

# Story of My Life

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*(No set summary as of yet; ratings pertain to current time only.) Running from the past is never easy.*

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# 1. Leave You Behind

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TAVISH O'CONNOR ALWAYS WAKES a half-hour before the sun decides it wants to take away the four-and-a-half he always needs. Groggy for the first two minutes, he blinks and makes a sluggish attempt at stretching while rubbing at his eyes with pressure that could bruise. He stands, lets the thin, off-white sheets fall from him and pool on the bed, droop to the floor, remind him of an avalanche without the coldness which makes him think of freezer-burn, or the rumbling and crashing that makes him feel like Chicken Little and Oh, no, the sky is falling.

He picks up the corner and haphazardly throws it in the general direction of the edge of the mattress it's supposed to cover, then leans over the old bed and puts weight on it, makes the rickety metal frame creak as he twists a hanging plastic stick to get light to flow into the room. Only there isn't any, and it's only instinct from give-or-take five years ago that he squints in anticipation of a sting to his eyes caused by the readjustment of his pupils.

Stumbling through the eight-foot hall, he reaches up, pulls a dangling aluminum ball chain as he passes, and takes the darkness with him into the small, open kitchen. Making due with the extremely small amount of golden light that filters through the screen, glass, and the threadbare curtains, he turns the knob on the waist-high sink. It takes him a couple of seconds to remember what he did with the kettle, but when he does he fills it with the tap and--after practically inhaling them--pours the coffee grounds into the aluminum filter. He cranks on the range, sets the ceramic brewer on the eye to perk, and turns back around to the sink, which is now almost full due to its smallness and the aluminum stopper. He tugs on the waistband of his grey sweatpants and yanks the drawstrings before tying them loosely and bracing his hands on the counter, shoulders hunched because of his forearms being presented to the window.

In a vain attempt to get his bangs out of his eyes, he gently tosses his head from side to side. His left foot gets placed forward, knee bent, and stretches his other out behind him before his heel scuffs on the stove while he reaches his arms a bit further. He leans forward and inhales deeply as he prepares to plunk his head into the chilly clearness below.

The murmuring in his ears speaks to him. Over and over, no matter how much he shakes his head, makes the liquid slosh around his ears, tries to make the voices quiet. This only succeeds in making it worse, the pleas mixing with the taunts and the screams and the whispers in the darkness behind his eyelids--which were now flashing rainbows at him, but more red and blue than anything. Continuous cycles while he keeps attempting to hold the choking back, the air in his lungs depleting rapidly, his throat closing, caving, screaming don't go, don't go, don't go, don't go, and he can't take it anymore.

That may wake him up, albeit sometimes unpleasantly, but it does nothing to soothe his mind or let it surrender to the forenoon's medication. The must light softly glints off his hair and makes his right eye, not covered by the auburn strands, shimmer with a dullness that foretells of age. Whether of the light or the man, it will take more time to tell.

He watches as the vehicle pulls away and drives down the tan dirt road and back into the civility of the town and wonders how that Cadillac can handle this terrain, then figures that it can't and that Joe will be having a customer as soon as that car hits the pavement. Hooking his thumbs in his front-most belt loops, he lowers his head to watch his boots scuff the dirt as he turns around and begins walking towards his truck, parked beside the white-washed

riding ring.

With one foot already inside and his hip resting against the side of the seat and one hand grasping onto the handle on the inner roof of the dark red and rusted Toyota, he slowly scans the entire property. His eyes slow down at the trailer he'd called home for the past eight months then continues on. He can't even bring himself to look out the way of the cinnamon trail leading past tall dry grass, into the meadow that you couldn't see most of for the trees. It was already hard enough to look at the main house, the stables, that goddamned tender's trailer. He feels a sting in his throat as it closes in on him for the second time this morning, and the blurriness in his eyes mixing with the little breathing he's getting done makes him believe he is once again sloshing his head in the sink.

"God, I'm gonna miss this place," he muses, letting himself weigh heavily on the coffee-with-cream-colored leather plush behind him. A mild wind comes from west of the property, stirring up a thin dust in the roads, making his hair lap at his face, like brushing away the many years of dirt layer on his lightly-tanned skin. He feels reassurance from the black hat perched atop his head, which doesn't even shift as the air rips by. Pushing himself back onto the seat, he leans against it, presses his shoulder firmly into it, his foot dangling out the wide-open door. He rests his head against the frame of the truck's door, blinks and lets his eyelids stay shut a tad too long. The sudden urge to follow after the real estate agent's vehicle washes over him faster than an actual tide, but hits with a force greater than. Sorrow tints his eyes, seeping into every nook and cranny of his tired form.

The many memories of the past months flash over and over into his line of vision, from his arrival, to just around four months ago, when the owner, Mrs. Catherine (who had become such a motherly figure), had told him to hand the place over, that she couldn't handle this life anymore now that one of her two sons had fucked his life up, and how she was running out of money fast, and that she'd gotten so, so tired. They even go to just three days ago, when the last of the supply and equipment had made it out of here in the back of Rich's truck, even to just now: the car pulling down the road. And it is extremely painful to think back to all the in-betweens, when so much had happened, enough of it to make him cry about leaving all this behind now, even though it might as well be deserted and nothing with all packed and boarded and shipped out. Gone with only a small glance back and a deep longing for all this to just be a bad dream, or even a daydream in the middle of pancakes at breakfast, everyone thinking "what if" in the back of their mind.

He tires his best and succeeds in not looking into his rear-view mirror as he takes the wide back road just off what used to be his trailer, and his tires kick up dust in his wake.

The times he misses most but recall the least are conversations from months and months ago, not long enough after he'd arrived, but not early enough for him to still feel totally uncomfortable on the ranch. Most of them occurred out in the meadow he can no longer even glance at, under the solitary weeping willow that stood in the tall, dry grass that formed a clearing surrounded by a large circle of trees and is not easily viewed from any of the buildings tens of feet away.

Always around nine-thirty, ten o'clock each night, a month-and-a-half or so after he'd arrived. Brandon had been so nice and so friendly, had helped him fit in, had stuck up for him given him a "You want a hand?" when he needed it. Brandon had been so angry and so fearsome when the other stable hands from the ring had busted him up, had broken their noses and scraped their knees, had told them, "Leave Tav the frack alone you hear? You mess with him, you fight with me!" Brandon had been so kind and so gentle when he had laid him down in the tent, had eased himself down to press him into the cushion of the sleeping bags below him, had moved so slow and spoke so softly, like he was a spooked horse; "I

won't hurt you, I promise..."

Brandon had been resigned to his fate, cried little when they dragged him away.