

*Second*

*is*

*Best*

BY

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*Thank you Lord Jesus  
for your love and mercy  
and for blessing me  
with my family whom I love so much.  
I am truly blessed.*

***Phil 4:13 'I can do all things through Christ who  
strengthens me.'***

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for her never-ending support  
and friendship.  
You mean so much to me.*

1.

Heavy rain drops pelted against the windows of the coffee shop forcing me to stare through the grey haze towards the ocean. Trees were bent over backwards, resisting the force of the wind, and the waves of the sea seemed to argue with the sand, smashing against the shoreline in an angry and wild dance.

The storm violently ravaged the usually peaceful beachfront at Addington Beach, as people tried with all their might to remain upright as they ran – or attempted to run – for shelter. At the same time everyone had to avoid debris flying around as the wind whipped it up and flung it around against its will. Umbrellas were of no use as they bent and buckled under the pressure of the wind, leaving their owners without cover from the drenching rain.

My mood was as grey as the weather outside and as black as the coffee steaming in my cup, and I felt as confused as the swirling waters lashing the beach.

Every few minutes the door to the coffee shop would swing open and a freezing cold draught would force its way in as the shop became more crowded with people desperately taking refuge indoors and warming themselves with a hot beverage. Quickly and easily they chatted and seemed to make friends, yet surrounded by the hustle and bustle I felt lost amongst them. I felt alone, afraid, and saddened beyond belief, without a friend in the world, and with no one who cared about whether I lived or died.

‘May I sit with you at the table please?’

I was lost in thought as I heard, ‘Ma’am, excuse me, ma’am, sorry to disturb you...’

My stare was diverted when an elderly gentleman eventually tapped my shoulder to get my attention. I nodded without expression and returned to the intoxicating visuals outside, my coffee untouched.

‘It sure is a crazy day today, where did this weather come from, eh?’

Ignoring him was my only reply and he seemed to get the message, leaving me to my solitude amongst the drone and hum of the now over-crowded room.

To add a touch of drama to the already wild and untamed storm, lightning decided to make an appearance – dancing across the sky and piercing through the heavy and monstrous clouds in zigzag flashes, swooping down to the ocean. At times it felt as though it stung the windows right in front of my face and I flinched. With every ominous clap it flung at the earth, the sheltering people around me shook and took a step back from the windows, seemingly fearful of its majestic power.

As the storm grew in ferocity so my mood became even more downcast.

The lights flickered and from some resistance on their part, remained on, much to the delight of the patrons in the shop.

‘Looks like the power is going to go out too,’ said another elderly gentleman as he squashed himself into the seat next to my first guest.

I wondered who might fill the last seat at the table, but only for an instant as my thoughts and gaze remained fixated on the storm outside.

‘May I join you?’

A woman about the same age as the men asked as she sat down in the vacant chair. The two gentlemen stood up until she was seated then plonked themselves back in their seats introducing themselves to one another at the same time. Hesitantly they looked toward me inviting me to play in their game but I very rudely offered them my shoulder and the back of my head.

In the background the muffled sounds of chatter and teaspoons clinking against the china increased in volume. The coffee shop began to get stuffy and very warm due to the number of people seeking relief within its walls.

Everyone took off their coats and scarves and made themselves more than comfortable, some even sitting on the floor, satisfied to remain there to wait out the storm.

I could barely see the ocean – the grey haze from earlier had become a dark, almost black fog, but still the wildness of the sea was inviting to me. I wondered how long it would take for the swirling waters to overcome me if I did not resist. I agonised over whether I was brave enough to attempt such an act.

Someone burst out laughing in a loud cackle and distracted my sordid thoughts, much to my annoyance. And then I shuddered at the realisation of what I was actually contemplating doing.

Where had my life gone so wrong?

2.

Fred and Mildred (Milly) Raines, my parents, lived modestly and had been content and happy in their early years of married bliss. I was born and they cherished their darling daughter, promising before God to raise me in accordance with His love and His will. We were the truest example of the modern day happy family, with a house and the white picket fence and family dog – all serving God. I thought I would be the happiest child that had ever lived. I was what they had always dreamed of, and hence I never had a sibling – as much as I would have loved one, especially when things went horribly south.

I was eleven and arrived home from school one day after eagerly jumping off the school bus while waving a quick goodbye to my friend Rachel. I was so eager to tell my mother my news that I didn't even notice the cars parked on the sidewalk in front of the house. Rushing up the path lined with the brightest marigolds in the street, I burst through the front door to tell my mother the excellent grade I had achieved on my spelling test.

