

The Reversal

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I was running through the woods, in a foot of snow, to a destination that I still did not know. The tears running down my face stung my cheeks in the frigid December night. I was scared, angry, lost, and alone. I didn't know why I was running or why I was in the woods; all I knew was to keep running. I couldn't breathe and I felt as if all of the trees were closing in to trap me forever in their icy branches. The only light to guide my wandering was the scattered rays of moonlight through the ominous branches. As I ran, the events of the day flashed through my mind.

I pictured sitting down next to Jillian at lunch and talking to her about how she tried to push me in the snow at Dave's last weekend. She could not stop laughing because I almost face-planted into the snow. I acted as though I was upset with her; despite thinking it was hilarious as well. She elongated the “please” as she pleaded with me in her famous Jillian voice, “Matty! Oh please! I had to try to get back at you for pushing me in my pool last August. Don't think that I forgot about that.” I remembered looking at the bench Lisa sat at with her friends; Scott pointed her out to me and said, “Dude! Lisa looks absolutely gorgeous today.” I had to agree. Then I thought about running through the hallways after the final bell rang. I bumped into Jillian and she asked me why I was running. I told her that my letter was coming today and she said that she would call me after cheerleading to see how it went. I drove home like a lunatic and slammed to a halt in front of my mailbox. There it was, my letter from Boston College. I got in! I threw on a collared shirt, got back in my car, and drove to work. I called my mom on way to work and told her the good news. She screamed the news to her entire office; I heard cheers in the background. I called Katelyn and she was so happy for me. She reminded me that we were going to get

together later and study for our economics test.

I made it to the firm and sprinted up to Tim's office; he looked at me and he could see the excitement in my eyes. He hugged me and then he sent out an email to the entire office. Everyone stopped by my desk and congratulated me. I was so happy. Everything was perfect. Tim came to my desk and told me to take the rest of the day off to celebrate. "I have to study for economics," I told him, and he called me a nerd. He told me to go home and have fun; he would pay me for the rest of the day. I smiled, gave him a hug, and left the office. My mom called me and told me to be careful later because the roads were going to get icy and I told her that I would. Wow! What a perfect day, everything was in place. Everything I had worked for finally paid off, and everyone was so happy for me. I couldn't help but smile as I drove home.

I emerged from the woods and stopped at Dean Road. How did I get there? I didn't mean to, or did I somehow, subconsciously, run in to the one small section of woods that separated my development from Dean Road? I started to cry again. I was on Jillian's street. I had been on this road so many times and her house was so close. I thought about the dozens of times that I swam in Jillian's pool and the many times that she and I ran the beer pong table in her basement all night long. If I just walked right, I could get there in two minutes. She had to be home. I would knock on her door and she would look at me like I was crazy. She would say in her famous Jillian voice, "Matty! What the hell are you doing?" I would laugh and tell her about the most realistic dream that I had ever had. But no! She was not home. I made a left instead. That is where Katelyn's house was. I suddenly needed her more than anything; I needed to be in her presence. I resented her at the same time, though. She started this. She was the one who reversed my perfect day.

I was on my way to Katelyn's; she would wrap her arms around me, give me a kiss, and

say “I told you so.” My phone rang and it was her. I picked up and said “Hey Babe, I'll be over in ten minutes.” My smile instantly faded when I heard her say, through tears, “Matty, my mom has a blood clot in her leg and she is in the hospital.” Okay, I said, don't panic, I'll take you to the hospital as soon as I get there. She explained that her mom did not want her to drive because the roads were icy. I went to her house and we tried to study economics until her mom called to say that she needed some of her things at the hospital. She warned us to drive very carefully. While we were studying, the roads had gotten much worse. We drove to my house and I told my mom that we had to go to the hospital, but she didn't want us out on the roads. I explained that I would take her car because it had four-wheel drive and I would drive slowly. We drove to the hospital and it took four times as long because we drove a quarter of the speed limit the whole way there.

