

# **A COLLISION, A MOMENT, A BREEZE.**

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A breeze.

A small, almost unnoticeable breeze, which makes its way through the throng of bodies. The hot heat. The air suspended over the neon lights, as if it knew there was something going on, that something was able to take place. The loud music, weaving and threading its way into ears and eyes and lungs, finding its way to your core. Your chest thrumming, your heart beating.

A collision. A body, an elbow to the face. A "I'm so sorry!", a fumbling of hands trying to find out where you are, where you fit in this puzzle of people, this mess of a meeting. A moment, a glimpse. A kind pair of eyes locking onto yours. A breath. A single breath, small not sharp, however still present. Exhale. Inhale, exhale, you can do this. Blinking once, twice. No movement, just a silent exchange, written through the smoke and sweat of the heated crowd.

A reality check. The breeze sweeping time back to its feet, pushing your bodies closer together. An immediate response. A flushed face with a sheepish smile. An introduction, leaning in to share a name, hoping to get yours in return. A single name, carried to you like a promise, the breeze drawing it into your mind, your body, your lungs. An exchange of phone numbers. A promise to meet to make it up for the unpleasant collision, a "Yes, of course!" despite the itch at the back of your mind refusing to get your hopes up, refusing to let you drown in disappointment when they inevitably don't show. An acquaintance. Someone who is now here when before they were not. A fellow human, a friend found through the breeze.

Now there is a gust. A gust whipping the hair out from under your cap, snatching up scraps of paper and rubbish and spitting it back out into the open. A gust which picks you up and propels you forward, forcing you to carry on walking towards your destination, towards the coffeeshop. The coffeeshop which marks a moment, a breeze of the past with the promise of the future. You check your phone, you are at the right place. There is a pull, a tugging in your stomach to turn back, to let the past remain in the past, to let it stay as a breeze, a beautiful breeze at that but yet merely a breeze to appreciate not to act on. But the gust. The gust which continues to push and pull and propel you until you are enveloped in warmth and the bright lights of the coffee shop. The smell of coffee staining your senses, the chatter of people surrounding you. The midday conversations, the connection of friends, the shared comfort of sitting down to have a hot drink on a dreadful day like this. A tap on the back, another moment. Blinking; once, now twice. That pair of kind eyes finding its way to yours, the once-flushed face from dancing now a dimpled smile with rosy

cheeks. A shy hello, a gesture towards a table. A hesitant order for two, a reunion of spirits. A shared smile behind steaming cups of coffee as the gust screams outside. A table for two in the alcove, hidden from the howling of the outside world. An abrupt laugh, the forming of an inside joke. Two pairs of eyes gleaming with mirth. An unexpected spark, an instant connection, the beginning of something more, something greater than the both of them.

A plan to meet again, the gust of wind bringing you back to ground, back to reality where you cannot stay in the coffee shop forever despite how much you want to. The door slamming as you both get pushed outside, back into the gust, back into the bustling city. A stalled goodbye, an unexpected squeeze of the hand, instant heat rising to your cheeks in the frigid weather. Watching the back of them as they fade from view, a smile tugged on your lips, the gust full with anticipation for the future.

A dull day at work which continues to drag, the wind building and building outside as the day continues. A buzz of a phone. A familiar number, the name bringing up a smile. The sneaky peek at a text during work. An invitation to a picnic. Pursed lips and hands clutched together in a desperate attempt to smother the amusement and nerves. Now there is excitement, work is over, the wind is still building. You check the text again, reading the words over and over until you are sure they'll be burned onto your mind forever. A sudden call. A "Did you get my text?", a sly response. Laughter erupting from the phone, filling you with joy from the top of your head to the tip of your toes. A "Meet me in the park". Disbelief, almost nervous laughter trying to comprehend what you've been told. "Right now?" "Yeah, right now". The click of the line leaving the instant curiosity lingering.

