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Holly Springs, Mississippi, population: 2,474 people. Holly Springs is the type of small-town you'd imagine in a Hallmark movie. Small boutiques and cafes line the main street, you know, the type of place where the owners are old and know the name of all the children who come by every day after school. Holly Springs is in a constant state of normalcy; not many things change around here. When something does change though, it's huge. You know the part of the cheesy Christmas movie when a new person moves in, and the whole town acts like it's the biggest thing to happen in the last 10 years? Well, that's pretty much the only realistic part of those movies. It really is once in a blue moon that somebody new rolls in, but when that blue moon does happen, it's definitely the talk of the town. I'm talking newspaper-worthy. But an even bigger phenomenon than that? Secrets. Everybody knows everybody, which means everyone knows everything about everyone. At least they like to think they do. You can't really keep any secrets around here, but all it takes is one to rattle the place. It's not often that something bad happens, but when it does, well let's just say it definitely doesn't look like a Hallmark movie anymore.

My name is Liam Everett, and I'm seventeen years old. I love football, music, my friends and family, and my girlfriend Trinity. At least that's what it says on my tombstone. So I guess technically my name was Liam Everett and I was a seventeen-year-old. A seventeen-year-old with a huge secret; the type of secret I was talking about earlier. The kind that quickly changed into a tragedy. Though, that's not really what I was anticipating would happen when I took those pills. I didn't know what to expect, I was in pain and I thought nobody cared enough about me to still want me here, let alone realize that I left. One of the things nobody really talks about in our Hallmark movie town is the importance of mental health. It's just expected that everyone is happy. According to everyone else in town, there really isn't much to be sad about. Obviously, I didn't make the decision to end my life on a whim. I wouldn't judge anybody if they had, everybody has their reasons, but for me, it was years of pent-up feelings, depression, and anxiety. I didn't choose to end my life because of a specific moment, or any moment really.

That's the thing about mental health, there doesn't have to be anything extremely significant in your life that causes you to feel the way you do, it just happens. My whole life I thought I wasn't good enough, it wasn't other people telling me I wasn't, it was myself. Nobody had to tell me anything or even did tell me anything, it was my own mind that continued to make me feel unworthy and not good enough. It was easy to pretend I was fine because there was nothing that anybody could have done. I was prepared to take my life that night, and so I did. I had made sure my room was clean for my parents and hung up my football jersey for the last time, then I moved to my bathroom and grabbed the pills that I had stored under the sink. I untwisted the cap, poured a large amount into my hand, filled a cup with water, and downed them all with one swallow. I had no doubt in my mind that I was making the right choice, but as my head got foggy and my breaths got labored, I started to question myself. Not about the decision to die, but about what would happen after I was dead, or what dying would be like. I always had been an overthinker, likely the reason for my crippling anxiety. Not the kind of anxiety where you are anxious to meet new people or start a new job, but the kind that keeps you up at night. The kind that gives you panic attacks at three in the morning and causes you to expect the worst to happen. I was terrified of the idea of the people I loved dying, enough so that I wanted to take my own life to avoid ever having to feel that kind of pain. As my vision started to blur, I laid myself down on the floor of my bathroom and shut my eyes. My chest constricted painfully, so I knew the end was coming. I just wasn't strong enough to keep going. I kept it all bottled up because everyone was "perfect" in Holly Springs. I took what I assumed would be my last breath, and passed away.

Again, I didn't know what would happen once I died, but what I hadn't anticipated was being able to see my own dead body lying on the ground. I looked down at my body and patted myself down, I was still here, I could see myself. So who was the dead body on the ground? I stepped over my own body and looked into the mirror. but I couldn't see myself at all, then when I looked down at my "body", I was still there. *What the heck, am I a ghost?* I said to myself. All of this was overwhelming, I had wanted to die because I wanted to be off this Earth, so why was

I still here? Suddenly I heard footsteps coming up the stairs to my room. The steps were too light to be my mother or father. It could be Blake or my girlfriend Trinity. God, I hoped it wasn't Trinity. I hated myself for doing this to her, for leaving her. I just couldn't do it anymore. I loved her, but if I couldn't love myself, I would never be good enough for her. I could only hope she would understand. I heard her calling my name and I started to panic, this is not what I wanted to happen. I could hear her walking around my room. I'm assuming she was confused as to why I wasn't in there, which is what led her straight to the bathroom connected to my room.

"Liam?" she called, "Liam, where are you?" *I'm in the bathroom!* I called back until I realized she wouldn't be able to hear me. She'd never be able to again. I couldn't take this, she didn't deserve this.

