

I'll Never Forget

I braced my hand on the doorframe, as tears welled in my eyes. Fifteen years ago today, my life changed forever. Every night since then, Tami's lifeless eyes have stared back at me in my dreams.

"Keith?" Tami's mother called from downstairs.

I sucked in a breath. "In Tami's old room."

"Okay, take your time."

I moved two steps into the room. It hadn't changed since we dated during high school. I took a deep breath and closed my eyes. A lingering hint of vanilla filled the air. A tear spilled over and trickled down my cheek. I reached up and dried my face with the heel of my hand. My gaze landed on her bulletin board. It still displayed an "I love Keith" heart and a picture from our class trip to the lake. I continued to scan the walls. The soft yellow with gray accents surrounded me. Her Jonas Brothers poster hung above her headboard. The fading evening light filtered through her sheer curtains onto her bed. My heart squeezed at the ragged teddy bear sitting against the pillows.

My hand ran across the bedspread, a gift from her grandmother. She had loved that quilt. A faint squeak filled the silence as I sat on the edge of her bed. The nightstand drawer scraped as I open it and removed an envelope. Sliding out the hand written letter, I unfolded it. My finger

caressed the paper. My shoulders slumped as I stared at the words that had haunted my dreams from that dreadful night.

Dearest Keith,

You gave me hope when there was none, and I love you for that. Please know this is not your fault. But I can't go on like this. I feel like you are the only one that understands me. Everyone sees me as an outgoing happy person, when the truth is I cover my sadness with smiles. No one knows how badly I hurt inside and that I struggle to face each day.

When Dad died, I lost a part of me. He was my rock. He gave me the strength to pursue my dreams. Now I'm weak. Without him I don't know who I am.

The stress of always striving for good grades is overwhelming. I'm not good enough to get into a prestigious college like everyone expects. I'm a disappointment to my family and friends. I just can't do it anymore.

I don't want to leave you, but there is nothing else to do. Please find someone and live a happy life. Something I could never do. Tell my mom I love her and not to grieve too long. I'm finally at peace.

Love, Tami

Tears streamed down my face as I remembered that day.

She kissed me goodbye and somehow slipped the note into my backpack at the end of the school day. There was a certain dullness in her eyes, but I thought it was due to a late night of studying. After basketball practice, I reached into my bag for my cell phone and my hand landed on the envelope. I frowned as I pulled it out and read it. My chest pounded as the reality set in.

I ran to my car and raced to her house. I knew her mother worked on Tuesday nights and wouldn't be home. I slammed the palm of my hand on the door.

"Tami, open up." When she didn't answer, I picked up a rock and shattered the window.

I bounded up the stairs and rushed into her bedroom. My breath hitched.

She lay on her bed, unmoving. An empty prescription bottle rested on the bed next to her.

"Tami!" I hurried to her side. Empty eyes stared back at me. "No!"

I grabbed her arms and shook her. Tami's head flopped back and her arms dangled. I fumbled in my pocket, and pulled out my cell phone and dialed 911.

"This is 911. What's your emergency?"

"My girlfriend overdosed, please hurry." My voice cracked as I relayed the information the dispatcher needed.

I started CPR and prayed. But, I knew I hadn't been in time. If only I had paid more attention. I should have said something. It was all my fault. She wouldn't have taken her life if I hadn't ignored her pain.

My heart still ached at the memory. I swiped at my tears. Fifteen years seemed like days ago.

Arms wrapped around me and a chin rested on my shoulder. I took a deep breath.

“The kids are asking where you are, Keith.”

“Just recalling the worst day of my life.” I folded the letter in half, and turned my head.

Those same lifeless eyes from the past now glimmered back at me. Big, blue and beautiful.

“Tami, I almost lost you.”

“You saved my life that day.” She squeezed me tight. “After all these years, I’m not sure I ever thanked you.”

I reached up and kissed her cheek. “A happy you is all the thanks I’ve ever needed.”

She nuzzled her face in my neck. “I remember hearing your voice as I lay in that hospital bed. You read to me and talked to me. I knew I was loved.”

“Oh honey, you were loved by so many. Everyone wanted to come see you. They were all so worried.”

I could feel her smile against my skin. “I realized that. It made me want to live.”

I turned and enveloped her in a hug. “I’m so glad you did...”

“Mom? Dad?”

“Coming Gina.” I chuckled. “As I was saying...”

“Hurry up. I’m starving.”

“Okay, Riley.” I sighed and shook my head. “Let’s just say I’m happy you stayed.” I smiled. “I love you and love being married to you. You are an amazing wife and mother.”

She leaned in and kissed me. A kiss so sweet that my healing heart nearly exploded. “I leave that letter here in case I need a reminder of how precious life is. She cupped my face with her hands. “Why did you come in here today?”

I placed my forehead on hers. “The last fifteen years have been a whirlwind. Your recovery, college, getting married, and having kids. I don’t think I really ever grieved over the pain or guilt of that day. I needed to remember what I almost lost.”

“Sometimes I forget how it affected you. I’m sorry.”

I brushed my hand down her hair. “Let’s just say we were both hurting that day. I’m just happy we found a future together.”

“Me too.”

“I love you, Tami. Don’t you *ever* forget that.”

Isaiah 41:10 (NIV) So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.

Jeremiah 29:11 (NIV) “For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.