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HOMECOMING

by Trisha Fontan

It was bloody cold – colder than I could ever remember it being and it had been raining forever. I say things like that way too often. Things like "forever" when obviously no arcs have been built and in reality it has only been a matter of days, I'm not sure why? Effect I think. I can't bring myself to say it's been raining "cats and dogs" or "cold as a witch's tit" (whatever the hell that means), so I tend to exaggerate for effect. Can't you just imagine how annoyed you would be if it had been raining forever and colder than you could even imagine? That's how it was the day I went back to the house for the first time.

The house that had once been my home was now a mystery to me. Nothing familiar and right waited within its doors, he was gone. It had been a mere three days, but it felt like an eternity had passed since then (not that I know what an eternity actually feels like?). You always know that nothing good can come when the doorbell rings in the middle of the night, and for anyone who knows me, 7am definitely qualifies as the middle of the night.

It took me a minute to answer it; my first instinct was to turn off the alarm. My dad was on the other side.

I'm not sure he even said hello.

"Honey, something terrible has happened," he said.

"To Mom?" I choked out.

"No honey, Mom is picking up your sister and on her way over, it's Greyson -"

I cut him off, "What, what are you talking about, he just left for work?"

"I know honey, but Uncle Mitch just called – he got called to the scene of a big rig that lost control and slammed into oncoming traffic – it's Grey's car honey."

He reached out for me but I pulled away.

"No Dad no, no way, you are wrong, Uncle Mitch is wrong, he's fine I'll call him, you'll see." My knees began to shake and the room started to spin, my Dad put his arms around me and brought me down on my knees.

"What happened?" I said.

Now that I've replayed the conversation in my head a hundred times I feel terrible for asking him. I can't begin to fathom how hard it must have been the first time and I already knew exactly what he had said. He repeated the exact same line, but his voice cracked.

The pain was sharp and sudden and hit like an earthquake that shook me to my soul. Today, three days later, it still comes in waves like aftershocks. Some are short and hard, while others are long and drawn out. And today, I have to go back to our house.

As you can probably imagine the rain has seemed appropriate these last few days. It's almost as though the sun has simply refused to shine and the heavens are weeping with me. I told everyone I wanted to be alone – to go to our home for the first time, again, alone. But now I'm not so sure. I have been sitting in the driveway for forty

five minutes just listening to the rain pound on my car, and avoiding the inevitable. Greyson went out of town for business all the time. I was home when he wasn't home all the time. Yet I can't bring myself to walk in the door.

He used to call twenty times a day when he was gone just to see what I was up to.

"What?" I'd say after he called for the fourth time in 20 minutes, "I am trying to work," equally annoyed, and flattered at the same time.

"What ya working on?" He would ask.

"Why do you care? You never ask about my work when you're home?" I'd laugh.

"Just curious..." That was his favorite saying. I wish I could hear it again. I can't put into words how it sounded, but if he been a sitcom character it would have been his tag line. I talked to him multiple times a day, and most of the time he had nothing at all to ask or offer, but was rather "just curious" about my day.

He hadn't called in three days though, and today I only had one thing to do. I had to enter our house and find the spare keys to his car. It's crazy the things they expect you to do in the days following, well you know what. Someone needs to empty his car, it seems so trivial somehow. I can't believe that they actually ask you to do it so soon. My Uncle can't get in the trunk because the trunk latch is buried under the engine (or at least that's what I imagine). No one has let me anywhere near the car. They are treating me as though I may break – that has never happened to me before (I mean obviously I haven't broken), but also I've never been viewed as fragile.

At sixteen I met the man I was supposed to marry. I knew it from the way my toes curled when I thought of him, to the way the hair on the back of my neck would tingle when he walked into the room, no matter how many hundreds of people separated us. I have never looked back. But now the life that I have so cherished is simply replaying in my head in reruns, like a late night repeat of a television program long off the air, and people look at me differently.

It's not that I don't know how they feel, I do, we all do I think. They know there is nothing they can say to make it any different than it is, and most of the things they do say sound fake and insincere.

They are probably right though, I shouldn't see the car. I didn't see the body either. I think that's why I keep rerunning our life in my head; he is so real in there that it's hard to imagine he's not coming home again.

