

The Words I Should've Said

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Words. There are millions of words floating around the universe. Words like pizzaz or rebel, and strange words too like collywobbles. Unlike people, words never die, especially the ones that are spoken. But the words I once said, were 'I hate you,' and now they live in the universe forever.

I used to speak — but now I don't. I used to be normal — but now I'm not. She used to live — but now she doesn't.

I am stuck. Staring at the classroom board while the teacher explains God knows what. Her voice is like static at the back of my mind. I changed schools after it happened, I couldn't stand the glances in the hall, or the teachers asking me how I was coping every few minutes.

My new classmates don't get it, they don't know what happened. They act like normal teenagers, chatting and gossiping and spilling secrets. That won't be me, not anymore.

The school days move slowly as if time is trapped in a thick jelly.

At home it's supposed to be different, I'm supposed to relax but everyone treads lightly around me as if I might explode at any moment. I do what I'm supposed to, eat enough so no one is worried, attempt my homework so I'm learning, go to bed early so I'm sleeping, and try to be the Little Miss Perfect I was once before. But I'm not her anymore, how could I be after what I've done?

Everyday I'm reminded of her. It's not even big things that send the memories off, just stupid little things. Like when I'm bored in class and doodling on my page, or how the air has a chill to it overnight and the autumn leaves start to fall — she always loved when that happened. Autumn was supposed to be a time of hugs, of evenings with warm drinks and warmer smiles, but I know it won't be that anymore.

I walk the trek to school, followed by other moody teenagers. I place on my headphones to drown out the world. Most highschoolers stand and chat around before the bell rings, but I go straight to my locker. I guess when I moved to this school, I didn't really put in an effort to make friends, but it's not like anyone else reached out to me either. From everyone else I probably look like the new sad loner chick. I quickly tag behind the parade of popular kids marching their way through the hall, not that I want to join them but it's the only way to get to class. But one girl notices me and shoves me against the locker laughing. No, not today please.

'Look guys, silent Sue wants to join us, don't ya Sue?'

I inhale a shaky breath. My name isn't even Sue. The hallway goes silent, all eyes are on me. I do not speak but tears swell. She would've known what to do, she would've known how to help, but she isn't here. She's dead.

'Oh, oh, is silent Sue gonna cry...?'

I shake my head and duck away, running the opposite direction, away from the laughing bullies, away from embarrassment, and towards the exit sign above the door. They don't get it; they don't know anything.

I run, swearing when I slip on the stupid leaves covering the pathway. I shakily grab my key from my bag and unlock the door to the house. I hope my father is out.

I find him in the kitchen. He watches me expectantly, perhaps hoping I'll talk to him. I shake my head because I just wanna go to my room — he usually gets what I mean, but he stands tall looking down at me.

'Talk to me please. You ditch school, you won't speak, what's going on with you?'

I stay silent, after what I did, after what I said, I can't speak, I'll hurt someone else, I'll kill someone else. Dad hands me a notebook, and a pen.

‘Can you at least write, please.’

I nod hesitantly.

‘I know things have been difficult, but we’re moving forward, right? New school, have you made any friends?’

I shake my head and write: *Move forward...that’s your answer for everything, move forward, feel nothing.*

He sighs, and his face contorts with frustration.

‘You think this is what I want? You never say anything!’

She was my world, Dad. She left us, and it’s my fault she did.

‘It was not your fault, you hear me. Yet you won’t even say her name, heck you won’t say anything.’

Because it hurts too much. Dad, we fought, I know it’s inevitable, but it was bad this time, and then she died that afternoon. You can’t tell me it’s not related.

‘She was in a car crash, you know that. That’s not your fault.’

But what if it was? What if she was distracted from it, and that’s why, or what if she was sick of this life and did it on purpose?

‘We can’t focus on the what ifs, she loved you dearly, you know that.’

I said I hated her. Those were my last words she ever heard me say, the last words I ever said to her, the last words I ever said to anyone.

‘Then go to her, make it right.’

I nod timidly. I’ve been putting it off, I know he’s right. He embraces me; I waft in his cologne smell, and feel his big arms around me, protecting me.

I stand upon the dead leaves. The mist rises and dew blankets the wet glass. I’m alone. I can barely breathe. I wipe my clammy hands against my bouncing knees. Stained-glass shadows fall on the grass, painting it marigold, cerise and periwinkle. Gingerly I step through the imposing metal gates, and move through the grounds, dodging forgotten graves. I hear the faint sound of dead flowers rustling, being removed for fresh ones to lie on top. Gravestones lean together like old friends. I get to what I think is the one, littered with moss, grass shards sprout through the soil. In one swift movement, everything goes away. My fingers trace the carved letters.

SOPHIA WYATT: 20/7/1975 – 1/4/2022

I suck in another breath and another. How is it that I am breathing but the air feels empty of oxygen? Too much. Too many memories. Too many voices. My quivering hand grabs for my bag, clasping a water bottle. Suddenly I’m so thirsty — I drink and drink. The cold liquid soothing my tight throat. It calms my rapid breathing. My vision blurs. I break into a sweat and pant on my knees like a dog.

‘I’m so sorry. I am. Please, please...’ My words break up. Hot tears fall. I squeeze my eyelids shut. My voice sounds raspy and heavy with shame, the same way the guilt weighs down upon my shoulders. I can’t. But I know I must. My voice cracks and catches in my throat.

‘I never thought it would go this far. I’m searching for something to say, a worthwhile explanation. My words failed... which I know isn’t a deserving response. But it’s the only one I know, I was just angry, it seems so petty. So, so I am sorry Mum. I don’t hate you, I never did, and I know I never will. Please. I don’t. I —

‘I love you. Those are the words I should’ve said, those should’ve been the words you heard, but that’s what makes words so great, unlike people words don’t die so once you say them, they’re out in the universe forever. So Mumma, I love you, I love you, I love you.’