



purple hyacinth

I never really liked four-letter words. All of them mean so much more than the confines of four letters. Love. Hate. Time. Loss. Pain. No mere words can accurately describe any of these terms. In order to understand them, you need to feel. The tender caress of love. The hate that consumes you. The adrenaline coursing through your veins. The heart-wrenching loss. The heavy weight of time. Or the aches and consequences of pain. Each one of these feelings can be experienced differently or not felt at all. You can numb the hurting by taking some drugs or drinking some alcohol but these numbing agents are merely temporary. You can enhance the pain by cutting yourself or digging your nails into your palm until you don't feel it anymore. You can try to cope with the anguish by visiting a therapist, talking to someone you love or finding comfort in something you love doing, although, once again, these are all temporary. The only constant in your life will always be the pain. So you have to learn to live with it, accept it and maybe even embrace it. Those who don't will continue to live their lives temporarily, never fully understanding what it means to stay.

I suppose that is one of my greatest faults - my inability to remain in one place for long periods of time. The only permanent thing about me is my impermanence. Anyone that knows me will tell you I was nothing but a pest, causing irreparable damage wherever I went and then leaving without a trace, completely disregarding the consequences of my actions. I always relied on someone else to clean up the mess I left behind which is why it's ironic that the only job I was able to get was working as a garbage man where, for once, I was the one responsible for other's waste. Of course, this was all before the discovery of my illness and my indefinite stay at this hospital but we'll get to that later. Though not too much later because by then I'll probably be dead.

Being so close to death has helped me to realize a lot of things about the insignificance of my life - especially since there's nothing to do but think within the confines of my boring, empty hospital room. There's no one to talk to but the occasional nurse and even they don't stick around for too long. (An irritable dying man is not the greatest company.) Everyone else couldn't care less about me after I harshly pushed them all away when I received my cirrhosis diagnosis. I knew they would be better off without me anyway. My ex-wife would say that things really started to go downhill after I first got the news but I would argue that it began much earlier than that. I'd say the big drop in my roller coaster of a life initiated with my dad.

When I was young, I used to get these awful, terrifying nightmares. At least, I thought they were at the time, but now I realize how much of a coward I was (and still am). In the middle of the night, I would wake my dad up so he could protect me from whatever lurked in the darkness. He would open his eyes, sigh, then drag me back to my room to tuck me in. I'll never forget what he said to me one night while wrapping me up in the covers. *Sometimes, when I'm trying to sleep, he whispered, my biggest regret keeps me awake.* I



didn't understand what the word *regret* meant but assumed it was a silly term used to describe someone. He left my room without another word and though he never mentioned that again, for the rest of my life he showed me what he meant through his actions. Now that I'm familiar with the word *regret*, I don't blame him for what he said, I agree with him.

I have to hand it to my dad though, he sure had a way with words and never failed to express his disappointment with me as his son. He always told me what a waste of time, space, money and effort I was and growing up, nothing I ever did was good enough for him. He couldn't even stand to look at me, for I was only a reminder of my mother and the life he once had with her. The only noteworthy thing she'd ever done was leave me alone with him, not caring enough to look back. To my dad, I was just a burden - an extra mouth to feed and an extra body to clean, clothe and make room for. I was the penalty for his poor decisions, including his decision to have me, after which he broke my mother's heart and became a drunken mess for the entirety of my life. I did learn many things from my dad though, especially how to take care of myself, so I guess I can be grateful to him for that. (And only that.) To start things off in chronological order, the first letter will go to him.

I call them Letters A.D. (Letters After Death). I figured giving them a historically cool name would draw attention away from the truth behind their title - I'll be dead when the recipients get their letters. Each letter will be accompanied by a flower called a *purple hyacinth*. The idea came to me from a comic I read online, wherein the main character is an assassin who leaves behind a *purple hyacinth* atop the dead bodies of those he kills. Naturally, I was curious about the meaning behind these flowers and discovered they symbolize sorrow, regret and forgiveness - two of which I have and one I hope to receive. Admiring the concept, I decided to do the same (without the assassinating, of course) and apologize to those that deserve an apology for the terrible choices I've made.