The mornings are by far the worst because there's an instant where I don't remember. An instant where life is like it was before. Then I do remember, and it's like he's gone all over again. Every morning. However, that single moment is the only reason I wake up at all. I'm afraid that if I walk into the house, it will be real. He will be, well you know, and that moment won't be there when I wake up tomorrow.

My phone begins to vibrate in the cup holder it is resting in; it's my mom I'm sure.

"Yeah Mom," I say after checking the caller ID.

"Where are you honey? I called the house you didn't answer." Since it happened her voice seems to have softened around the edges when she speaks to me. The only other time I remember her using that voice is when I was seven. I broke my arm at school and she had to come meet me in the emergency room.

"I'm in the driveway." We both sit there in silence for a minute not sure how to

continue.

"Would you like me to meet you there honey? I can be there in less than ten minutes. I understand you wanted to do this alone but maybe it's just a bit too soon?"

"I'm not sure Mom. I don't know what I want at all..." I can feel my cheeks begin to dampen as the tears start to glide down them.

"We don't have to go in today – but I am going to head over there, I'm on my way. I love you." She hangs up the phone before I can argue, although I'm not sure I want to anyway. I had sat in the car for forty five minutes without a single tear, but I can't handle the softened voice. Really, I guess, I can't handle that he's, well, that it happened.

The phone vibrates again, this time on my lap; my mother has called for reinforcements. My sister. Our relationship is having a hard time handling this whole thing. Although she is less than two years younger, she has always been the one who needs to be taken care of (and sadly that's not much of an exaggeration). Her supporting me is completely uncomfortable, despite how close we are.

The other thing is that Greyson and I have been attached for almost fourteen years, he was not just her "brother-in-law" he was also her friend. The three of us, and anyone who she happened to be gallivanting with at the time, did everything together (not "everything" obviously). Vacations, concerts, dinner, holidays, and all the rest of it though. We were quite inseparable. Although it's not the same kind of pain, I don't think that it's much less. Yet her and my parents are expected to put it aside and take care of me.

"Wow, Mom must have figured out how to use her speed dial," I say as I pick up the phone.

"Unlikely," she responds light heartedly, "she just must have dialed really fast. She thought I should call you?" Her voice is no longer light.

"I can't go in the house."

"Someone else can get the keys – you now that." She says hesitantly.

"I can't avoid it forever."

"No, but you don't have to do it today. It's only been three days." She is on the verge of crying, I can hear it in her voice.

"Feels like so much longer though, right?" I say.

"Yeah, and yet not at the same time," she takes a deep breath before continuing. "I can hardly remember what normal feels like anymore..." her voice trails off.

"You are so right, how is that even possible?" I ask not really expecting an answer but curious just the same.

"I'm not sure but one thing I am sure of is that me, crying on the phone with you, is not what Mom had in mind when she called me."

"I won't tell – pinky swear."

"Good to know," she almost laughs but seems to be unable to quite complete the action. We sit in silence for I don't know how long.

"I can't get him out of my head, he is still so alive in there," I say quietly.

"I'm sure. He should be. He will always be alive in there. I think that's ok?"

"I'm afraid if I go in there, if I really acknowledge what happened, well that I may

somehow forget him. What he smelled like, or tasted like or how it felt when he touched me."

"Never!" she says with such confidence I am inclined to believe her.

A car pulls into the driveway next to me, "Mom's here," I say. "You did good sis, thanks."

"Anytime, call me later, love you." She says.

"Love you," I say as I hang up the phone. I grab my purse and open the door to leave the car, pulling up my jacket hood to shield the rain. Mom seems to be doing the same.

"Do you want to go in?" she asks tentatively.

"No, but I need to."

We both dash towards the front door awning hoping to stay at least remotely dry. I begin to put my key in the door and turn it, and as though in slow motion almost the door slides open. I duck in quickly to allow Mom in from the rain. It's my house. My shoes are tumbling out of the shoe basket at the front door. My name is all over the pile of mail that has scattered on the floor, after being abandoned through the slot by mail man. My gym bag is still sitting just enough off the wall to be in the way of the front entry. It's just how I left it, minus the mail, three days ago. Yet it's not, as I close the door behind me and push back my hood it takes but a moment to realize that my house will never be the same.