

This short story by first year student, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, **Achini Pahalawatte** won the First Prize in the Creative Writing Competition organized by the English Language Society of the English Language Teaching Unit, FHSS, for their English Day 2015.

Reconcile.

Sometimes, I stand in the rain and try to catch its droplets in my hands, only to have them gathering by my feet.

Sometimes, I buy us coffee, and wait until it turns lukewarm then cold, only to find that only mine has drained in the end.

Sometimes I watch movies, the kind that I don't always watch, wait for a moment, only to find myself leaving on my own.

In the end, I realize that I was only trying to reconcile with the wonderful moments we shared, you and I.

*To you,
whose memories I'm still chasing after*

The rain has stopped only now, and I'm finally able to step out and take a deep breath of the crisp spring breeze. It's scented of rain and damp grass, and it fills my lungs like a splash of cold water, truly soothing and refreshing. It can pacify the burning fire of a broken heart. The street isn't as busy as it was the moment I arrived, there are several of the same league as I walking back home, tugged in to their jackets and rain coats as though they are anticipating for the rain to burst again. And so are there several women waiting for vehicles to pass by, and men who discern them with eagle eyes whom I'm bound to evade. As always, it's another one of the forlorn, gloomy, cold nights. I take another deep breath and look up at the sky; the heavy dark clouds of rain are yet to relapse which implies that another cloudburst is about to come by, which I don't mind. I like the rain, I don't know why. I like it, just for the sake of it being the rain.

The cold tarmac on the road makes a murky sound with each step I make as though to tell me how lonely I am tonight, my shadow formed gloomily before me by the light of the street lamps above and behind. Someone passes by in hurried steps; maybe he is late for something important, maybe his family is waiting for him for dinner. I have no reason to hurry of course. I have no one waiting for me back at home, and even if they were waiting for me, I won't haste and dash because I really don't mind to have them waiting, whoever who might.

It doesn't take me long to reach the bus stop which stands empty and lonely as would an abandoned house. Its fluorescent light flickers time to time, its languid beam does nothing to recede the eerie darkness which surrounds it. But for some reason, for me it seems warm and comforting. When I enter it, the feeling of being folded in an earnest hug of a loved one engulfs me. I settle in its grasp, sit on a stool and watch as the droplets sliding down from its plastic roof fall soundlessly into the puddles below. They make tiny waves on the surface, the light from the stand make silvery ripples upon them.

Momentarily I realize that I might be too late to sit and wait for the next bus to arrive because the prospect of the last bus being already gone is much more than it is for another to arrive. There aren't anyone else awaiting it, and of course I, as always, am ritually late.

Maybe I purposefully killed my time to be late tonight; maybe I didn't want to return home tonight, at all; I cannot tell.

It's not long before I feel presence approaching me, and take the stool to my right. His reflection appears on the puddle before him; he shifts in his seat and I feel his eyes fix on my side. I don't look up though, I remain watching the droplets as before. I can sense him searching for words.

"The last bus for tonight is gone already" He words out a while later. His voice reminds me of water, water running ceaselessly down a stream.

I set to respond with an indolent nod.

"Do you wish to stay here any longer?" He questions, his eyes still haven't left my side.

I shake my head in response.

No sooner I feel him move, and his hand, his pale fingers with perfectly trimmed nails and a silver ring on the ring finger, reaches out to me as though nothing is as natural and regular as that. I look up, and he smiles. There's a glint in his eyes; dimples form on his cheeks, they have flushed pink the slightest like a touch of rose on a pale white cloud. His eyes form crescent moons, sincerity spread all over his perfection like sunrise on morning dew.

"Come, let me drop you home"

Without reluctance, I reach out and tangle his graceful fingers with mine.

It's so strange, how our hands fit in so well as though they are meant to be held, as though they are meant to keep us communed together. It feels so impeccable, how his fingers tangle in mine, how they tighten when a stranger passes by and how they loosen when the drizzle wet our shoulders, it's so perfect that I dare not to once let go. All throughout this, he keeps smiling, his eyes fixed to look ahead.

