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Tempest

Macy Kile

West Virginia University, mgk0005@mix.wvu.edu

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TEMPEST

Macy Kile

My socks are wet.

It's the worst feeling in the world. Mud and water had soaked through my shoes and flooded my socks with an inescapable wetness. I would've taken off my shoes and socks; however, I was nearly knee deep in mud at the bottom of a hill and they would never dry in the torrential downpour that was releasing itself from the sky.

My car was here too, sprawled on its back in a position that seemed so incredibly vulnerable. It brought me to tears, to see it like that, but my socks were wet, and I could only really think about that. I felt faint and I tried my best not to sway and lose what little footing I had gained. I tried to lift away from my captor, but the suction from the sticky mud kept me in place. I could shuffle a few inches at a time with an effort that made my muscles burn. Eventually, I reached my upturned-beetle-looking vehicle.

I felt less alone with my car, but I knew that I was utterly isolated. A glimmer of silver stuck out a few feet away from me, illuminated by my headlights, and I slowly made my way over to it. I picked up my cell phone and attempted to wipe it off. The dirt turned into a little brown Ganges that covered my hands, and fresh clear streams replaced it. When I turned it on, it told me what I already knew, no service.

I knew what I had to do, yet at the same time I didn't. I didn't have a

way to contact the police. I barely knew where I was, I knew the other car was long gone, and that help had not been called. I was disoriented. I felt like my head was splitting in two. I put my hand tentatively to my forehead and in the dim light from my phone. I saw a streak of red blood on my hand. It too was quickly swept away in a river.

The view above me was something of nightmares; lit from my car's headlights, gushing water streamed down the hill's chest into a pool at its feet. The hill stood tall and threatening. Lacerations caused by my car lay deep within its torso. Mud excreted from it like blood. It was unclimbable in this state. I would have to remove myself completely from the mud in order to find a way up the hill.

I reached my arm precariously through my car window and struggled to turn my car off in the awkward position. I cut the engine. Now, it was just the rain and me. After one last backward glance at the site, I began to try and free myself from the pit that threatened to swallow me whole. I had to take a number of breaks to rest. The wound from my head made me see little white dots that looked like lights at first. Impossible because everything in front of me was pitch black.

I walked along the foot of the hill until it finally began to look less intimidating. I don't know how long it took for me to reach the road. All that I know is that my legs and arms ached, and my back felt like I had been hunched over for an eternity. When I climbed over the guardrail I looked down and felt a deep exhaustion.

I kept my tasks right in front of me. Get out of the car, check. Turn the car off, check. Walk away from the car to remove self from danger, check. Find a phone, check. Get to the road, check. Now my next objective was to find cell service, a house, another car, anything to help me. I didn't know if I should wait with my car for a passing vehicle. It was nearly 2:00 in the morning on an alternate route road in the middle of rural West Virginia.

Fuck.

During the day you could go the entirety of your journey without seeing another car pass, and I was beginning to fear that no one would come along. I began to walk in the direction that I'd been heading. I knew that nothing lay for me the opposite way. My life seemed to offer no relief, as soon as I was rid of one burden, another quickly replaced it.

I had just ended my three-year long relationship with my boyfriend Sam. Sam and I met in the middle of the summer, a sticky June. It made me irritable, the never-ending heat; but Sam made it fun. He was my first actual boyfriend. We would go swimming in the rivers, get drunk under the sun, and cool off in the water. He was quiet around my friends.

I remember one day at the end of August just Sam and I went to a local swimming hole. He carried me down to the water on his back, I squealed in excitement when he put me down. I tossed off my shoes and stripped down to my bathing suit before running into the water.

He joined me in the rippling blue-grey river. The strength of the current surprised me, but it was shallow enough to stand. The sun reflected off of the water, making Sam's white-blond hair seem like a halo around his head. He seemed like an angel to me then. Sam scooped me up in his arms, whispered in my ear that he loved me for the first time. I believed him.

One night everything turned sour. I sat on Sam's porch, the cold November air made me shiver. I could not see Sam, but the lighter clicked on with a hiss and the end of his cigarette lit up with a red-orange aurora. I said nothing. I just listened to the soft inhale and exhale of his ritual, the sound of the cigarette burning softly. My eyes slowly began to fill with tears, the canvas had a messy orange streak from the burning tobacco. I blinked them away, they were warm against my face.

