Pain. Simple yet complicated. Love. Powerful yet painful. Death. Hateful yet loveable. Complex emotions that no psychologist, no human can explain. Yet simple emotions that we feel, we experience every day. Simple emotions with complex meanings and explanations. Sometimes it is better to accept the things the way they are, instead of trying to understand them. One-Shot.

Pain- it is such a simple yet such a complicated emotion. I don’t know how to define pain. I am not talking about the physical pain, which is as easy to define as anything in a dictionary is. I am talking about the mental pain, the emotional pain, the type of pain that scars your very mind, the pain that leaves its imprint on your broken soul. Pain is the moment in which all you know is that no matter what your world will never be the same again. It is the moment in which you are standing or maybe sitting, yet it feels like you are falling from a height and that you will never be able to stand up again or that you may never be able to reach the end of it. Pain is when you couldn’t do anything as the person you love the most slips between your fingers like sand and the tighter you hold, the quicker they slip. Pain is when your love of the life dies right in front of you from a disease that you thought is eating you up. Pain is when I saw Augustus die right in front of me, and maybe pain is when Augustus saw me die right in front of him.
I honestly cannot tell you who died first—Augustus or me. All I remember is when I gained consciousness after my death, Gus was with me. My Gus. My love.

“Hazel Grace”, he had said. “It looks like we broke each other’s heart by dying, huh?”

“Well, it was a privilege to get my heart broken by you”, I had responded.

I didn’t know how the hell was I this calm when I had just freaking died.

He had chuckled. “It’s nice to know dying hasn’t changed your attitude.”

“Oh, and here I thought my attitude would have driven you away.”

He had suddenly wrapped an arm around my waist, bringing me close to him. “I am sorry, Ms. Lancaster, but you have to do more than that to drive me away.”

I had smiled. “Trust you and your cheesy words.”

He merely smirked.

I looked around. Familiar streets yet something about them seemed unfamiliar, strange, almost like I wasn’t supposed to be here. It seemed like Amsterdam, near Peter Van Houten’s house.

‘How is this possible?’ My mind screamed out. ‘How can I be here? I died. I freaking died.’

“Where are we?”

“Where do you think?”

“Amsterdam?”

“We are in heaven.”

Once again my eyes searched the whole place, my eyes taking in every single detail, trying to find a clue that, even in the lowest of voices whispers, ‘This is not Amsterdam.’

“Heaven transforms into the place we think is heaven”, he had said.

“How do you know all this?”

“I just do”, he had said and winked.

I had bit my lip, a strange feeling that felt almost like guilt, but not quite, washed over me, as my thoughts finally stopped their journey and settled to my mom and dad.

‘They must be feeling terrible’, a part of my brain whispered to me.

Suddenly, Gus leaned forward and kissed me. A feeling of shock passed through my body at the abrupt action, but eventually my mind caught up with my body and I kissed back.

“You don’t know what you biting your lip do to me”, he mumbled out, his lips brushing against mine.

“I have a pretty good idea”, I responded, kissing him again.

He broke the kiss and put his forehead against mine, as we both stared into each other’s eyes.

‘God, he is so beautiful’, my eyes whispered to my brain. ‘How is he ours? Can I look at them forever?’ And for everything that my brain has said my whole life, for the first time, a cloud of doubt passed over it and finally he whispered, shame and insecurity gleaming off of it. ‘I don’t know.’

“What about our parents?” I had asked.

“What about them?”

“I wanna see them.”

“Hazel, we’re dead.”

“That doesn’t change the fact that I want to see them. Surely, there must be a way to see them. Please, Gus.”

He had sighed. “Come on.”

“How do you know everything, Gus?”

“I died before you, well, we died at the same moment, but I gained consciousness before you. I honestly cannot tell you why.”

I had simply nodded.

“I find it extremely lucky that we both died at the same moment”, I had said after a moment of silence, slight suspicion in my voice.

“It is just a coincidence”, he had responded.

A part of my brain wanted to accept the reasoning. Miracles and Coincidences do happen. But still
somewhere in the back of my mind, there was doubt that all this is just a mere coincidence. Life is nothing but tragic. But I hummed and let it go.