"Liam? Are you in there?" she asked. When I didn't reply, I heard her grab the doorknob. I couldn't watch her find me like this. I knew someone was going to have to, but I didn't know I was going to have to watch. She pushed the door open hesitantly and peeked her head through. I watched as her eyes took in her surroundings until they finally landed on my body lying on the floor. I watched as those ocean blue eyes that I had so deeply fallen in love with, took in my state. All the color in her face and eyes drained immediately. The blue in her eyes turned into a pale gray as if I had sucked the life right out of them. Her cheeks that were always the perfect shade of pink whenever I kissed her or complimented her, disappeared entirely. All I could do was stare as she stumbled into the bathroom and fell to her knees next to me. She tapped my cheek a couple of times almost as if she was trying to wake me.

"Liam, wake up baby, you gotta wake up," she said. She continued to move my lifeless body around, trying everything to wake me up from this eternal sleep. She slapped my face repeatedly as she chanted "Liam wake up, this isn't funny, wake up, wake up, wake up!"

I watched as her eyes filled with tears. She straddled my body and started trying to do chest compressions. They were weak and lazy, as she started breaking down in front of me. I moved to try and pull her off the body, there was no use, there was no coming back. When I tried to grab her shoulders my hands went right through them. She continued to sob, tear after tear fell down her heartbroken face. *Trinity, stop it, I'm here, I'm right here,* I called to her. Of

course, she couldn't hear me. Nobody could. Nobody can hear me, nobody can see me, nobody can touch me. I'm a ghost and now I'm left to suffer even more for ruining the people I love. Suddenly, Trinity started screaming, I wasn't sure if it was to get my parents or if it was out of pain because of what I had just done to her. She was this way because of me. I sat down on the side of the bathtub and sobbed. I did this to her. I made her upset. I'm so selfish, she needed me and I just left her, and I left her to pick up the pieces on her own. I heard my parent's steps climb the stairs in a panic. They had heard Trinity's screams of agony and were probably taking two steps at a time.

"Trinity? Liam?" They called. Trinity didn't say anything. She was lying on the ground wrapping her tiny frame around my much larger corpse. She placed her head on my unmoving chest as tears poured down her beautiful face. Staring at her face reminded me of the first time we met.

Trinity and I had met 3 years ago, at the house of the only person qualified enough to teach music lessons. I was learning guitar and we literally just bumped into each other. I was maneuvering through the hallway of the small house with my huge guitar case and music bag, and I didn't see her walk in. Suddenly, something ran into me, knocking us both over. I groaned as my head hit the ground and she landed on my chest slightly knocking the air out of my lungs. "Oh my gosh I am so sorry, I wasn't watching where I was going!" A beautiful voice said as she quickly scurried off of me. Almost missing the warmth her body gave me, I sat up and finally looked at the tiny human who was able to knock me over. As we locked eyes, I was stunned by her ethereal beauty. Huge ocean blue eyes stared right back at me. Faint freckles scattered across her nose and cheeks, full pouty lips, and the longest and softest looking dark brown hair that reached down to her waist. The kind you could run your fingers through for hours. She tilted her head slightly to the side, probably wondering why I hadn't said anything or why I was staring like a creep. I wanted to say something so badly, but I was completely awestruck by her beauty. No girl had ever caught my attention as fast as she just had. I had to say something, and it had to be smooth. I couldn't mess this up with her.

"It's all good, we barely know one another and we're already falling for each other," I said as

smoothly as possible. My voice cracked slightly at the end, I hoped she hadn't noticed. A mischievous glint and an adorable smirk adorned her face. Crap, she definitely noticed.

"That was smooth," she said with a smile. I instantly fell in love with that smile. The way her top lip curled slightly with her bright white teeth on display. The skin around her eyes crinkled as her eyes shone with amusement and happiness. I found myself staring again, I quickly looked away to not make her uncomfortable. I realized we were both still sitting on the floor so I quickly got up and extended my hand for her to take. She seemed to be just as entranced by me as I was with her, which I'll admit, boosted my ego a bit. She hesitantly placed her much smaller hand in mine, and I pulled her up so she was standing right in front of me. The second our skin touched I swear I could feel sparks. The kind of sparks you hear about in songs, books, and movies that you wouldn't believe were real. She must've felt them too because her eyes narrowed to the spot where our hands were still connected. Now that we were both standing, I could finally get a good look at her. She was definitely petite, probably around five feet, quite skinny, but not in a bad way. She was absolutely stunning and I wondered how I had never seen her around here before.

"This may be a weird question, but are you from around here?" I asked her.

"Actually no, but I will be. This is my aunt's house, um my parents aren't around a lot anymore so I'm moving in with her," she replied.