'Mommy! You will never guess what I got for my spelling test! You will never, never, never guess! Momm.....' I yelled loudly, my voice echoing strangely.

I suddenly stopped mid-sentence when I noticed my mother sitting on the couch with red and wet eyes. To my astonishment, as he was normally at work during the day, my father was sitting next to her holding her hands, his head bent.

He straightened when he saw me and stood up and walked toward me, brushing past my aunt and uncle and other family members and friends that I suddenly noticed were also in the room.

'Kaye sweetie, something has happened, something not happy,' he said.



He came across to me and picked me up – he was a very big and strong man – and he carried me to where my mother was sitting. He sat down next to her, while still holding me and finally rested me on his lap. My mother looked at me with tears streaming down her face, her lips quivering as my father spoke gently to me.

‘Sweetie, do you remember how we spoke about grandpa not being very healthy?’

I nodded my head cautiously, remembering.

‘Well,’ my father went on, ‘he had a heart attack this morning and he has gone to Heaven to be with grandma.’

He stopped choking down his own emotions and a sob escaped his chest.

‘Grandpa’s dead?’ I uttered as I began to cry, coming to the realisation that my favourite man in the world, after my father of course, was gone forever.

It had not been long, two years in fact, since my grandmother had died and so the emotions of that traumatic time were still very fresh in my mind.

My mother reached out and hugged me crying all the while. I knew her parents were now both in Heaven and she had loved them very much.

From the death of my beloved grandfather, my mother inherited a lot of money and it was that day that the slow decline of my modern day happy family began.

The first thing my parents did was to each buy a brand-new car. Then new furniture for the entire house and then I suddenly had a wardrobe any little girl would die for.

Then came the exotic holidays. My father would take his annual leave and we would go somewhere exciting and where the sun was always blazingly hot. And for the rest of the year they would go away on weekends and leave me with my aunt who got paid handsomely to take care of me. Let me not forget the parties that were held almost every other weekend – it seemed my parents had gained an

increased number of new friends that they could lavish their wealth upon.

One of their so-called new friends convinced my father to invest in a new business venture. He would then be able to safely leave his mundane job at the breweries – which he had kept even though they were wealthy, not wanting to use the inheritance to live off but to rather invest in something that would increase their wealth. This would then allow my father to give up his job without depleting all the money – he very much wanted to work from home and in doing so be able to spend far more valuable quality time with his precious family. This was just far too appealing for him to pass up and was exactly what he had been looking for. To be able to go to his sweetheart daughter's swimming gala or to her sports day and support her and cheer for her was a dream come true for him, the perfect father.

For months my father's dream to be rich, work from home, and have his loving and adoring daughter by his side almost all day every day was realised, and life was more perfect than he or I could ever have imagined.

When I look back now and think of the turn of events I realise I should have noticed the drinking slowly increasing from weekends and parties to every night. It started off with a glass of wine in a crystal glass, with dinner served on our new porcelain plates rimmed with gold. From one glass of wine it progressed to wine all night until bedtime, and then eventually to the point where I would come home from school and find glasses that had been filled with all kinds of alcohol all over the house even though we had two full-time domestic maids to clean up and run around after my parents and the new air of wealth they carried upon their shoulders.

My father's new business partner came over to the house one evening and I was sent to my room by my mother when the screaming from my dad's study drowned out the noise from the radio I was listening to. I lay in bed with the bedroom door closed and the pillow over my head trying to

drown out the sound of my father's voice. I had never heard him speak like that to anyone in my life – he always had the gentlest voice of any man I had ever met – and it made me so frightened that I cried in terror while I tried to drown out my tears with my sheets.

I heard my mother go into her bedroom and slam the door shut, to hide herself I presumed from the terrifying yelling. I wished she had come to me and held me and comforted me instead, but I lay there alone and wished for sleep to engulf me.

The front door banged shut and the windows adjoining it shook. I heard the bottles in the kitchen rattle as my dad poured himself a large drink and, I assumed, gulped it down in one go as very soon the glasses were rattling again and I heard him pour another, and another, and another.

Early the next morning I walked drowsily to the kitchen for breakfast. I was expecting to find a cheerful loving husband and wife preparing coffee and breakfast before I went off to school. Instead I found no one. Not even the maids were there. I thought perhaps after the previous evening's chaos they would probably just be a bit late and so I opened the fridge to get out the milk, made myself some cereal and poured a glass of milk to drink. I sat down at the kitchen nook and started eating my cereal, still expecting my parents and the maids to walk in at any minute.