At one point we come before a hectic street. There are more women waiting for cars to pass by in glamorous clothing which hardly cover places which shan't be exposed, and men who seem to indulge the sight much more. Several of the women eye *him* with vigorous smiles painting their overly-dolled-up faces, several of them try to approach him; but all this he casually evades with a generous smile. His hand tightens on mine even more, and I realize that we are closer to each other than before.

He stops walking at one point and turns to me, calling my name. I question him why.

"Are you in a hurry to go home?"

I am never in a hurry; I tell him that.

He smiles. *"Alright then"*

We settle to see a movie. Very late at night.

It's a movie for adults which people of our age tend to run away from home and watch for the fun of it, which I, on the other hand find extremely uncomfortable. There aren't many people in the hall, only a several men who have their eyes widened and glued to the screen, and a few couples which make things even more uncomfortable for me. Seeing my distress he squeezes my hand and laughs, and tells me to close my eyes if I want to. I ask him, out of curiosity, if he enjoyed it. He smiles in response.

"We are young, we all have that time when we enjoy this"

I don't say anything in retort though; because I don't want this moment to end. His hand is warm in mine, his thumb draws patterns that not even I can decode. Overpowering all the obnoxious sounds in the hall, I can hear his breathing so distinct and clear; slow and nice, its pace so consistent and relaxing. If not for the moment, I would have fallen asleep in his grasp.

Half way through the movie he urges me to stand up. *"Let's go, time is flying"*

The moment we step outside, I realize it has neared yet another cloudburst.

The sky seems darker, no stars nor the moon are visible, concealed behind the heavy gray clouds; the sky seems nearer yet so far away. As I look up, a cold droplet falls on my cheek. He reaches out, as though on cue and wipes it away with his thumb. I flinch as his skin touches mine, because it sends a captivating sensation down my spine. I turn to look at him only to see him smile. He smiles so often now.

"It's going to rain"

"I like it" I say in retort.

We walk hand in hand in utter silence as though we have all the time in the world. We have reached a calmer area of the town. Not many people linger around for the many buildings in the area are residents. Except for few others who are returning home after late night work and night-outs, we are the only ones who are taking a leisurely walk. We

may seem strange in others' eyes, we may not be in their eyes at all, we may be the biggest interest of all to go and gossip about the next morning; but I don't care, because it's just us. *Him and I*.

A car passes by us, inside is a sleepy child looking out at the street. He seems horrified, as though he's afraid to lose something so precious to him, something he holds closer to his heart. I remember my past, momentarily. Those sad days when I too, stared out the shutter, wondering what on earth my parents meant by the word 'divorce' and why my mother brought another man and made me call him 'father' while my father was still there. I cried at night when it confused me so much, I remember. I was confused as to why I need to have two fathers while all my friends at school had only one. It wasn't until a little later that I realized what she really meant. It was a little later after then that I began to cut my wrist with blades, later afterwards; I met *him*, and I stopped doing that ever since.

The drizzle drenches us as we come across the residents and reach the grove where lines of Sakura trees remain still and soundless as though they've gone to sleep for the night. There aren't any blossoms decorating the branches because it rained a while ago. There is a dampened layer of pink petals below our feet; it's so soft that I can hardly even feel our feet hitting the ground. There, on a side of the grove is a coffee shop, closed for the night. Its yellow light is still turned on, on the porch. A line of plants remain still in the dark, the dew on their leaves glitter the slightest under the yellow light. With my little knowledge on plants which I have inherited from my mother, I recognize them as petunias. Petunias are beautiful, they come in so many vivid colors, some are patterned with white. By night, however, they go to an eternal sleep. Another flower is born by the morn next day. The life of a flower is sad indeed.