"I'm sorry to hear that um..." I stuttered as I scratched the back of my neck.

Hopefully, she would get the hint that I'm asking for her name. God, I'm making such a fool of myself. "Trinity," she quickly filled in as she extended her hand once more for me to shake. I placed my rough and calloused hand in her silky smooth one. Trinity, a beautiful name for a beautiful girl.

"Hi Trinity, I'm Liam," I replied.

Now as I stared at Trinity's body shaking with sobs, I was filled with regret for what I had done to her beautiful soul. In my heart, I know the two of us were meant to be together, but my mind kept telling me she deserved better, I would never be good enough for her. When my parents finally approached the bathroom and took in the scene around them, my heart broke all

over again. I knew before I made the decision to end my life that I would be leaving the people I loved, but nothing prepared me for the look on my parent's faces. Much like Trinity, my mother's green eyes lost all of their normal brightness, and her bottom lip began to quiver. My dad placed a hand on her shoulder as his eyes opened wide with disbelief. As if believing I was not dead, my mom calmly told my dad to call 911. She carefully walked over to Trinity and my lifeless body and tried to pull Trinity off of me. She didn't budge. She continued to just stare at the wall with her head on my chest as if she was listening for any trace of a remaining heartbeat. My mom slightly adjusted Trinity so she could place two firm fingers on the neck of my body to feel for a pulse. When she didn't find one, she grabbed my wrist and looked for a pulse again. Nothing. When she came to this realization the dam broke. She threw herself onto the body as she cried for me to come back.

"My baby, no not my baby. Liam." she sobbed into my chest. My dad walked in after finishing the call, eyes wet. My father never cried. Seeing him this way was the final straw. He carefully sat down next to my mother and wrapped himself around her. As my mother's body shook violently like her lungs couldn't get enough air, my father's back stayed stiff trying to be strong for the broken girls in front of him. I stepped forward to comfort all of them and went right through them, I tried everything I could to get them to notice me. It was useless. Finally, the red flashing lights shined through the window, and emergency responders rushed to knock on the door. My dad stood up and straightened himself out before running down the steps to let them in. After a minute or two, multiple pairs of steps followed. The door was left open and multiple figures walked in assessing the scene. Trinity and my mother were pulled off the body that used to be a part of me as the first responders carefully checked my vitals confirming my death. Any small piece of hope Trinity had been hanging on to disappeared. Her tears stopped, her body stopped shaking, and she took in the scene like she was a random bystander. My body was loaded up onto a stretcher and carried out, my mother and father following close behind them. Trinity stayed statue still as they maneuvered around her. Her eyes were blank, her body unmoving and she stared at a singular object lying on the ground. I watched and waited for her to break down again, but to my surprise, she remained perfectly calm. She walked over to the

orange pill bottle lying on the floor, looked at the label, and walked out. I followed her out like a lost puppy confused as to why she did not react to the pill bottle. I followed her tiny steps as she approached my parents and first responders. She quietly walked up to my mom, handed her the pill bottle, and abruptly left. I followed her outside as the sobbing coming from my mother grew louder again at the realization. They were heartbroken enough knowing I was dead, but finding out that I had taken my own life completely ruined them. I hated myself for it. I knew my parents were shattered, and probably would be even more once they approached the hospital. But my concern grew for Trinity. I knew Trinity like the back of my hand, she was my everything, this shell of a person was not my girlfriend, not my Trinity. I followed her as she got into the front seat of her car. Trinity's face still adorned a blank look as she turned around and reversed out of my driveway. As she got on the road she turned up her radio horrendously loud, as if to hide every emotion she was feeling. She drove miles down the road at a speed that was uncomfortably fast. Suddenly the music changed to an all too familiar song. Our song.

I watched her face as her eyes shone with realization and her bottom lip quivered. This is the breakdown I had anticipated when she found the pill bottle. Now that she was driving, all I cared about was her safety, now was not the time to fall apart, not while her life was on the line. As the words of the song persisted, memories of the time we had decided to make it our song, filled my mind. There we sat in my bedroom just lying on the bed watching tv.

"I'm boreddddd," Trinity dragged out as she rolled over. She placed her arms on my chest and placed her face in her hands scrunching up her cheeks slightly. Her big blue eyes met my own brown ones. We just looked at one another for a minute enjoying each other's company. Finally, her eyes moved from mine and searched around my room. Her gaze stopped and landed on my guitar. She hopped up excitedly and grabbed my guitar. She walked back over to me and extended her hand to pull me up so that I was sitting.

"Play me something," she said with a smile. I cringed. I don't like to play for people. "C'mon, for me, please?" she asked as she gave me her best puppy dog eyes. God those eyes, I could never say no to those eyes.