The darkness did not feel comforting, it felt intimidating. I was afraid for Sam, that he would lose himself again and get angry. A quivering figure towering above me, Sam trapped inside of himself. I lusted after it and cowered

ered away from it. I couldn't detach myself from him.

It was the night he first hit me. I had come home late from work after a few drinks with my coworkers and he accused me of cheating. I don't remember how his fist felt against my cheek. I remember how he enveloped me in a hug so incredibly repulsive that I let myself melt into him. I don't remember the reeking alcohol that came from every pore of his body, but I remember the way the lingering cigarette tasted on his lips.

That night I lay in his bed, not too far, not too close. I remember counting the planks in the ceiling, and how the shadows looked when a car's lights would stalk us through the window. I could still feel every ounce of presence that lay beside me. I suppose the sun rose. I suppose that I watched it. I eventually felt him stir awake, and I pretended like I was asleep then. Sam got up and crept out of the bedroom, so quietly, something that would have been thoughtful.

Earlier in that night, before the crash, I had come over to Sam's house after work to find him working on his computer. His light hair was duller in the dingy fluorescent light. I decided to make him some food because I knew that he had been working on his grad school applications all day. While I was at the stove, he came up behind me and put his hands on my hips. I thought back to when we were in the water, weightlessly floating in a pool of blind love. A touch so gentle and forgiving that I melted into his embrace. I closed my eyes. Sam turned my body towards him with shocking forcefulness. My eyes flew open to look into his. They were filled with an emotion that I knew all too well.

"Who the fuck is Alexander?"

Anxiety flooded my body. My lips began to tremble.

"Answer me," Sam demanded. His grey eyes were stone cold. His beautiful smile was twisted in anger.

"Alexander is my coworker," I whispered.

"I know all of your coworkers, remember Liz? Who the fuck is he?"

I slowly stepped away from the stove, I tried to make my way out of

the kitchen; but Sam grabbed my arm and pulled me towards him. A stranger looking in might've seen two lovers from afar.

“Chris just hired him, alright?” I kept my responses short, full of fear that he would find further fault in my words.

“Why are you making plans to be alone with him then. You're fucking him, aren't you?”

“I just met him, Sam. I promise nothing is going on.”

Nothing was going on. Alex wanted help picking out a gift for his sister's birthday. He wanted me to go to the mall with him. Sam's laptop sat threatening on the table. It wasn't his grad school application that had been pulled up, it was my text messages, I knew it wasn't hard to do, but a small part of me thought that Sam wouldn't go that far to invade my privacy.

“I don't believe you. You fucking liar. How could you do this to me?” Sam hadn't let his grip loosen on my arm. I waited for my opportunity, Sam pushed me

away from him and I took the chance to grab my keys, leaving everything else, and make my way out the door. He didn't follow me out, every other time he didn't need to, and I had come back to him.

As I walked out of the door into the dark night the rain began. I remembered being in the river, the nights where we spent curled up in each-other's arms, the way he used to kiss my nose before we departed, his white-blond hair appearing as a halo around his head. All of that was worth it to me to keep going, the thought of getting that back kept me there.

There were nights where we would stay up until the sun rose. We drank wine from the bottle, effervescent and bubbly. We would crack each other up for hours and marvel over each other in the dim light. I couldn't forget those moments. Sam ruined them for me. He took a can of bright red paint and ruined my perfect picture. I wouldn't go back to them as an excuse. I told myself that I would find another way.

The suffocating storm slowed to a tranquil sprinkle. The rivers rushing along the side of the road took a breath of relief, but their flow still hurried along. My clothes stuck to me as I walked, tendrils of my long brown hair welded to the middle of my back. My eyes had long since gotten used to the darkness. However, the newfound silence from the lack of rain was startling.

I nearly screamed whenever I felt my phone vibrate six times in a row. I looked down, the light blinding my eyes, messages from Sam that I didn't open. A meager one bar showed up at the top.

Sometime later an ambulance and a state trooper were surrounding the site where I was driven off of the road. I told them what I could remember. A young man with red hair assessed my health. He said that I probably had a concussion and that my head wouldn't need stitches. He said that I was extremely lucky, that he's never seen someone get out of a wreck that bad with only a few scratches.

I don't know if I felt lucky. I stared at the streaks of red and blue lights darting across the darkness. I got into the ambulance. The red headed man was driving. We drove off of the site. I wish they would have just let me go home. I wanted to wrap myself in a blanket after a hot bath. I needed some comfort. I felt my eyes start to close; but I forced myself to stay awake.