The roads were so icy that I could barely walk now without slipping. No cars were out; it was just me, alone, walking on the desolate road. I was sweating and out of breath from running, and my eyes were burning red from all the tears that I had been crying. I couldn't believe what was taking place. I had read stories about this happening to kids in neighboring and distant towns, but I never thought it could happen in my own town. I never thought it could happen to my friends. I walked by houses and I wondered if they had any idea about what was going on. I wondered if they knew the pain that I felt, the pain that my friends felt, and the pain that the families felt. The families would never be the same. My group of friends was so tight-knit and caring, and now we too would never be the same. Nothing made sense.

We made it to the hospital safely. Doctors and nurses were running everywhere. We found Mrs. Adams and she did not look well. She was attached to an obscene amount of wires and the monitor that read her blood pressure was beeping forebodingly because her blood pressure was through the roof. She told us that two teenagers had been in a car accident. The

person who was driving was in a coma and the person in the passenger seat was dead upon impact. She had thought that the two teenagers were Katelyn and me, and her high blood pressure was the result of her panic. A nurse told us later that the accident was in Randolph, which was as much as she could tell us. Katelyn and I both assumed that they were two Randolph High School students and as shocked as we were about the tragedy, we didn't know the kids. We made sure Mrs. Adams was okay and got back on the road, this time driving even more carefully.

I found myself standing in front of Katelyn's door, but I could not will myself to open it. I just stared at the door handle. I tried to clean my eyes and my runny nose, but it was no use because I had yet to stop crying and Katelyn was surely crying too. Everyone was crying. I reached for the handle but the door opened without my even touching it. I looked at Katelyn and she looked at me. She wrapped her arms around me and we just stayed like that, in the cold, for what seemed like an hour. Then we just sat on her family room floor across from each other. My phone was ringing incessantly, but I couldn't pick it up. I did not want to talk to anyone. I could only pick up for Dan. He told me that he and Danielle were on their way to Katelyn's. Katelyn and I waited in tears, in silence, and in the surreal state of tragedy.

I dropped Katelyn off at her house and we decided to finish studying for our economics test on the phone. My admission to Boston College was completely forgotten; it seemed like it was weeks ago. I pulled onto my street and my phone rang; it was Katelyn. I picked up. She was crying again. I was scared; I assumed something was wrong with her mom. She told me that the accident we heard about at the hospital was Jillian and Lisa. They were on their way home from cheerleading and Jillian's little car skidded on the ice, spun out of control and was hit directly on the passenger's side by an oncoming car. Lisa died upon impact and Jillian was in a coma. I felt

like I was going to pass out. I didn't believe her because it just couldn't possibly be true. She had to be lying. I hung up on her. I walked into my house, took off my shoes, and saw that my little sister was crying. She had heard. How? What were these rumors, and how did she hear about my friends before me? She was in middle school. She came over and hugged me.

Why did everyone believe this lie? It was not true; the girls were from Randolph. My mom yelled at me. She told me that she had been worried sick, and that she told me that I should not have been on the road. I couldn't think, I couldn't cry, and I couldn't move. Everything was so surreal. My phone rang again. It was Dan, my best friend, and he was crying. I had never heard him cry before. We had been best friends since kindergarten and now we were seniors in high school, and I never once heard him cry. He begged me to tell him that it wasn't true. I said that I didn't know anything. I told him I would call him back. He paused and said "I love you, bro." I felt the tears coming in my eyes and I tried to push them back; I did not want to cry but I couldn't help it. I started crying so hard that I was shaking. I was hyperventilating. I could not breathe. My mom didn't know how to deal with this. She was still yelling. She never yelled, why now? I had to get out. I couldn't be in my house. I put my shoes back on and sprinted out the front door. I didn't know where I was going.

I didn't know that everything, in fact, was real. I didn't know that Lisa was really dead and I didn't know that Jillian would die five days later. *I headed for the woods ...*