“Okay, concentrate on the hospital room and we will be teleported there.”

“Okay”, I had responded, unknowingly, saying the whole ‘Okay’ thing.

“On three… One, Two, Three”, he continued as I thought solely in the hospital room where I had died.

I felt a weird energy sort of thing and felt like I was moving really fast and then, nothing. I opened my eyes, which I didn’t even realize I closed and saw that we were back in the room where we died, and our parents were sitting on the chairs next to our dead bodies whispering things while tears fell down their eyes.

A few tears fell down my eyes as I watched my parents in such pain. I looked over to Augustus and saw pain etched on his face as he saw his parents crying over his dead body.

“I think we should head back, Gus.”

He had nodded and together we headed back, a silent goodbye on our lips. But before we went, I noticed one thing- one thing that I will remember forever.

Our hands were intertwined.

I told Gus this. All he did was smile and say, “Our hands were intertwined, just like our souls are.” I had smiled and kissed him for being so cheesy. He had kissed me back and just as it deepened, my eyes snapped open.

I was so confused that it took me a moment that all that was a dream. That the reality was Gus is dead and I am alive.

Tears fell from my eyes as I think about it. I screamed and thrashed as my mom and dad came up to my room and whispered soothing words.

“I don’t wanna live anymore, but I don’t want to leave you guys. I want Gus. I want a last kiss with him. I want a last night. I want a last dinner. I want a last moment. I want a last goodbye, mom.”

“I know, sweetheart, I know it hurts, but please, calm down.”

I just sobbed in response. “I want him”, I mumbled out as unconsciousness took over me. The last thing before everything went black was my mom and dad’s frantic talking to each other.

I woke up again in a hospital bed, similar to the one that was in my realistic dream.

“How are you doing, sweetie?” Mum said. I looked over and nodded. I have been in this position far too many times that I am familiar this is what happens every time something like this happens.

“I want to see him, mum.”

“Sweetie…” my mum sighed.

“Will you take me to see his grave?”

She looked a bit surprised at the request before replying in affirmative.

As soon as I was released, my mom took me to the cemetery and up to Augustus’s grave before going and waiting in the car.

I looked at the epitaph.

Augustus Waters
2001-2018
A loving friend, son, boyfriend
May you Rest In Peace

“That’s the thing about Pain. It demands to be felt.”

“Hey, Gus”, I started. “How’s it going? It’s completely awful here without you. I cannot wait to die.” I sat there talking to Gus for hours. I told him how I got his eulogy. I told him about everything after he died. And most of all, I told him about that strange yet realistic dream.

“Hazel”, my mom said as she walked up to me. “Come on. It is getting dark. I will bring you here tomorrow again if you want.”

I nodded and stood up. Together, we walked back to the car and drove home.

Many night after that, I found myself having those unusual dreams and walking up, sometimes
screaming, and sometimes sobbing and throwing things in my frustration. Some of them were sweet dreams that I wish were true. Some of them were nightmares with horror that I would never wish even upon my worst enemy.

Often, I found myself in the hospital after these fits, my condition getting worse and worse with each passing day. Sometimes, when mom could calm me, she and I would have these rare midnight conversations. My dad never stayed, always leaving the room in tears. It hurts to see him that way. But as Augustus said in his eulogy, ‘We don’t get a say if we get hurt in this world, but we do get a say in who hurts us.’ That is true. I got hurt by Augustus. Mom and dad got hurt by me. And Augustus’s parents got hurt by him.

My dad knows I am dying, and as much as he is sad about it, he has learnt to accept it. The last conversation that I had with my mom before I died was just about the conversation I bet she will remember for a life time.

“He really hurt you, didn’t he?” she had asked.

“I chose it. And I would do it again if I get the chance.”

“But it has got to be painful. You were alright, before that night when you had that first dream.”

And I had responded in the most ‘Hazel Grace’ way. I had given a cruel smile and said, “That’s the thing about pain, Mom. It demands to be felt.”

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