

## WAITING

For the first time in four years, her New Year's resolution had changed from 'I must keep waiting' to 'I will stop waiting.' It was not an easy decision but she wanted to start all over again, she wanted to be alive again, she wanted to accept that he would never come back, she wanted to forget the hurt and pains of waiting every year and looking through her window every night hoping he would show up.

"He's not coming back Wini" people around her had told her several times, but she had refused to listen. Stanley would never abandon her.

He had always kept to his promise, he had never failed her. Of course people would not understand. Okay they were all aware they had been friends even before they were born, everybody in the community knew they had practically done everything together. So she understood any time someone in

the community told her they understood how she felt. But they did not understand their closeness was more than human understanding. The last person to advise her was Grandpa Matthew. He was a retired soldier and he did nothing but sit down at the cottage of his home observing everything going around his environment. She had just returned from the store when Grandpa Matthew called her. It was the last day of the year.

“Winifred can I talk to you for a minute” he had shouted from where he was sitting.

He was among the few that called her Winifred, most people called her Wini.

“Grandpa Matthew I hope everything is all right?” she had asked after sitting down on the cane weaved chair close to Grandpa Mathew’s chair.

“Everything is well with me but what of you Winifred?”

“Me? I’m fine Grandpa Mathew”

“Oh no, I don’t think so. Everybody in this town don’t think so” Grandpa Mathew had said shaking his head.

“But I’m doing fine”

“No you are not. You are trying to waste your life away

Winifred. I know sometimes you are hurt, you are angry and mad at Stanley because you feel he abandoned you and other

times you believe there is still hope he will come back. But

you need to also believe we know Stanley would never

abandon you. It’s been four years and he is not yet back. It

means he is not coming back, he will never come back. You

need to forgive him for not returning, he had his reasons

Winifred. If after four years, Stanley has not returned to the

only person he treasures, you need to let him go. He won’t be

happy to see how you have wasted the last four years. Stanley

will want you to be hap...”

And just like that Grandpa Mathew had slept off without even completing his statement. She had walked back the few steps to her home thinking over what Grandpa Mathew had said. He had never spoken to her about Stanley since Stanley stopped coming. He was Stanley's Grandpa and he had been the first person to call her his in-law.

Every first day of every year, she had always written her New Year's resolution. But she had written the last year's resolution on the second. It took her more than a day to go over everything Grandpa Mathew had said. She had later agreed with his words. She needed to live again. She had decided to stop waiting for Stanley. She had decided to let him go.

Now a year had passed since she had made that resolution and as she brought out her diary to write another resolution,

she tried going over the result of the previous New Year's Resolution.

Apart from her house, the only place she could be found was her family store. Although on Sundays she attended Anglican Church, the only community church, she had always gone late and was always the first to leave. She hated the stares, pity and sometimes the glares coming from people and she had done her best to avoid them. At their motor parts store, she handled only the records while her father handled the sales. But for the first time in four years, she had gone to the community park. She had sat down at the exact position she used to sit with Stanley. The park did not have all the fancy things cities used to have, most of the things were natural. It was overlooking a small river that was about five steps down from ground level. So when someone sat down on one of the natural rocks facing the river, it felt like someone was on a hill. There was a particular rock she had always climbed with

Stanley, they had always made sure they had a small bag full of stones and they threw it down the river as they talked about their future. Visiting their sitting position had not helped to forget him, it had reminded her more of how much she had missed him. She had moved away from there and even tried the swing but she had remembered they had used that swing many times. She had gone home feeling pains on her chest.

She had tried doing other things like handling the sells at the store but each time she explained a product to a customer, she had been reminded how she had sold with Stanley, no place in the community was free from Stanley's presence. She had gone to her former classmate's birthday party but had left after receiving sympathy stares.

That did not stop her, after all it was her resolution to start all over again. And Grandpa Mathew had always said 'the best

way to forget is to remember.’ The more pain she felt from trying to start all over, the more she tried.

Three months into the year, Jade had visited the store. He was the son of the Anglican priest. They had attended school together. Jade had wanted to purchase a new side view mirror. He had later asked to take her out for dinner. She had accepted and for the first time in four years, she went out with someone that was not Stanley. And she tried, she tried to smile, she tried to enjoy the conversation with Jade. But it did not work, the only feeling she took home was a feeling of betrayal. She felt she had betrayed Stanley’s trust. The next day when Jade came to the store to ask her for another dinner she had politely rejected because she knew it was going nowhere. She had decided to just visit places, go to social gatherings, do things she had not done for four years except dating.

So months gave way to other months and soon the year came to an end but Stanley did not show up, not that she was waiting. On the last day of the year she had gotten hold of the newspaper, then she saw the news. Even though she had made a resolution to stop waiting, she could not ignore the news she read. The last time something like that happened was two years back.

As she boarded a train to her destination, she had wondered if what she was doing was against her New Year's Resolution. 'Had she failed in her resolution by just that act?' she thought as the train dropped her at her destination.

'But what if he came and she was not there to welcome him because of a stupid resolution? He would be very sad that none of his friends and loved ones came. What if he came, then the New Year resolution would no longer be important.'



She met few crowds at her destination, some carrying placards with sweet words for their loved ones they were waiting for. She stood at a corner waiting with the crowd.

Then the bus arrived, and one by one they came down. Friends and loved ones rushed at them, some laughing, some crying, some laughing and crying. Some seemed to be seeing their kids for the first time, some seemed to be surprised at how their children had grown, some touched the grey hair of their parents while they shed tears of joy. Gradually the bus was becoming empty but she had not seen him. But there was still hope as long as the bus was not empty. Stanley could be among them. He was never declared dead, he was just listed among the missing soldiers. No one saw his body, no one had the right to give up on him being alive. She stretched her neck and watched hoping to see him, hoping to run towards him and tell him she had never given up on him. Her jacket was not thick enough and the cold was making her teeth clatter but

she ignored it, she just hoped and waited. Then the last man came down and soon the bus was out of sight. Once again, Stanley had not returned.

She had gotten home later in the night. The next day, the stares from people told her they knew she had gone to wait for Stanley but she ignored them. She had made a resolution to stop waiting but as she sat down with her dairy and a pen, she knew not waiting for Stanley was impossible. It was already third, exactly a year she had written 'I will stop waiting.' She had actually stopped waiting, she had tried coming out, she had tried to live life again but the previous year had taught her there was no life without Stanley. There was no joy without Stanley. The previous year had taught her that she might decide not to wait anymore, she might write down and do everything to follow it but her body would never cooperate, her body would never agree, without Stanley there was no hope. She discovered the only reason she had survived the

first four years was hope, it was the fact that she was waiting for him. There was a sense of joy knowing she was waiting for her heartbeat to come back, there was happiness that came with not giving up.

Before the second day of the New Year came to an end, she took her pen and wrote.

“This year’s resolution, next year’s resolution, other year’s resolution: I am going to be happy because I am going to be waiting for you to come back, I will do all the things we did together to keep your memory fresh. Don’t be in a haste, you can take all the time you want, but make sure to come back when you are ready. I will be waiting.”