

Sarah Johnson

## The Watch

It had happened quite quickly, really – without much time for me to register what was even happening. Picture this: one idle minute I'm sitting on my bed, pasting rosy wedding pictures and stamped flowers into a brand new plastic photo album, daydreaming of unique baby names, and then the next thing I know I'm grabbing my keys and putting them into the ignition before I can even register where I'm going or what I'm doing.

The phone rang two times that morning. My legs were lazily drooping over the side of the bed as I lifted each wedding photo to the florescent light above me, examining if they were real or not. Had that day actually happened? Was I *actually* married? It had been four months and the honeymoon phase was still far from over. But already I saw my life before me: three kids, two dogs, and a white picket fence. We already had the quaint dream house. Logan would just have to build the fence in due time.

Logan. Logan Hampton. I liked saying his name. I liked thinking it. I had memorized its every syllable and sound. I gushed to myself, holding a photo of him kissing me at the altar, and then I fell back onto the bed imagining him as a father for a few split moments. Then the phone rang again.

Craning my head towards the wireless phone, I saw a glimmer from the dresser. Logan's watch.

"Darling, have you seen my watch – where's my watch – it was right here earlier..." Logan had exclaimed standing in front of his nightstand just a mere half hour before that phone was ringing, his light blue eyes confused.

I had laughed, louder than usual. Was this going to become a routine? Would I bring his coffee to him every morning, helping him find his multiple trinkets and clothing articles while he got ready for the day? This was the stuff dreams were made of.

I had ran to his closet – the striped tie or the blue one? It thrilled me I was partaking in this.

"Logan, the watch will show up, I'll look for it – now pick a tie!"

He had scratched his head, his black hair ruffling, "But Sammie – I need that watch."

I had smiled to myself: I got him that watch. He thought of me when he looked at it and told me so every time he put it on in front of me.

It was gold, with a white face. It wasn't obnoxiously shiny, but when the sun hit it just right, everyone stopped to stare at it.

"I'll keep looking. Here, have this one." I had handed him the striped tie.

His face was still twisted, trying to remember where he had put the watch. But as I walked around our room and into our closet, I couldn't find it anywhere. I had not thought to get up on my tiptoes and look at the top of the dresser.

So I had helped him with his tie, dodging his dramatic kisses he had lunged at me as I had pulled the fabric through the loops. I had then sent him off with a distressed face.

"I wish I found it. It must be lying around the house somewhere." He had said, caressing my cheek.

"I'll look some more. Have a good day at the hospital." I was awaiting a kiss from him.

He had grinned and leaned down to give me a sweet one. His cheeks had been a bit rosy from the cold and his smile was out of a Crest advertisement.

"My whole day's going to be thrown off now." He had joked, "Won't even know if I'm late!"

I had forgotten that his car clock wasn't working anymore.

"Well don't rush." I had patted his shirt.

"Yeah. Yeah." He had nodded, thinking of something else.

And then he left. And it wasn't until I heard the phone ring a third time only 20 minutes after he had left, that I noticed the missing watch. It was on the dresser. Of course it was on the dresser. He didn't need to rush. It was right on the dresser and I should have found it for him.

I shouldn't have answered that phone. I should have carried on, like he had made it to the hospital that morning.

"Ms. Hampton?" a hurried voice asked over the phone.

I relished in my name for a quick moment. I still wasn't over its newness.

"There's been an accident."

The phone dropping on the bed was soft and hardly made a sound. It should have crashed on the floor – something more loud and theatrical. Something more memorable. But all I can recall is its cushioned landing, making an annoying "pfff" noise.

I didn't turn off the TV, I didn't set the alarm, I somehow grabbed the correct keys and I somehow ended up in my car. I was driving to Logan's work, where he had his clinicals – to the hospital. I should have brought his watch. Do the dead tell time?

The living do. The next few days, weeks, and months were numb. That's the only word that can define them.

The worst was identifying his disfigured body that had been battered by the semi that took him out on the highway. The truck that took away my perfect Logan. – took away my perfect future. He looked like a mannequin, splayed out on a cold metal slab. Like a doll he practiced on in school. I wanted to straighten his striped tie, but my mother swatted my hand as I reached to do so.

As college sweethearts, we had overcome every typical obstacle thrown our way, but I had never seen this one coming. I wished I could've ducked, let this missile hit some other unsuspecting couple. I never imagined a life without Logan – it wasn't fair I had to now.

"Three children, we'll have three of them – name 'em off right now, let's see...what do we want to name them? Sammie, this is all up to you, this is your choice! The pressure's on!" He'd always kid with me, as we had picturesque picnics at the park.

