

Farewell to a Lost Friend

by Fawkes_07

Just what the title implies.

(a eulogy)

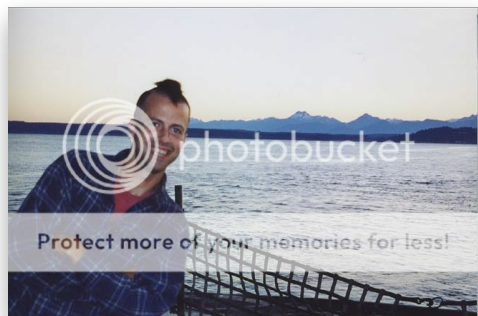
Chapter 1 of 1

Just what the title implies.

A/N: This is not my usual sort of posting at all. To be honest, it's non-fiction, and it's not exactly poetry, either. More of an essay. But it's offered as an explanation as to why so many of my stories are all currently left hanging.

By way of exposition: I had just finished writing up \$60,000 in grant applications for my nonprofit, with full intention of finishing "Heirs of Slytherin" and writing a chapter or two of "Fair Exchanges" as a Christmas gift for TPP, when suddenly [this arrived in my email](#). And [this](#).

I beg pardon in advance, dear reader, for the names you don't know and the internal references which are unfamiliar. But those particulars don't really matter in the long run.



Phillip Chase Hollins

Like a pilot light, some part of certain friendships stays on during the passage of time, the years, the changes, the distractions, the distances, biding time until we come together again. In that moment, it takes only a glance, a smile, a squeeze, or a tear, and twenty years of warmth glows through as bright as ever. How unspeakably lucky I am, to have found such friends in my life, and so many of them.

I didn't recognize Rob and Dave when I walked into the pub. They were at the table right beside the door, but I walked all the way to the back, muttering about clobbering them if they ditched us. I didn't recognize them on the return pass either; it was Elisabeth who finally caught my eye. Why? Well, with Dave Guy, there was an excuse: his long red curls were replaced with a respectable haircut in Premature Gray, a businessman now, grown-up and responsible, with a gorgeous, sophisticated girlfriend beside

him. Robert, on the other hand, looked almost exactly the same. Except better. A hunk in college, he was now a frigging Movie Star/Adonis/Hubba Hubba Maxima, more beautiful with age in the way of Robert Redford or Sean Connery.

I was looking for a couple of fat, aging hippies--foolish me. Of course I walked right past them.

That first dinner together was a repetitive cycle of camaraderie and grief, tears coming in waves, striking one person then spreading quickly to the rest. At one point Rob and Dave, having the oldest and best friendship *and* bond with you, fell together in a teary embrace that made our queer waiter dumbstruck with awe. Hell, for a brief instant I felt like jumping in there, too--on the surface it looked pretty slashy *wink.* A beautiful thing, two straight men who love one another and show it. Once again I count myself lucky.

Oh I remember Toronto when Mylo went down

And we sat and cried on the phone

I never felt so alone

He was the first of our own

--"Blind Curve"

We went back to Dave Guy's and got baked. Even though we've all left behind the party gorillas we were in The Day, that pilot light had been left on as well, and it wasn't even questioned, just *understood*. Jack Daniels, Our Benevolent Sponsor, after all. It didn't take as much as it used to, that's for damn sure.

I knelt behind the couch and listened to Jerry explain, very calmly, for probably the zillionth time, the tale of the search and rescue. You and your two friends had built a shelter last summer, out there in the wilderness, using local materials and lashing everything together. It had a fireplace and was big enough to stand inside, an eight-mile hike from where you guys parked your car. Undoubtedly a place of great peace and beauty, far from roads, machines, people.

Jerry described it was near some sort of chasm or valley. There were, from the "parking spot," two ways to get to the shelter: a long way, hiking around the edge of the valley, or a direct route by snowboard through the bowl. Jerry reckoned that you saw all that fresh powder, Phil, and couldn't resist it. You probably went charging headlong on your board over the ridge, intending to swoop as far as you could up the far side and scramble up the rest of the way. But Nature is not gentle, and reacted to the insult with forces both great and unimpeded. You and your friends most likely perished in an avalanche somewhere in the bottom of that valley.

Keith and I agreed: we were so mad at you, you asshole! Why couldn't you just stay on the goddamn trail? You'd still be alive if you just boarded at some ski resort like a normal goddamn person! But we also knew the truth: if you did that, you wouldn't be Phil. Sticking to the trail was not part of the Phil vocabulary. A brilliant scientist working as a bike messenger. You always plowed forward with a battle cry in your mouth, unhesitating. Eat hot lead, Sedat!

It was good to read the letter from one of your more recent friends, describing you as the Soccer Coach, howling toward the goal at the end of the game--just getting started when everyone else had given up or gotten tired. No defeat, no surrender. That was you, Phillip. *Of course* you had to leap headlong into the abyss. To do otherwise would not be true to your nature, and you were always true.

So I see it's me, I can do anything

And I'm still the child

'Cos the only thing misplaced was direction

And I found direction

There is no childhood's end

--"Childhood's End?"

