

## **Two Weeks After**

The silent darkness of my bedroom offers an abundance of time and space to rot in my own grief. I don't leave my house anymore, neither do any of Evan's friends. For two weeks, my sobbing has been the only sound in the house, and the tears haven't stopped for a second. My father gently knocks on my door and delivers a slice of pizza to my bed-bound hands. I accept it, knowing that I won't eat it, but appreciating his efforts. "Frankie, talk," I mutter, and my German shepherd obeys the command, releasing a single bark, and receives the slice of pizza as his reward. I thought I'd run out of tears, but they continue to fall, and Frankie absorbs them all into his thick coat. Glancing across the room to the photo album sitting on my dresser, I mentally flip through the pages full of photos capturing our love. The love that I lost two weeks ago when Evan Jones left his eyes on his phone screen for too long, and wound up in a car resembling a piece of crumpled paper. I roll onto my side, facing away from the soured memories, and the tears fall with more ferocity.

## **Six Months After**

Sitting at the Jones's kitchen table, I stare at the spread of Evan's most prized possessions. Across from me, his mother and father sit silently. We all grimace at the last unsorted item: the driver's license that finally came in the mail two months ago. The car crash took Evan's life on the same day that he passed his driver's test. The photo sitting in front of us was taken on that day—the last photo ever taken of him. In the photo, he stands in front of the gray backdrop, and Evan's smiling face exudes a warm brightness that surrounds me in a hug. A mop of messy brown hair sits on a freckled face with bright blue eyes, and a proud, shining smile. Finally, I manage to pull my eyes away from his face as Mrs. Jones excuses herself from

the table, and Mr. Jones trails after her, a look of defeat clouding his grayed face. In their absence, I allow my eyes to scan the walls around me, examining the photos of Evan that cover the surfaces. Atop the fireplace sits a memorial, celebrating Evan's life with pictures from birth to death. Dust covers the rest of the house, the kitchen clearly hadn't been used in six months, and the piled trash and takeout boxes stacked next to the garbage can prove it. Before I know it, tears begin streaming down my face and I glance one last time at Evan's picture. Without saying goodbye, I rush out of the house and climb into my gray sedan, wiping my eyes clear. Once I'm confident I'm able to make it home without crying, I toss my phone into the backseat. Any time I'm in the driver's seat, my phone is in the backseat.

I'm always sure to never make the same mistake Evan did.

I'm always sure to never hurt my loved ones the way he has.

### **One Year After**

A crowd of three-hundred people stand silently in the courtyard. The grass whistles and the wind billows through our clothes, sending goosebumps up everyone's arms, but no one utters a single complaint. Six-hundred eyes remain glued to the large picture of Evan— his last school photo. Twenty-four hours ago the beloved class president was living and breathing like the rest of us. Now he lies in a morgue. Uncontrollable tears fall to the ground, supplying more water to the grass than it had been given in a year. Evan's vigil. Our classes are shortened to ensure every student and teacher can be in the courtyard to honor his memory. The bell rings in the distance, and everyone begins to vacate the courtyard. It's easy to tell who in the crowd knew Evan personally, it's the people who walk like zombies. Grief is painted on nearly everyone's faces.

Now, only three people remain standing in the courtyard. Zach, Jeremiah, and I, Evan's best friends. We stand in the comfort of our mutual pain until I feel my legs begin to buckle under my weight, and I leave the courtyard before I collapse. As I walk through the metal doors, I turn around and see Zach sobbing in Jeremiah's arms. Evan owns their hearts now, just how he owns mine.

### **Five Years After**

My head begins to throb with the beginning of a migraine, caused by flashing colorful lights and the music blasting from speakers. At least a hundred other bodies fill the small space, and I stand alone in a corner, waiting for an acceptable time to leave. My friends convinced me that a party would distract me from the anniversary of Evan's death. I disagree. I try to remind myself to stay present in this moment with my peers, though I always fail to interact with them. I prefer not to socialize with any of them, anyway— my best friend remains in my hometown. We haven't spoken in a year, and he lives six feet lower than the rest of us, but he will always be my best friend. A boy that I recognize from one of my classes awakens me from my thoughts, "Hey Sarah, my name's Chris—" he begins.

Immediately, I interrupt his sentence, "I have a boyfriend." Once Chris digests my response, he nods and walks away. I fail to mention that my boyfriend is the same person as my best friend. The one who I haven't spoken to in a year. But I haven't stopped missing him in that year and I haven't stopped loving him in the past year, either. Evan Jones will always own my heart. He never left me, even if his body did.