I put my cereal bowl and glass in the sink and went to my bathroom to brush my teeth and wash my face. When I came out of the bathroom I told myself I should go into my parents' bedroom to let them know I was getting ready to go to school and that they should get up too. As I was about to open their bedroom door my mother came out, surprising me. I let out a little yelp and laughed, expecting her to find it funny too. Usually this kind of thing would have us in stitches.

'Kaye darling, I have something to tell you, let's go to your bedroom.'

She put her arm around my shoulders and guided me towards my bedroom, so that I sat on my large double bed and she sat herself softly down next to me.

Straightening her white satin gown around her waist and legs she hesitated.

‘Do you remember what happened here last night Kaye?’

I nodded, my eyes were big and round as she continued, ‘Daddy was very angry because that man who pretended to be our friend lost all of our money. Daddy invested our money into a company and that man used it to gamble with and he lost it all. Do you understand what I’m saying sweetheart?’

She stared at me pleadingly.

‘We have to sell all our nice things and daddy must go back to work?’

‘Yes, something like that darling.’

‘Will daddy still be at home so much? Because I like it when he is at home so much.’

‘No dear, it will probably be like before grandpa died. Do you remember what that was like?’

‘Yes, that was also okay.’

But it was never like that ever again. My father became increasingly depressed, rapidly becoming a shell of the man I had once known. He got a job at a local car manufacturing company with a good enough salary that we could be comfortable living on.

My mother took to drinking even more excessively during the day and that led to endless arguments at night and inevitably the arguing led to violence.

The cars were sold as was all the nice furniture and anything else my mother could get her hands on while I was at school.

During my last year at school my father was put on short time at the car factory which meant that he was often at home during the day with my mother. All they did was drink themselves into a stupor.

### 3.

The sun baked down on the bonnet of Boyd's car and I rested my arm against it, not thinking for a moment, and had to whip it away as I felt my skin burn. Boyd was one of only three boys in our senior year that was old enough to get his driver's licence. This of course made him popular – not that being popular interested him much. He was an average student, an average athlete and just wanted to get this final year over and done with.

No one in our class could believe that it was senior year already, our final year. And we only had eight months to go. At times it was too surreal to comprehend that in a couple months' time, we would all be going our separate ways after being in one another's lives since the first grade.

Boyd and his best friend York slowly walked towards the car. I could see they were deep in conversation, both staring at the ground as they draped their heavy bags loaded with books over their shoulders.

They let their bags fall with a thump to the ground on reaching the car, and Boyd put his arm around my shoulders and kissed me lightly on the forehead aware that a teacher would probably be watching. They found romances between students extremely entertaining and we were careful to avoid any teasing.

The two boys climbed into the front of the car and I slid onto the back tan leather seat. I could see their serious moods lifting as we headed to the perfect waves that waited for us at Baggies in Warner Beach.

As we did everyday after school, we went to the beach before Boyd took me home. We all always kept a bag of spare clothes in Boyd's car for our afternoons on the beach.

While Boyd and York endlessly conquered the waves, I managed to actually stand on my surfboard a few times. Though I had been doing this for many years now, I had still not mastered the art of surfing.

I sat in the hot sand, a towel draped over my back and shoulders, protecting me from the glare of the sun – it was a particularly hot and humid day for May on the South Coast of Natal, and I knew the discomfort in store for me if I burned.

By three o'clock almost our entire senior year was at the beach and, as we did every day, we sat together and laughed and joked around with one another, discussed school related topics and our plans for the future, not fully aware that life as we knew it would ultimately change. The small café at Baggies Beach made a fortune out of our healthy appetites and our terrible thirsts.

This was always the happiest part of my day.

Boyd was always close by. His dark brown hair had smudges of blonde from the sun, and his sun-kissed skin and good build were enough to make me smile and swoon at any given moment. He had hard features which, if you did not know him very well, made him look angry, and yet behind those harsh features was a very caring and kind person, but he kept those feelings reserved only for the people very close to him, and of those there weren't many.

Amongst all the different personalities that made up our class of '75 there always had to be one that was the clown, the one that you could rely on to entertain everyone else. And that someone was York. He had such a comical personality, and found humour in everything. He was tall, tanned of course, with blonde sun bleached hair of course and he wore glasses most of the time, which hid his lovely hazel eyes. They suited him though, almost making him look even more handsome and more mature.