"Alright, what should I play?" taking my guitar onto my right leg and plucking a few

strings to make sure it was still in tune.

“I don’t care,” she replied. She sat with her legs pulled under each other. I laid down on my back and placed my head in her lap. It wasn’t the best position to play the guitar in, but as she combed through my hair with her delicate fingers, I didn’t care. I started playing the introduction to “It’s Been a Long Long Time” by Harry and the Orchestra. My fingers glided across the strings with precision, and I looked up to Trinity’s face. She was already smiling down at me as the intro faded into the verse. I hadn’t expected her to know the song, let alone start singing it, but as the verse began, her beautiful voice filled my ears. I fell in love, at that exact moment. It’s like the entire world around me shifted, she was my everything, I didn’t know how I had ever lived without her. We stared into each other’s eyes as she continued to play with my hair and sing, hoping she meant every word, I joined in. We sang the song into completion, and as the final chord played through the guitar, a single tear slid down her face. “Why are you crying Trin?” I asked.

“They’re happy tears,” she replied.

“Why are you crying happy tears then?” I asked with a smile.

“I don’t know, I just love you,” she said with apprehension. It’s the first time she said it.

The first time either of us said it. Yet, somehow I had no doubt in my mind that she meant it, and that I felt the same, and so I replied, “I love you too Trin.”

As the song blasted through the radio, tears poured down both of our faces. Both of us remembering the song and the promise I had broken to her. It was supposed to be her and I, and now it was just her. The song must’ve momentarily distracted her because she didn’t seem to notice that the bridge we drove over every day on the way to school curved to the left. She was still driving straight. *Trinity!* I screamed trying to grab the wheel. My hand went right through the wheel. *Trinity, you’ve got to turn!* I yelled, hoping with every bit left in me she could hear me.

She couldn’t. The front of the car crashed through the guardrail on the bridge and her car started plummeting into the water. There was nothing I could do as the car became completely submerged. Trinity’s head hit her steering wheel and she laid limp in her seatbelt while the car sank deeper into the river below the bridge. The song still playing through the radio was much



quieter now. Her eyes were now closed and there was a small gash on her forehead. I got into the front seat and tried to shake her into consciousness. Again, my hand went straight through her body. Her eyes snapped open. Thank God she was okay, she needed to be okay. The bottom of the car began to fill with water as it seeped through the damaged part of the car, but she wasn't moving. I could tell she was conscious she was looking right at the floor as the water rose up to her calves. *Trinity, get out! You have to move!* I yelled. I knew she couldn't hear me, but I wouldn't let her do this to herself. *Trin, c'mon babe, c'mon, you've got to get out,* I yelled once more. Again, she remained unmoving, her eyes trained on the water that was now up to her waist. *Trinity, no!* I screamed. She made no move to escape the car. The song on the radio that was still playing started to crackle as the water seeped in. The water was now up to her neck. *Move Trinity! Why won't you move?* I screamed with tears streaming down my face. I reached for her seatbelt, she needed to get unbuckled, she had to get out. My hand went straight through it. It was no use, she was doing it on purpose. I had broken her that much that she didn't want to continue living without me. My eyes lit up with hope as she went to move, maybe she would save herself after all but instead, she reached forward and grabbed a singular object from the dash of her car. Photo booth printouts. Four tiny photos of us. The best versions of us. We both looked at the strip as the water continued to fill. Her smile was the most beautiful I had ever seen, her cheeks the perfect shade of pink, and her eyes my favorite shade of blue. I had changed her, taken all that away from her. She was still beautiful, she always would be, but I had sucked the life and joy right out of the best person I knew. She brought the strip to her lips and kissed the picture of my face.

"I'll see you soon Liam," she said quietly as the water finally began to cover her face. Knowing that I wasn't coming back, she held onto the last thing she had left of me and her. She spat water out as she tried to breathe. She was running out of oxygen too fast, she wouldn't last much longer. All I could do was watch as she struggled to take her last breath. Her lungs filled with water and her eyes turned blank. She was gone. I had tried so hard to avoid the kind of pain that came with losing someone I loved. I so selfishly had put everyone I loved through the exact pain I had been trying to avoid all along. It was all collateral damage. It was insufferable. I

reached over to Trinity one last time. I expected my hand to permeate once more, but I was taken by surprise when my hand was able to cup her now cold cheek. She was gone. My body shook violently as I sobbed. Hesitantly with trembling hands, I closed Trinity's lifeless eyes, knowing it would be the last time I ever saw them. I was gone and now so was she. Holly Springs Mississippi, population 2,472.