

## The Sorrow That Follows

I kept my head down; my gaze concentrated on the droplets of rain splattering against the cobblestone footpath. I clutched my umbrella loosely between my fingers as I walked, only halting once I neared the church steps. Steadily, and unwillingly, I glanced up.

The stairway stretched long and wide with many of the steps beginning to crack with age. The climb ahead looked daunting, and I struggled to find a source of motivation to make my approach. Once again creeping back into my thoughts was the unwelcomed memory of that night which seemed to be on a loop of late. Shaking my head, I pressed 'pause' on the memory, and shoving it into the deepest depths of my mind, I began mounting the stairs.

Eventually, the large double oak doors came into view. I placed my umbrella to the side with droplets skittering off its dampened surface as I lowered it to the ground. Walking through the entrance, I was greeted by multiple vases of white lilies and the faint murmurs of those seated on the pews. Wet with moisture, my hands trembled by my sides as the thrumming and quickening pace of my heartbeat echoed throughout my eardrums. As I took tentative steps down the aisle, I was met with the shock of an open casket a few metres from where I stood frozen in place. At that moment, it was clear things were about to change drastically.

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"C'mon V, admit this is fun!" My brother's laidback attitude did little to cheer me from my irritable mood. He had decided it would be a fun idea to take a drive through the woods, though our concept of 'fun' has always been very different. It was late afternoon, and the windshield of my brother's car was coated in the sun's blinding golden glow. Normally a source of comfort, this was beginning to grow bothersome.

"This is a terrible idea, Tristan. I should be at home practising my presentation for tomorrow," I muttered with a tone of annoyance. I folded my arms and shifted my stare to the blur of forest green racing past the passenger window.

"Loosen up! Don't be such a tryhard," he teased as the corners of his lips quirked up into a smug grin. Despite my attempt to maintain an angered expression, my lips curved upwards into a small smile. In truth, no one knew me better than my brother, although he probably never realised. I didn't have to be little miss perfect with him. I could be myself.

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The funeral service had been a blur. I had avoided the sight of the casket for the entirety of the ceremony, keeping my eyes trained on the deep mahogany carpet beneath my feet. Leaving the church was far worse than when I had entered. As people murmured condolences and apologies in an attempt to be polite, my thoughts were empty, and their words were muffled as I forced a fake smile in response.

Now, at the burial ground, the rain had stopped but it was still quite overcast, and an icy chill hung in the breeze. I stood by, as people paid their last respects, and the coffin was lowered into the ground. At that moment, time slowed, and like shadows lurching forward, I felt myself being hurtled into my last memory with him.

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“I am not a tryhard!” I exclaimed, stifling a chuckle as I turned my attention away from the treeline of towering pine trees and back to my brother. His indigo eyes twinkled with amusement as he stared at me through a raised eyebrow, and within seconds, we were both giggling like children.

I was going to scold him, tell him to pay attention to the road, but before I could shriek out in warning, the windshield shattered, spraying glass like rain during a violent thunderstorm. The image of my brother’s wide eyes danced on the back of my eyelids before everything went black.

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The time following his death, even leading up to the ceremony, was a time of blackness: a darkness so consuming I was left stripped of my emotions, a ghost of my former self. I wasn’t quite sure what I was supposed to feel. Anger? Sadness? Now, standing by his graveside, I knew. Uncertainty. The uncertainty of what my future is supposed to look like without him truly terrified me. I had been thrust into a new, unfamiliar world, and such uncertainty left me feeling utterly hopeless.