

My sunshine, my summer rain

by Paige Burkhardt

The cold night air swirled around them with impressive force, stinging his skin as he wrapped his arms tighter around her waist. He wanted to freeze time, right here, right now. He never wanted to let her go. He couldn't help but feel he was losing her, like she was slipping further and further away from him as every second passed.

He wanted to tell her how much he loved her, how radically she had changed his life and how desperately he would miss her if she left him. He wanted to tell her that the moment he saw her, life as he knew it had ended. But he couldn't. He could only hold her and breathe in her scent as her hair twirled around his face.

His mouth was dry and his stomach rolled with uncertainty. He tried to swallow, but his throat felt tight and rough. Pressing his cheek up against her forehead, he felt the soft warmth of her skin on his rough, unshaven face.

"Do you," she said, clearing her hoarse throat, "do you remember that summer we spent on the beach? We did nothing," she coughed and he squeezed her tighter, wanting to protect her from the bitter wind, "but eat and drink and swim for a whole month."

He forced his throat to clear and coughed out his words, "Yeah, of course. Of course I remember. You," he chuckled, "had all the lifeguards following you around and we got so sunburned. My skin was red for weeks."

He felt her move in his arms, so he relaxed his grip. This couldn't be happening. Why would she leave him now? After all they had been through. After all the laughter, the tears, the heartache and the pure and blissful joys, it made no sense for this to be happening now. He tried to think back on the events that had led them here to this cold and horrible night, but all he could see in the cinema of his mind was blurry images of things that once were – things that now made no sense, like they were from a dream.

He thought back to the autumn she had decided her life needed changing. She had knocked on his door, auburn hair flying in the wind, bags in hand, ready to leave. She was out of breath and excited when she spoke, but he would never forget what she said. "This thing we call life – it doesn't make any sense at all. It doesn't flow in a seamless and never ending river. It's sporadic and wild and unpredictable. I want to be like life. If I can't beat it, I want to join it. The only question now is, are you coming with me?" Of course he was coming with her. He would go anywhere with her. He packed a few meagre belongings in his bags and they drove and drove and drove until they reached nowhere in particular – which was exactly where they were heading.

For three perfect weeks they swam under waterfalls, explored the thick forests and danced under giant trees that rained down yellow and orange leaves. He remembered that this was as close as anyone could ever get to heaven on earth.

A smile touched his lips, remembering that autumn, despite the current bitter and painful stabbing he felt in the pit of his stomach.

Her legs began to shake and she buried her head into his chest to hide her face from the icy wind. He felt her body shivering and he allowed himself to lower, supporting her as they sat to rest on the concrete. It was like sitting on ice, but they could stand no longer. This tragic parting had ripped them of their energy. As her small frame rested against his chest, he could feel her soft heartbeat.

He felt her body shifting from his and his heart tore in pieces as it thudded violently against his chest. "Please," he said, fighting the tears that threatened to roll down his frozen cheeks, "please don't leave me." He pressed his palm against the back of her head and tightened his grip around her waist. "I can't survive without you."

The weight of her head pressed against his palm and he lowered her back so she could see his face. "I'm sorry," she whispered, still hoarse.

His brows pulled together with frustration and fear, as tears spilled over the ledge of his eyes and plummeted down, splashing on her thick unbuttoned jacket.

He wished he could take back everything he had said in their stupid argument. He wished he had never thought about accepting a job so far away, or told her she was irresponsible. Her spontaneous outlook on life was the thing he loved the most about her. Now, a moment of complaining, a moment of being unsatisfied with his life, had led them to this place. Here and now – this horrible bitter moment that had started to draw attention from passersby.

"Is everything alright?" a woman with a thick accent and even thicker makeup asked.

He couldn't respond. He couldn't think. He couldn't breathe. So she walked away.

"I'm so sorry," she said again, lifting her soft hand, running the back of her fingers against his cheek. Without thinking he grabbed her hand tightly and kissed it, feeling the warmth of her palm on his lips. "We had some," she cleared her throat and shivered, "good times, didn't we?"

"The best," he managed to say, allowing the tears to come freely now. This wasn't fair. He didn't understand why she had to leave him.

"Hey, man. What's going on? Are you guys okay?" a tall, dark man wearing pants much too big for him asked, touching his hand against his shoulder.

No. He wasn't okay. "Oh man. Hey!" the pedestrian shouted, "Someone call an ambulance!"

"I guess it couldn't last forever," she said, her eyes brimming with tears.

Why? He thought. Why couldn't it last forever?

He supported her head with one hand and her waist with the other. He didn't have anything but his body to press up against the bullet wound in her stomach. The thick red blood was oozing across the pavement now, alerting the few and scattered people that something was wrong. He could hear the screams and shouts of people around them, but they sounded so far away and he couldn't bring himself to tear his gaze from the light that was fading from her eyes.

Suddenly his mind was racing. His entire world had come crashing down around him, spiralling around and around into this one moment. If he hadn't caused their fight, they wouldn't have been in the street and he wouldn't have dropped his guard for that brief moment. Then he would have seen the man in the hat and sunglasses, in the thick of night, walking up to them with his hands in his pocket. If he wasn't so stubborn, he would have let her hand over the necklace that belonged to his mother, and maybe, just maybe, that bullet wouldn't have shot out of the pistol and pierced through her pale skin.

The sound of her coughing snapped his mind back to the moment. Her skin was so pale, and her body was getting heavier in his arms. "No, no, no, no," he said, brushing a wayward strand of hair away from her face. "Please stay with me."

"I," she coughed, breathing in deep and heavy breaths, "I love you, s-so much."

"Shhh.... it's okay. You're going to be fine," he said, rocking her back and forth as he cradled her. Why did she have to leave him now? They were at the beginning of their lives together. There should be more than this.

"It's okay. It's not so b-bad. But I'm going to m-miss you," she said, forcing a smile to come to her pale and quivering lips.

"You have to survive. How would I ever make it through without you? I can't! I can't do this life without you! I need you!" he was shouting, clawing his way through his guilt, his fear and the agony that ripped through his heart.

"I love you," she said again, reaching her hand up one last time to stroke his cheek. "You are my sunshine."

He forced a smile to his lips, but couldn't hold back the tears that streamed down his face. "My sunshine," he whispered back, "and my summer rain."

Her lips curled to form her last smile as her hand dropped from his face and fell lifelessly by her side.

He closed his eyes and swallowed the fear and anguish that rose in his throat. He pressed his lips against her cold forehead and lingered in the moment, once again breathing in her scent – the scent he would never smell again.

The sound of sirens and the flashing of lights swirled around him in a chaotic whirlwind. Time had slowed down, coursing through his universe at a lethargic, exhausting rate. All he could feel was the hollow pain that had taken up permanent residence in the pit of his stomach.

He could hear the shouts of men in white coats as they begged him to let her go. Everything became a blur as he watched them tear away the body of the only woman he could ever truly love. Once again, life as he knew it had ended.

As he watched them drive away, he gently whispered, “Until we meet again my sunshine, my summer rain.”