By the time we reach the café, the drizzling becomes a downpour. No sooner does it start raining cats and dogs. He drags me into the porch and pulls up the hood of my jacket as though to stop the rain from hitting my face, but I pull it back, because I like the feel of it.

"I like the rain" I reason out.

He only smiles, and let me feel the coldness hit my face. The pitter-patter is a slow music in my mind; and out of reflex I stretch my hand out and try to catch the droplets. They don't gather in my hand though. Instead they crash on my skin, and slide down to gather in a pool by my feet. I remain still and watch this routine for a while.

"*Why do you like the rain?*" He asks, after a moment of silence where we both allow the music of it to dominate.

I ponder upon the question before I reply. "Because I like to recall"

I feel his eyes on the back of my head, I wish I can grasp what he's thinking but my mind is too muddled to even try. The rain has got me so engrossed into it.

"*What do you recall?*" He asks then, his voice sounds so closer to me. I close my eyes, lower my hand and take a deep breath. Something is trying to stop my heart from beating and it kills me inside.

I turn around and witness the sight of him watching me with eager eyes. He's waiting for me to respond; which I do, willingly, by taking his hand, again, gently, in mine. He looks up questioningly, his eyes search for answers in me but utters not a single word. The rain patters on, and I don't want it to end. Not until I have recalled what I am willing to recall.

I smile before I respond. "Come, let me show you"

I drag him out from the porch in to the heavy rain then, and it doesn't even surprise me when he flinches in detest, because he likes what I dislike, and dislikes what I like.

I love the feeling of it when the coldness of the spring rain drenches me from head to toe, when it patters heavily on my skin and on top of my head. I love it when it dampens my cloths, and when they become sticky and heavy because they will eventually smell of rain. I love it when the droplets spring up when I stomp on the flooding ground, I love the sound that it makes. I love when it awakens the memories of a long-gone past. I like to bend down and touch the water pooled by my feet and recall the time when paper boats floated by; sometimes petals of roses and ripped pieces of love letters we disliked. I love to raise my face up into the sky and close my eyes to let the droplets slide down my skin because then I can't tell apart water from tears so I won't know that I'm crying, the coldness will subside the burning in my eyes. I love the rain, I just love it; because I can recall the reminiscences I gathered from the shattered pieces of a beautiful past.

In the scorching cold rain, he and I stand together, facing each other without giving so much as a single thought on how strange and even delusional we might be in others' eyes. We don't care though, because we are just us. Him and I, standing in the rain as though it's the most natural thing in the world to do. He has his eyes closed tight because he dislikes to be drenched in the rain. I watch him then, I watch his face change; I watch a slow smile spread across his lips. I watch the dimples form livelily on his cheeks. He hold both my hands in both of his, we stand so close, like two lovers who are lost in their dreams. I let my tears dissolve in the rain. There are no tears anymore.

I ask him then, because I can't hold it in any longer; "Do you remember? We were young....we held hands....we danced in the rain...."

He takes his time to evoke, and I wonder if they are tears which I see rolling down his cheeks or the raindrops from above.

"I remember..." He replies and gently squeezes my hands. *"Us holding hands, dancing in the rain...I remember..."*

I move a little closer, almost touching, and smile.

"That's what I like to recall"

We stand in the rain a little longer until the heavy clouds have gone on its way.

Since I start to tremble in the breeze subsequently to the cloudburst, he suggests we go somewhere warmer and reach yet another busy street. There are several shops open; the grocery shops which work all twenty four hours the day, a few hotels, karaoke bars and a few restaurants where runaway students like to visit for a cup of tea and couples come to sit for a leisurely talk. He and I enter one of these because it seems warm inside. Several of the late night customers turn to look at the new comers. The others carry on with their doing. He picks a seat, a table for two secluded from others. Only one customer is around, a young girl who is completely immersed in reading a paper back. I read its spine; it's a Japanese author that I love.

He suggests that we have a cup of coffee and catch up with our lives.