The walk to the park, the wind still building. A small figure growing larger as they get closer and closer, the wind jostling them towards you. The instant recognition of those kind eyes, that dimpled smile, that familiar face which never fails to make you feel at home. The wind brushing past you and ruffling the flowers in which they are holding, the shocked laugh finding its way out of you. "You got me flowers?" An instant affirmation, a cheesy smile, a grand gesture. It feels as if you are the only two in the park, the only two in the world. The wind building, swelling more and more until it becomes a crescendo. The height of the wind flapping your coat behind you, making their hair stick up on end as they suddenly quiet down. A sudden silence leaving you in anticipation, even the wind has died down suddenly as if it is waiting too. A question, a stumbling of words floating out of their mouth so quickly you are unsure if it even happened had it not been for their red cheeks, their expectant gaze. A moment of comprehension, an instant decision - no hesitation. A "Yes!", an immediate rush of warmth as they envelop you. A feeling of giddiness as if you could conquer the world, the wind now joining you both again as it swirls and billows, making you feel as if you are in a little bubble, unaware of the wind picking up. Pure happiness, pure joy, pure serotonin. You don't want this moment to end.

Days become months, months become years and the happiness persists. There is a comfort, a safety to this world you two have built. Every day it feels as if it is the first time you're seeing those eyes, as if you are transported back to that first time the breeze carried them to you. There is an affluence of joy and you wake up feeling as if you are the luckiest in the world, the luckiest to be able to have this type of connection, this connection formed through breezes and gusts and crescendos. You had always heard people saying that money could never buy happiness and now you know for sure that this is true, that what you are feeling, what you get to feel when you are with them is priceless. Nights are spent whispering in hushed tones as the wind gently rocks you both to sleep, days spent shrieking with joy as you figure out the last word of the crossword together as the wind rattles the windows. Coffee religiously consumed in that alcove, the place where memories are made, where laughter is shared, where tears are shed. The barista not needing to ask for your names nor orders anymore for they have been learnt by heart. You feel so *lucky, lucky, lucky* and you laugh as you hurry through the crowded footpath. Hands clasped together, the wind falling into step with you.

It starts off small at first. A slight tremble of the hand as they finish the crossword, having to take breaks as you walk to the park so they can get their energy back, coffee shop visits becoming less and less until they are scarce. The baristas do not remember your names nor orders anymore. If you both decide to get coffee it is ordered in. You tell yourself that this is okay, that you welcome change, greet it in fact, like the warm wind in spring greets your face as you step outside. You reason and bargain and try as you might but there is a dark feeling in your stomach as you do.

Yet life goes on.

Unusually long days without any movement, claims that it's "just one day it'll be fine, all I want to do is sleep, join me!". One day becomes two and two become a week until it is almost every other day where they do not get out of bed, *cannot* get out of bed and when they do it is slow and steady movements much like the heavy wind that lays a blanket over everything outside. Unsteady hands now cannot finish the crossword so you write it instead, try to play it off to not make them feel bad when all you want to do is worry and worry and worry. A constant "Are you okay?" met with the same response of "I'm fine, it's nothing". Life moving slower and slower, the wind feeling heavier and heavier, a never-ending pressure on the both of you. Still there is happiness, you worry and stress and ask them questions but there is happiness.

It is midday when you get the call from work, that they have fallen over, that their legs gave way as they were on the way from a meeting, that they cannot get up, that they are drifting in and out of consciousness. The rush, the scramble, the desperation. The wind bellowing as you push against it, push through it to get to them and for the first time you wish the wind would go away. It is only later, when they are in hospital lying on the bed and sleeping soundly that you let yourself cry, let yourself grieve for what has happened, because you know that it will not be easy

from here but you are determined. Heart beating rapidly, tears streaming down your face but you are determined. Shuddering breaths in and out but you are determined. You will not lose this. Not them, not now. The wind laps at the window, a constant thrum, as you decide that you have to be strong, that you *will* be the strong one. From now on you cannot afford to panic. Not until you *know* that it is all over, that they are completely safe. The words leave your lips in a hushed whisper, the wind your only confidant.