I went with Dave over to your brother's house to bond with your things, out of a desperate need to reconnect with you. I cried over your worn copy of the Silmarillion. I wept over your toolbox. Both were old and hard-used, and I knew you loved them for that reason--they'd stood by you and served you a long time. A brand new case of Loctite, still in its plastic wrapping, stood out absurdly in bright red and blue against the mottled browns and blacks of all those ancient wooden handles.

Dave says he'll look for that purple shirt of yours, the nice one, the button-down shirt. You once wore it when we were meeting for dinner. I didn't know you even had a nice shirt, to be honest. Well, that's not entirely true, you had that suit for Clinic Day, but it looked about as natural on you as, say, a rhinoceros hide. This was not only a "nice" shirt, it was a Phil shirt, too--sharp, but comfy looking. I remember being really surprised and flattered that you'd dress up for me, even though we were both broke and just going to a dive of a restaurant (and had to split an entree so we could afford the bill). As if you had to dress up to impress me. As if I ever saw you as anything but beautiful.

But I hadn't seen you lately--not in 10 years. This was deliberate on my part. You never wrote or called me, and the last time I visited Seattle, you didn't seem all that happy to see me. I felt snubbed. I felt indignant. "Why bother sending the Christmas card every year? I never get one back. He doesn't even seem to like me much anymore."

Then you blew off my wedding. That was the clincher. Friends flew from Chicago and Texas, Germany and Switzerland, but you wouldn't make a 3-hour drive from Seattle. Maybe you thought about it, maybe you had intentions of showing up and misplaced the invitation. Maybe you forgot to ask for time off, or went climbing some mountain that weekend, oblivious to the date. But you didn't show up, you never told me why, never even sent a card or called to acknowledge it.

By the way didn't I break your heart?

Please excuse me, I never meant to break your heart

So sorry, I never meant to break your heart

But you broke mine.

--"Kayleigh"

Yeah, I don't mind admitting that it hurt like hell at the time. It still hurts like hell, and now I'll never know what happened. But I can speculate. Hoo, doggie, can I ever speculate! Did you see the physical distance between us as some sort of proof of rejection? Did you think I'd forget you, "out of sight, out of mind?" Was there an expectation that if I was TRULY your friend, I'd be living there in Seattle beside you; I wasn't there, *ergo*, I didn't care? Did I step unwittingly into some self-fulfilling

prophecy, in which I failed some unknown test of demonstrating my affection for you, making you withdraw, which in turn made me give up in exasperation? Listen to me go on, huh? But Phil, I have to imagine *something*, some reason you fell out of my life, because the alternative is to believe something too dreadful to handle.

"Do you remember dawn escapes from moon-washed college halls..." I remember. How can I forget, Phil, that you made love with the same dizzying, reckless intensity as everything else you undertook? Did you think I was just blurting out nonsense on an adrenalinized whim when I said I loved you? Were you doing precisely that when you said it to me? Because I meant it, Phillip. I meant it every time. Did you ever believe it?

And thus the paradox of Phil, that weird discontinuity: you were always so vital, so positive, so fully in the moment, and yet you were distant and guarded as well. You wrote me one letter, that first year after Mudd--spent a page and a half proudly detailing a barn and irrigation pond that you built yourself--and then in one sentence confessed your fears that people were "repulsed" by your "less savory side." Was that the problem, Phil? Were you afraid that I'd eventually find you repulsive too? Maybe you needed to reject me first, so I'd never figure out what a horrible guy you were and what a terrible, foolish mistake I'd made by loving you as deeply as I did. Damage control, in other words. Was that what you thought? Or am I deluding myself once again, desperately cooking up elaborate scenarios to avoid what Occam's Razor would suggest: that all along, I meant far less to you than you meant to me.

I'll never know, Phil, because now you're gone.

Bridges are burning, burning

Bridges are burning, burning

--"Lords of the Backstage"

I've struggled over a week now with this insane wish that I'll log onto the computer to find a glorious email announcing, "He's back! He walked off the mountain!" I know you're gone, that I'll never hear your voice again except in memory. I know the mountain has you, cradled in clean white arms, and when those arms melt, so will you.

You'll become part of the mountain, Phillip. Perhaps a fir will take root in your heart; that's certainly a glamorous image. More likely your body will fuel lichens and leaf-moulds, giving them the strength to wreak their tiny bit of local havoc, etching the stones into sand. Either way, you'll be avenged, contributing to the wearing down of the mountain, changing it over the eons into more good earth.

Your bones, however, are more mineral than biological, and will resist the inevitable pull of entropy the longest, just like the mountain itself. Maybe someday they'll startle the shit out of some hapless hiker. Perhaps they'll even fuel some local legends. Imagine them, the tales: that on certain winter nights, when the moon is just right, you can hear the Ghost of the Haunted Valley. Listen closely, and you'll hear the voice on the winds: "Look at all that fresh powder! Fuck the long way around!" And then, Doppler shifting toward the bottom of the valley, something incomprehensible, perhaps an ancient Salish battlecry: "Wah-Guzsh!"

A/N: The lyrics are all from the album "Misplaced Childhood" by Marillion. Music I first heard with these guys and always makes me think of them.