Somehow on this particular day he had gotten hold of a piece of sponge that at a quick glance looked exactly like a piece of cheese. He stuck it into his sandwich camouflaging it a little with the lettuce, and as one of the boys came walking toward the café York offered the poor starving sucker a bite. Naturally he took a huge mouthful. With

everyone watching him he chewed for a second then realised that the piece of sponge half hanging out of his mouth was in fact not cheese, and he spat it to the ground cursing York. We were in fits of laughter. York the clown had conquered again.

As it was such a perfect day and since it was a Friday, we stayed on the beach until the sun had set, then went home to greet our families and then those of us that were fortunate enough to have easy-going parents, made our way back to the beach and remained there until sunrise. Obviously this was not the norm on every weekend but we did as children did and begged our parents for the favours, and if we managed to win them over then we would experience the happiest fun-filled memories to carry in our hearts for the rest of our lives.

Boyd kissed me goodbye in the car as was our routine – it was always my decision not to have him walk me to the door – and I slowly got out of the car, waving and smiling goodbye.

‘See you in two hours!’ Boyd yelled out of the window as he drove off from the sidewalk.

I dragged my legs along the pathway that was lined with a few drooping flowers and grass that was growing between the paving stones. The grass in front of the house should have been mowed weeks ago and I knew if I did not do it this weekend it would never get done. Fortunately it was a relatively small garden.

As I turned the handle and pushed the door to open it, I was, as always, greeted by the unwelcome stench of alcohol and stale cigarettes. Holding my bag tightly over my shoulder so as to ensure it would not bang against any furniture, I headed for my room. First I tiptoed past my mother who was sprawled out on the couch, a last sip still waiting in the bottom of her whiskey glass, then past my father who was staring in a drunken stupor at the TV from his armchair. Same scene different day! Quietly I laid my bag on my bed

and took out my school uniform and added it to the week-load of dirty laundry in my washing basket in the corner of my room.

I tried to make my room as pleasant as I possibly could, under the circumstances. I had a single bed covered with a bed linen set patterned with pink flowers on a light yellow background, which had been given to me as a birthday present by Boyd's mother a year ago. I had a small table I used as a dressing table and a mirror edged with flowers that my best friend Rachel had given me that same birthday. There were a few photos stuck on the wall of Boyd and me and all our friends enjoying crazy happy moments together. Against the wall opposite my bed stood a white wardrobe, small, but big enough for the few clothes I possessed – all bought with money I'd earned myself or else from money I'd saved from gifts on birthdays or at Christmas.

I exchanged the school books in my bag for clothes, and slipped into the bathroom to shower, still hoping I would not awaken my drunken parents.

When I stepped out from the shower and dressed in a pair of jeans and a light grey sweater, I thankfully still could not hear any movement from the lounge.

Back in my room I put on my sneakers and picked up the warm thick jacket belonging to Boyd but which I had claimed, then lifted my bag over my shoulder, silently clicked and locked my bedroom door and tiptoed back towards the lounge. I found the note I had left my parents the previous Friday which simply read, "*Gone to a beach party, be home Sunday*", and I lifted it off the kitchen counter and moved it to the dining room table. At least if it was not in the same place they probably wouldn't even notice it was the same letter. I knew they wouldn't realise it was the same letter anyway, they had no concept of which day of the week it was or the time of day or possibly that I even existed half the time.



As silently as I had entered the house so I exited it, and sat on the sidewalk until Boyd arrived and whisked me off to where I would be as happy as the rest of our friends.

On the beach we made a huge bonfire after we had braaied a few pieces of boerewors and made boerewors rolls. Music blared from the portable radio someone had brought along and we listened to our favourite music on the late night station, to which we danced, our bare feet digging into the now cool sand.

York started a new game which we all took great delight in playing. We chased crabs as they came out of their little holes in the sand, as the sea water bubbled up to the surface. We never actually caught one, but it was just such immense fun to see who could actually get to one before it burrowed back into the sand – a silly game and yet we were highly entertained by it.

We eventually snuggled up in our sleeping bags next to our favourite persons and fell asleep to the sound of the ocean crashing on the sand as the swells broke. No matter how loud the sea sounded it was always good therapy, like rocking a baby to sleep. I slept well that night, cuddled up to Boyd, and dreamed about floating away on a cloud.

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