A waiting room. No excuses now. They tried to fight against it, play it off, "It was just a one-time thing I'm sure! This is unnecessary!" but you refuse to listen. Breathe in and out. Inhale, exhale. A gale striking against the clinical exterior, trying to fight its way inside. Inhale, exhale. *You are strong. You are strong. You must be strong. For this. For them.* The gale strikes again and reality creeps its way into the room. You are in the hospital waiting room. You are waiting on the doctor. You are unsure and you are scared and quite frankly you want to go home together with them and hide under the blankets, away from the wind and the swabs and the unknown. *Keep it together.* Another strike of wind. Another breath in. Another breath out. You are fine. This is fine. *Breathe. For this. For them.*

A meeting with a doctor. And another. And another. Weeks fly by and the wind still screams. You tear yourself apart, scouring every medical website, clinging to every scrap of information you can find. There *must* be an explanation for this. The possibility of the unknown looms over and you are scared. There is barely time for coffee and normalcy so you worry, worry, worry and research, research, research despite their protests. The coffee shop long gone. The wind worrying with you, weeping at the doorframes. Pressure, *so much pressure.* The wind isn't stopping, *why isn't it stopping?* You feel hopeless. You feel lost. You feel scared. But yet there is still happiness, there *must be.* Through a half-hearted attempt at a joke there is still happiness. Through unsavoury homemade coffee, one cup for two there is happiness. Happiness is created. It is not the same as before but it is created and evolved and adapted until it is enough. It will always be enough. Your safe haven is still safe. This too shall pass.

It does not pass.

A final doctor's office. A slight shake of head, the pity swirling in their eyes. A squeeze of a hand, how is it they are always the one comforting you as if you are the patient. A brief time of gratefulness, a meaningful glance is exchanged. Those kind eyes. Those dimples. You love that smile. You hope you never have to see it leave. A crack of wind and back to reality. A diagnosis. A cold bucket of water dumped onto your shoulders although you are still bone dry. *No, no, no.* Denial. Denial, denial, denial. *This can't be happening.* The smile now gone, the kind eyes now looking scared. You want to crumple up and cry. A death sentence, typed on paper. Little words holding so much meaning, holding so much pain and torture. *Terminal.* This cannot be happening. *Low survival rate.* This cannot be happening. *Procedures we can take looking forward.* This cannot be happening. Muffled sympathy, pain of guilt -

the wind slamming onto the windows, rattling the blinds and you feel as if it is rattling you too.

Sickness. An ugly, ugly word which you have grown to hate. *I'm sorry*. Words which you have also grown to hate because in the real world, sorry means nothing. In the real world, sorry can't give you a cure for them. Desperation. Calling every doctor, talking to every professional. *There must be a way*. A phone call to their mother, a phone call to their little sister. You cannot bear to watch. Running into the park, sobbing under the tree, screaming in the wind letting your voice get carried away. Praying for something, *anything* at all. The wind holding those prayers like it held those late night conversations. You want to explode.

Reality and routine, the harsh wind now a constant battering. The cyclone now a storm. It is not the same but it is better than nothing. Persist, persist, persist. Waking up to clean sick from the toilet. Making hot soup to give them some comfort, *any comfort*. Nights spent staring into space, at those holy orange bottles, asking them, *begging* them to work. *They have to work*. Time spent wondering why you feel you are mourning them when they are not gone. Persist, persist, persist. You do everything but it is not enough. You would stand outside in the bellowing storm if it meant there was a chance they could get better. But statistics and numbers and facts break you down, pick you apart until hope is something like the used coffee grounds lying at the bottom of the bin. Persist, persist, persist. It is not enough.

Silence.

You know what is about to happen, the doctors tell you this is it. A static blanket atop of a hospital bed. There is no wind but a mere breeze today. Funny how a breeze brought you two together but now it will also be the thing to break you apart. Found in the wind yet also lost to it. A final shared smile. A whisper of words. A tearing of the heart. One clammy hand in the other, this is it. A dimple absent with no smile, *how can this be it*. The breeze, so comforting yet contradicting. Be the strong one, you must. A beep of the heart monitor, the pattern your battle song. Slower and slower and slower. This is it. The crossword at home, long forgotten, along with the coffee cups, memories and love to go with it. This is it. A final breath, time suspended.

It stops. You let the tears fall.

Not a single sound can be heard apart from the sobs of a person torn apart and the breeze.