The rain on us gradually dries up and he helps me with my coat, we hang them on the back rests and watch the street in utter silence. I don't know what he's thinking, he probably doesn't know what I'm thinking either, but how his eyes seem lost and confused makes me wonder where he might be wandering off to. It seems that we don't have much of catching up to do. Maybe we both know what we have been going through, maybe we both know that there is no point of discussing things. Maybe we both know that all we've been doing is crying, and at some point, trying to live this life.

I tell him, eventually when he questions me how I was doing, that my life is bull. He laughs then, and says in retort. *"That's what we all say..."*

I sense what he means, so I remain silent. The coffee arrives moments later, the waitress eyes me strangely before she retreats and I focus my eyes on the steam of my mug. The coffee is burning hot, and I wait for it to cool off, loving the feel of it as the warm steam kisses my cheeks. He runs his finger around the rim of the mug, contemplating on what to say next. I don't want him to talk now though. I don't want him to talk to me at all.

But the time flies so fast.

"It's about time that you move on" He says, seconds later. He hasn't heard my pleas for him to stop, certainly. I don't respond but remain watching the liquid barely touched in my mug. I know that this is coming on my way, because it has been doing so for so long. The best response, for me seem to be silence.

"I know you would always refuse to...but you can't live in memories...for so long..."

I watch the steam for the next few seconds, then I avert my eyes to watch his finger running around the rim. His fingertips have turned the color of cherry blossoms.

Memories begin to flood my mind once more and I attempt to choke down the tears before I finally find my voice to question that one matter which I always ask at all perpetuity; because I was too stubborn to accept the reality.

"Why did you have to die...?"

He too, remains silent then, as though we have spoken all the words we were to speak tonight. I dare not to cry anymore, because it doesn't seem to do any good to my broken heart. His finger now has paused on its deed, remaining stiff on the rim. The steam of the hot liquid has gradually deceased. The soft clatter and voices in the restaurant continue, the girl still engrossed in her book as though the entire world has stopped in time. He looks up then, gazes at me and replies.

"I couldn't help it..."

I heave a sigh and look out at the street. It's as busy as before as though it's still daylight, to me it seems so unfair; because they all seem so happy and relaxed. They might not have realized yet how short the life could be. And how cruel it is.

"Why did you leave me...?" I ask again.

"I couldn't help it..." is his reply.

There's a young woman outside in a blazing red coat, her hair messed up, face drained and tries to flag a taxi but they all move on.

I wonder how unjust the world is.

"You made things complicated" I say.

"I know..." he replies. *"And I'm sorry..."*

I take a moment before continuing.

"I loved you..." I say at last.

There's silence, and I feel him move in his seat.

"I know...." He says then and I finally turn to face him. The glint in his eyes has disappeared, replacing it with something dark; something that I cannot keep my fingers on. *"And I'm sorry..."*

“Why are you sorry?” I ask him, though, already knowing the answer.

“Because I never loved you...in the way you loved me”

I purse my lips and contemplate in the utter silence. I think of how the fate can fool me, how unjust it could be; I think of how cruel it could be to pull me away from the love of my life and still have me following after him. I think of how my frail, *frail* heart still awaits for that love to be reciprocated. I think of how much more pain the memories could bring to me.

“I loved you nevertheless” He says then. I turn to look into his face, and witness how sincere his eyes are. A gentle smile on his lips. *“As my little sister, I loved you dearly, I still do...”*

I think of how cruel my fate could be, to let me fall in love with my own step brother, the brother who made it so much easier to call my second father, *father*. Who made it so much easier to laugh and smile at the best moments of life, who made it so much easier to stop hurting on my own, who made it so much easier to love and be loved.

“Then stop doing it...” I plead, grasping tightly on to the warmth of my mug. “Stop telling me to move on...”

“But life is too short-,”

“Let me live in my memories....” I cut in, as gravely as I could. “Let me....as long as I could....”