[purple hyacinth symbolism: sorrow]

To My Dad,

I'm sorry for being such a huge disappointment (though it's not like you set the bar very high). I'm sorry for reminding you so much of my mother that you chose to take your anger out on me in place of her. I'm sorry you felt the need to drink in order to fill the void she left behind and sorry but not sorry for setting fire to your alcohol, nearly burning the entire house down. To gain closure, I'm supposed to forgive you and I guess I do. You tried your best, for a deadbeat. At least you didn't abandon me, but maybe it would've been better if you had. Finally, I'm sorry for existing. But you don't have to worry about that anymore.

From Me

Most of the time, when I look in the mirror, I hate what I see staring back at me. There's nothing remotely appealing about my sunken eyes, hollow cheeks, or my thin, frail body. I'm amazed I haven't been thrown in the morgue prematurely with my ghoulish appearance which, I guess, is for the best. (I don't think they have jello down there.) Other times, I think I might be going insane because the person in the mirror is often not the "me"

that exists right now but rather a “me” from my past. It’s gotten to the point where I’m afraid to use the bathroom but today I decided to face my fears and confront my reflection.

Staring back at me was the “me” I hated the most from the darkest parts of my youth. The tears cascading down his cheeks were nothing compared to the anguish simmering inside of me. He repeated the same three words again and again as if the more he said them, the easier it would be for me to forgive him for what he did. *I’m so sorry, I’m so sorry, I’m so sorry. I hope you know*, I said, raising my voice over his gut-wrenching sobs, *I will never, ever forgive you for this*. The crying stopped as the silence took over, the tension in the room thick enough to suffocate in. At this point, however, I wouldn’t mind being stifled to death. *I know*, he said, nodding his head vigorously as if he needed to convince himself to believe what he was saying as much as I did. *I know*.

I stumbled out of the washroom as quickly as my feet would allow and collapsed on my stiff bed, closing my eyes tightly to shut out the memories flowing back to me from my past. The flashbacks were relentless, popping into my head like popcorn kernels in a microwave. The party, the alcohol, the accident and him - my best friend. My dead best friend. My crazy, stupid, once-in-a-lifetime best friend who is dead, because of me.

I was young and reckless, as most youths are. We went to a party together that was nothing short of chaos but what came afterwards was far worse. I took after my dad and realized drinking was a great way to escape life’s problems so that’s exactly what I did all night (and for pretty much the rest of my life - hence my cirrhosis). I knew it was a dangerous idea but I decided to drive us home. We crashed, of course, and while I was being taken away to the hospital, my best friend was lifeless, lying dead on the cold pavement.

For the rest of my life up until this day, I have blamed myself for his death. There isn’t a minute that goes by where I don’t think about him and all that once was; all that could’ve been. We were only 18 and I took his entire future away from him. I suppose my illness is my punishment, though I believe I deserve a lot worse for what I did to him. I wish I could take his place. In fact, the man in the mirror was undoubtedly my guilty conscience. He comes back every once in a while to remind me how much I deserve to be dead.

[purple hyacinth symbolism: remorse]

To My Best Friend,

I’m so, so sorry you died because of me. I’m sorry I took away your mother’s smile, your father’s laugh, your sister’s playmate, your chance for a better life. I will never forgive myself for the pain that I caused and I will never stop thinking about you so that you can at least live on in my memories. Knowing I may have the chance to see you once I die is my only comfort.

From Me

My wife never complained. If I were her, I would have. There’s no way I would’ve been able to deal with myself, what with all of my flaws and bad habits, if it wasn’t for her. She was my gravity, keeping me grounded even when I wanted to fly far away to outrun my demons. That’s all that I was good at - leaving. When things got too hard or when I got



scared or when I needed an escape, I left and never looked back. In terms of fight or flight, I always chose to do the latter; I was a coward after all. Thankfully, my wife stopped me from ever taking off when I was with her. She made sure I stayed and for that, I'm eternally grateful. If I didn't, I never would've found love - both with her and with my son.

Things ended badly between us, though. I told her I was leaving and, like always, she tried to persuade me not to - especially since our baby boy was only a couple of years old - but I had made up my mind long before talking to her so I wouldn't budge. She asked me why but I never gave her a straight answer. I blamed it on her instead of myself to get her to hate me more than she loved me. Eventually, she stopped trying to get me to stay.

