

Words Like Knives

Sam Rogers

'I don't want to be afraid to hold your hand. We hear gunshots when we kiss. Our existence alone is illegal in 72 countries. That can't be normal. It isn't normal.'

"So that's it, then?" Four simple words sounded so harsh reverberating through my head. I asked myself the same thing. A simple sheet of paper, as light as a feather. And it was like concrete. The words felt so heavy.

"I guess so. That's what happens when someone struggles with internalised homophobia, doesn't speak to you for six months, and then breaks up with you via letter."

So yeah. That was it, then. The words became too heavy. They slipped through my hands, fluttering towards the floor. I wanted to crumple them. I wanted to rip them up. Ruin them beyond recognition.

"I think you should take it, Ivy. The letter, I mean. I should think. A lot."

I didn't seem to register any movement after that. None of my own. No one else's. The world and everything else in it seemed to stop in that exact moment. But I handed off the letter. And in turn, the little safety net I had left.

The days after felt grim.

I fell into a hole of isolation. Stuck with my own thoughts, who danced through my doubts. The words, though straightforward in intent, were doused in fear. Fear of who knows what. Myself?

'We're a danger. To ourselves and everyone around us. I can't live with myself and I don't know how you do it.'

It took me a week before I even got out of bed.

Dark clouds danced among the trees. A small groan escaped my lips as I held the curtains open. Tattered nails ran their way through streaky hair, only to cringe at the split ends. The mirror threatened to shatter at every glance. Each scar of acne, each strand of hair, oilier than the last, is another crack in the fragile glass.

Everything hurt.

I would have liked to close my eyes. Forever. I couldn't though. Hot water ran over old calluses, burnt to the touch. White tiles were soaked after a few seconds. The edge of my shirt hung around my thighs as I fiddled with the hem. Each edge crumpled as it was grasped in two clenched fists and pulled over my head. Raindrops were out of sync with the shower's droplets, drawing the sound out in my head.

Water enveloped my body, now finally lukewarm. A slight tilt of my head allowed the smooth waterfall. As though molten chocolate, in the form of thick clear liquid, was poured over each inch of my skin. It closed my eyes like a hand rolling down my face. The dark was... inviting.

As soon as passive thoughts were silenced, aggression rattled against the walls of my mind. It was almost as if I were standing under an overpass, a



train rolling by at a mile a minute. The sound felt eternal, loud as hell, and forever rolling by.

'My family hates me, God hates me, because of us. Everyone hates me because of you. Eventually, I'll hate myself too.'

As the water shut off, the train disappeared. I finally emerged from under the overpass, and things became clearer. Cool air hit my empty skin and froze. Desperate, I scrambled to feel familiar warmth again.

I couldn't find any.

"Bee? Are you still home?"

My mouth dried up. I was panicking. As I backed into the wall, it became a crutch. The crutch that held me together at the seams. Shaking knees buckled, but the door was there. I touched my thumb to my middle finger, remembering to breathe. And then my pinkie. Then my pointer finger. Finally, my ring finger. Middle, pinkie, pointer, ring. One, two, three, four.

"Abby?"

"It's not my fault. I swear, it's not my fault." It didn't sound like my voice. It was my voice. But it didn't sound like it. My head fell in my hands, I couldn't feel it. I suddenly wasn't myself. It was my voice and my body, but I was no longer the puppeteer.

The silence was deafening, but it was all I had. Nearing footsteps broke the peace like glass. It was like it had been hit with one of those bats we'd play softball with. Not the piddly little tee-ball bats. The heavy ones. The ones that actually do damage.

"You can't just hide out on the floor of your bathroom. What are you- Are you okay?"

The door creaked on its hinges, only deepening the letter-induced trance sending me spiralling through morality. Warm hands engulfed mine. One, two, three, four. I needed to breathe, but the air was suffocating. I was entangled in my safety net. "She left because of me, Ivy. I'm a damned disgrace."

"Bee, you are gay. It is not a sin, it is not a disgrace, and it's certainly not your fault she left you." Her voice, calm and collected, pierced through the fog. It's told this story a million times. Yet I continued to drown. The weights on my ankles pulled through currents and tides.

"She hates me. Her family hates me. And I should hate myself, right?" The small sentence was obstructed, choked through tears. "The letter was right. I'm a danger to myself and others and-"

"Look at me, Bee. Look at me. Her beliefs are not yours. You are valid. Completely valid. No matter what anybody else says, anybody at all, you shouldn't be afraid to exist." My arms wrapped around her in a solid embrace, melting into a familiar touch. Tears rolled down tattered cheeks. I finally felt at home.

"No one should be afraid to exist."