He stares at me then, his deep brown eyes sparkle in the soft light and it’s so beautiful that I remember the moments where he stared at me for so long, and tell me things that I always wanted to hear.

He smiles softly then and replies. *“As long as you wish...because it’s all my fault”*

“Why?”

He sighs and lowers his head as though in defeat. *“I should never have died”*

It’s almost dawn by the time we reach my home. The lights still flickering inside explains it that someone has, eventually, waited for me to return; a window upstairs is open and I see sudden movement in there. It’s probably my mother, worriedly waiting for my figure to appear any moment in her vision. I feel sorry for her though, but I can’t help it being myself.

There are golden rays of sunlight peeking out from the heavy gray clouds which are yet to diminish. The sky has taken up an eerie shade of purple and gray. The breeze carries the scent of spring and damp earth and I wonder, through it, if I can grasp the breezy scent of him which I so clearly remember. It’s so cold, the ambiance is. But I carry my coat in my hand because it’s still drenched with rain and my tears. We stop by our front gate then, he’s still holding my hand. I don’t want him to let go. Instead I wish he would carry me away to wherever he lingers around.

I don’t know where the dead go to, though. And he never tells me whenever I ask, so I decided to never question again.

We hold hands and watch each other as our faces change. I don’t know how I look like in his eyes, but I can almost guess that it’s somewhere along the line of a broken, lost soul that his eyes glower with utter concern. He, on the other hand seems calm, as always, his eyes filled with warmth and affection. The very sight of him engulfs me in a warm embrace. We say no words to each other, because we are afraid if anything, one of us will end up being hurt. Because we both are broken souls, because it’s not raining now and we are afraid to see each other’s’ tears.

As the sun rises, there begins the singing of cicadas somewhere far away. Someone starts his car in a house nearby. We can hear a rooster singing its morning call. It's almost time to say goodbye.

"The sun is rising" He says, finally, his voice blends into the breeze so well and I wish the wind would carry it to my mother to hear.

I fix my eyes into his and wonder if I can get lost in them; like in a maze and see how his world is like. My world has nothing good to offer me. I am all alone, my parents think I'm insane, and the only getaway I have is him, his warmth and the memories he left for me to chase after.

"I hate it" I say, owing him a light chuckle.

"But I like it" He replies.

"But why?"

He sighs and looks up at the horizon far across the street. A spec of orange and pink has emerged. The sun is yet to arrive. He doesn't have long.

"Another day has arrived..."

I squeeze his hand tightly and try my best not to let my tears fall. "But you're going away"

"I will come back..."

The purple gray shade in the sky, I see, gradually turns pastel blue, the sun has arisen. Its rays glint like stars in his eyes.

"But when?"

"Soon..." He says and steps closer to me, taking both my hands in his. *"Soon...I will"*

"I will wait..."

He smiles. *"You do that"*

I say nothing and wait for the world to stop in time. But it doesn't, and it kills me inside. My tears begin to fall against my will, which he reaches out to wipe away; on his lips play the saddest smile I had ever seen.

"Be good..."

I nod.

"Don't stay out at night"

I nod again.

"Don't cut"

I nod in retort.

"Don't make it too hard on mother"

Nod I do, he heaves a sigh and steps back. *"Alright then...it's my cue to leave..."*

I say nothing and wait for the sun to reach higher, afraid to witness him making his way away and away from me. Everything seems so far away now, everything slowly flies away from my grasp. I feel empty, I feel useless, I feel nothing but as though I were an empty shell.

Ever since he was gone, I *was* an empty shell.

With yet another sigh I turn back and make my way into my house. My mother emerges from the doorway then, tears filled in her eyes and folds me in a tight embrace. Only then I feel how the real warmth feels like. She tells me that everything's okay, that everything's fine; but I know it myself that they are not. Everything's not okay, everything's not fine, because she's crying. She's crying because of me, because I had, yet again, wandered off to reconcile with the memories I had lost. I hide my face in her shoulder then, and I too, cry.