I was glad but dejected as the real reason behind my leaving was because I had just received my diagnosis. As a result of all the drinking I did throughout my life, I had cirrhosis and it wouldn't be long before my liver failed and I died. There was no way I wanted the first few years of my son's life to be spent by my bedside, watching me go. Nor did I want my wife to have to endure the bad-tempered behaviour of a dying man while simultaneously taking care of our child and paying the bills. So I left them on bad terms to ensure they'd never come looking for me. And although my time with them was limited, they were the best thing that ever happened to me.

[purple hyacinth symbolism: regret]

To My (Ex) Wife,

I know once you see that this letter is from me, you'll probably tear it to shreds without a second glance so I'll try to keep this brief. I'm sorry for leaving you when I promised I wouldn't. I'm sorry for loving you when I know that I shouldn't. You deserve someone better who can do all of the things that I couldn't. I love you, still. Forever, probably.

From Me

[purple hyacinth symbolism: forgiveness]

To My Son,

You probably won't remember me and I'm sorry for that. I'm sorry for leaving you without a father, without someone to call your "dad." I'm sorry for all the bikes we'll never get to ride together, for all the games of "catch" we'll never get to play and for all the presents I'll never get to give to you. I'm sorry I won't be there by your side to give you advice, make you laugh or congratulate your success. Just know that whatever you choose to do, whatever path you decide to take, I believe in you and I'm proud. I hope one day, you can forgive me for my non-existence. Maybe then I can forgive myself as well. Until then, I want you to be happy. I want you to live a life without regrets with no need for purple hyacinths or "i'm sorrys." Above all else, I hope you are nothing like me.

From Me

After finishing the final Letter A.D. and attaching a *purple hyacinth* within its envelope, I put away my pen and paper for the last time. Looking over to the window on my left, I saw that the sun was just beginning to rise. It was my favourite time of day, where all of your worries can blend into the warm, relaxing colours of the sky and you're given a

fresh start. For most, this would be the beginning of a new day filled with new opportunities, experiences and encounters. But for me, I think it's the perfect time to leave and say goodbye, forever.

I've been waiting for this day for a long time. Instead of dreading death, I look forward to it, as the life I've been living in the confines of these four bland hospital walls is not much of a life at all. My days are spent in constant misery - whether it's from the physical pain caused by my illness, the mental agony of reliving my regrets, or the emotional torment of the nurses' pity. Don't get me wrong though, I have great respect and appreciation for the nurses that take care of me. The only annoying thing about them is that no matter what I say or do or how terribly I behave, they always keep coming back, perhaps even more cheerful than before. It's uncanny how good they are at what they do. (But I'd obviously never say that to their faces.)

In my final moments, I grab what remains of the *purple hyacinths* and place them beside me, firmly gripping them in my right hand with the last of my strength. When the monitor starts beeping incessantly, I weakly call for the nurse and tell her to shut it up so it'll stop disturbing my peace and quiet. Of course, the nurse that walks in is the most annoying one of all - she's been here almost every day since my extended stay at this hospital began. She double-checks my file before doing what I asked, though I'm sure she already knew what three letters she'd find waiting for her: DNR.

After the machine is off and I'm unplugged from the others I'm attached to, I hand the letters to the nurse and she nods knowingly. She eyes the flowers I'm holding on to and looks back and forth between me and the *purple hyacinths* expectantly. She puts her hands on her hips, taps her foot on the ground and whistles dramatically. I begin to laugh but it hurts so I opt for a smile instead. Eventually, inevitably, I utter the words she wants to hear - my last words. *I'm sorry for being such a pain*. She smiles a sad but forgiving smile and replies with the words I always wanted but never knew I needed to hear. *I forgive you*.

In a heartbeat, he closed his eyes and was gone, forever. The nurse held back her tears for she knew this obnoxious man would be laughing heartily at her from above if she let them loose. Instead, she made her way over to his bedside where the *purple hyacinths* lay and gently took them out of his grip. She was aware of all that they symbolized and knew he had carried them around with him all his life; remorse had been his sole companion. Because of this, the nurse decided that he should be free, without the burden of his regrets to weigh him down. She realized that he didn't need the *purple hyacinths* anymore. In fact, he was much better off without them.

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