

# Sarah Frendo

## The Last Winter

I'm not sure why I came here. I guess I thought it would help. But now that I'm here I realise how wrong I was. This used to be a happy place. Now it just feels empty.

I look around me at the people passing by. To the right a man in a suit rushes through the park checking his watch. Beside him, a woman dressed in a tracksuit jogs by. Parents sit at the benches talking while their children run around screaming with laughter. They are all going about their everyday routines as though nothing has happened. As though the world didn't just fall apart.

We always joked that I'd be the first to go and that you wouldn't be long after. We said we would be buried as we lived; by each other's side. People would laugh at us and were freaked out by our obsession with *The Smiths* and *Kisschasy* but they didn't understand. How could they?

You were the only one that I truly let in. I let you see the real me and you didn't run away screaming. It was like you understood everything without me having to say it. I could never imagine having that with anyone else.

Everyone says that I have to let go. They say if I move on so can you. Someone even suggested that I go see a counsellor. That one actually almost made me smile. Remember how you used to try to counsel me? I would just laugh and tell you to keep that shit at work.

You always wanted to be a social worker. For as long as I can remember that is what you were working towards. You would come home from your classes so distressed and I would do everything I

could to make you smile. I could tell how much it upset you but still you kept going back.

When you graduated I was happy but I was also worried. The dangerous situations that you put yourself in made it hard for me to let you out of my sight. It wasn't only the physical risks. I could see the emotional toll your work was taking on you. You were sadder than I had ever seen and constantly on edge. The best I could do was to try to be your rock; but don't you see? You were meant to be mine too.

But now here I am all alone in this place that was once ours. Some of our best times were here but all that is ruined. As I look around at the dark sky and withering trees I realise now that there is nothing left for me here. It is haunted with memories of what used to be. It is no longer a place that we share so why should it mean anything? I won't come here anymore. It is just another meaningless park in a city that is full of them.

As I get up to leave I look at all the paths stretching out around me like a maze and I don't know which one to take. You were always the one to lead, I just liked to follow. Instead I just stand here confused. No matter which way I turn no path will lead to you.

My knees give way and I sink back down to the frost covered grass. It feels as though someone is repeatedly stabbing me. I grab my chest as though trying to hold it together. I gasp for breath but it hurts too much to breathe. I give in as my body shakes with the force of all that has happened. The memories that I have tried so hard to push away come flooding back in.

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I saw the boy come up to us and the recognition on your face. A hint of a smile quickly turned to a frown.

"You went back, didn't you?" you asked. He looked flustered as he rocked back on the heels of his feet, right hand in his coat and head to the ground.

"I had to. You don't understand, I need them and if I want to stay I have no choice." As he talked he pulled his right hand hastily out of his pocket and with it a gun. When he looked up I saw his bloodshot eyes and could only watch as, shaking, he pulled the trigger. I screamed

as you fell to the ground and he turned to me. He looked at me with unfocused eyes.

“I had to” he whispered before turning and disappearing into the crowd.

I saw people running towards us and tried to speak but no words came out. The ambulance came and they took you away. The police wanted to question me but my mind was on you. I didn't hear a single word they said. What was it the doctors said? I remember a bunch of medical words that I couldn't understand but then one of them looked at me and tried to explain. They said that you had no brain activity; that you would never wake up. That is all I could hear over and over again. Then I turned it all off.

My life became centred upon visiting hours and meal times. Every day I visited telling myself that today was the day you would wake up and prove them all wrong.

People kept trying to make me face reality but I didn't want to. I just wanted to keep believing that you were going to be okay. They said that it would happen like this. That one day I would just be overcome with emotion but I didn't want to listen. I told your doctor that she doesn't know you like I do. She doesn't know that you are capable of miracles. But she only smiled that sad smile and said something about miracles running out.

Looking around your room I realise how foolish I was. I didn't want you to wake up in a miserable hospital room. I spent the entire first week decorating it with all of your favourite things. I even had a couple of the nurses help me drag in your night stand; so that I had somewhere to put your lamp and your book of Oscar Wilde's complete works. As I stand over your body I am shocked at how small you look, you used to stand so tall.

I get it now. This isn't you and it hasn't been for a long time. I knew you well enough to know that you never would have wanted this. I've been so selfish but I just couldn't bare the idea of letting you go.

I call the doctor in and tell her that I am ready. She says that she will prepare the forms and returns with them suspiciously fast. I guess everyone knew that this moment had to come eventually. Everyone except me, but now I get it. So with a shaking hand I sign the forms that will end your life.

It is said that before you die your life flashes through your mind. I like the idea of that. But just the important bits, the things that meant something. As I watch the doctor turn off the machines I wonder what you are seeing. Do you see me? Do you see anything at all?

I think to myself what a nice way that would be for it all to end. To see all of your most treasured memories one last time and then nothing.

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I look at the sky, almost clear. The flowers are beginning to wake and the frost is melting. Winter is coming to an end and soon it will be spring. There are so many people here. Some are dressed in the traditional black. Others are dressed in colour to celebrate the bright and fun person that you always were. I wear black. I know that if you were here you would understand why.

As they lower your body into the grave I wonder what comes next. Not just for me but for you. I was always the religious one and you the atheist but if there was ever anyone that deserved heaven it would be you.

It is getting dark and everyone has moved on but I can't stand the idea of leaving your grave. I lie down and rest my head beside the freshly laid earth. I curl up into a ball and imagine your soothing voice calming me down.

I never thought that it would be like this. You left me behind and now I have to try to be strong. Tomorrow will be a new day. When the sun comes up I will open my eyes and I will stop turning my back on life. I will do everything that we talked about and I will make sure that your memory lives on through me. But not tonight, tonight I just need to lie here by your side one last time.