remembered the license plate. How that happened she doesn't know. Her head hadn't been muddled by alcohol or anything else for that matter. You can read about things like this as much as you want, but she finds it isn't quite the same as the real thing.

She can't believe Tempest was drunk. Why was she drunk? Madeline will probably never know. There probably wasn't a reason, Tempest usually never had a reason for most of what she did, just that she wanted to or felt like it. She thought she would have recognized it if she was

drunk. Maybe a part of her did see it but trusted her and went along with it anyway. It's not like it was the first time Tempest had gotten drunk and dragged Madeline off on some outrageous adventure, it probably wasn't the first time Madeline had been in a car with her drunk or at least a little buzzed. *That's no excuse.* She should have stopped her, done something, or at least tried. Maybe she wouldn't have done it if Madeline refused to go with her or snuck her in her window to sleep it off. Tempest was probably just having problems at home, fighting with her parents, and trying to get away. Maybe if she would have tried to help instead of just getting in the car it would have been different. Maybe a girl wouldn't be in the hospital on the edge between life and death. She was lucky it wasn't her between life and death. It could have easily been her.

The last she saw of Tempest was her getting handcuffed and put in a police cruiser. They probably took her somewhere; Madeline wouldn't know where. She didn't know of things like that, wasn't versed in things like that like Tempest was. *What will happen to the Tempest now? What will happen to her if that girl dies?* Madeline doesn't know.

It's closer to morning, and the sky is starting to get lighter when a nurse comes in to check on her. They go through a process and eventually it ends with the nurse telling her that she is cleared to go home. Her parents sign all the required paperwork. And then she's free to go. Go home.

Her parents fret all over her, constantly checking and rechecking to make sure she's okay. Is she in any pain? No, she's not in any pain. She's okay. Once they get to the car, they take almost ten minutes to make sure she's comfortable even when she reassures them fifteen times that she's going to be fine.

Being in a car after what just happened isn't a fun experience. She's really jumpy and she can just picture it happening again in her mind, but her stepdad drives slowly, and she makes it home. She wonders how long cars will continue to be scary.

By the time they get home, the sun has basically risen and it's an official morning. Just like with the others, this morning brings consequences and changes. Hers may be less severe than the others, but they're all the same. For Madeline, the morning light brings decisions to be made. They don't have to be made *right this second*, at least not all of them, but by the end of the day, they will have to be made. Being told that the other girl *died*, that Tempest *killed someone*, doesn't make the decision any easier and it doesn't make her shock or conflict any less. She had to decide what exactly she would tell the police, what exactly her family should find out - if they should know the whole story. She doesn't think she can lie, not really. You can't lie to the cops, it's illegal, very illegal. She could get in trouble for it if she did. She must tell the truth, even if it's not easy or if she doesn't want her parents to know about it all for various reasons.

Even though she knows what she must do, her mind can help but wonder what's going to happen to Tempest.