"Let's see...Matthew! Or Patrick! No wait...Andrew! Andy for short!" I'd light up, clapping my hands together.

“Alright, alright, both winners. Now – what about a girl?” He’d say, eating a perfectly red apple, holding one of my hands in the other.

“Sophia. Or Clarissa. Or Amber.” I said carefully; girl names were harder to think of.

He’d pinch my cheek, play with my hair, help me fold the picnic blanket when we were through, do the dishes with me when we got home. He’d ask me about my day – down to the conversations I had with old friends and what I had on my sandwich for lunch. He listened more than anyone I’d ever met.

Choosing Logan from among all the other guys had been the easiest thing to do. I had met him at orientation – he had chosen to sit by me. We then dated for four years – all of college. Then we wed two years after graduation. We had planned our whole lives based on each other. There would be no other answer to life’s biggest questions. I would be the stay-at-home mom. He would be the wealthy and handsome Doctor – at least after he finished medical school.

He was my whole world. I know you’re not supposed to make someone that, but I couldn’t help it. I’d gladly be his axis on which he spun, holding him up night and day. I’d ask nothing in return, only if I could be an intricate piece of his ever-spinning world. I loved to watch him shine, because he did it so well.

I obsessed over how he walked, over how he talked – I was his own personal “fangirl.” It was rightfully deserved – his perfect jaw structure, his easy-going personality. His ever-listening ears, his kind words. His ability to make me laugh at nothing.

I always felt so inferior, a puny frizzy haired girl standing next to his perfection. He would always say he didn’t complete me – that I was everything on my own. But he did, he completed me – Samantha didn’t function without Logan.

So what do you do when you lose that? How was I supposed to go on? I had already completed all the prerequisite steps. I was done. The babies were part 35 of my 50-step plan, the next part of our journey.

Logan was gone. Logan wasn’t coming back. And I hated that watch. I hated it. But I kept it.

For years I kept it hidden. In the back of my closet. In a box. But when I turned 27, I decided I wanted to wear it with me always. I never spoke of Logan to anyone, so it shocked most to see it dangling on my wrist, as I never got it fit to my size.

“Samantha...isn’t that...” My mother would gape at it, her eyes widening.

“My husband’s? Yes.” And I wouldn’t say another word, and she knew not to mention it anymore.

I would get a tight look on my face and I’d intentionally purse my lips anytime someone brought him up around me. When three years had passed they all finally decided to stop talking about him all together.

I admit...I got a bit drastic. I turned every picture frame down in our house until I got the courage to throw them out all together. I trashed that shiny new wedding album. I burned the letters he wrote to me when he went to Spain for a semester. I cut off contact with his friends at the hospital, though they’d call regularly to try and catch up with me.

I omitted every trace of Logan from my life entirely, and by the time I was thirty, he was gone completely.

Except for the darn watch. I still wore it every day. I looked at its face, seeing nothing but roman numerals staring back at me. Wondering how many times Logan would look down at it. Wondering how many times the watch had saved him from missed meetings, had comforted him with an extra hour of sleep, had shown him when he'd need to be ready for our dates, had counted the hours of his days, unaware of how short they were.

I was wearing it the day I met Ryan LaGrange. He bumped into me when I was walking by a café, and his body collided so perfectly with mine that he caused the watch to hit his suitcase at just the right angle, so that the links exploded and they all lay splayed on the cobblestone.

"I'm. So. Sorry!" He said with a bit of sincerity, as I bent down to pick up the golden links and the white face, its glass cracked.

"It's fine." I muttered, trying to find every last link.

"No, no, let me take it to the shop, I can get it fixed!" he said, reaching out a hand to mine.

"No!" I nearly screeched, the customers sitting outside the café all looking up. His face mirrored a wounded puppy's.

"I mean...no that's ok. It won't be necessary." I tried to smile, although I detested this man and his clumsiness.

"Well, I feel terribly awful. Please let me make it up to you." His voice had a bit of coyness to it.

I finally looked him in the eye. He was fairly good looking: blonde hair, brown eyes – a nice face in general. It was more boyish than Logan's. It was more weak.

He was staring at my lips and making me uncomfortable.

"No that's really alright." I said, getting up from the ground with the broken face and links.

He followed my gaze as he too stood up.

"No, no – let me take you out for coffee or something." He gave me a small smile.

He was quite good looking. So maybe for that reason I said yes. And if only to get him to stop harassing me.

Inside the café, he stared at the watch for me, seeing if it was repairable.

"Looks like the hands are not moving anymore." He peered at the face of it.

"Yeah, I could tell you that much." I grinned slightly.

"Ha-ha. Well the links can be put back together. The glass can be replaced. And I think a shop can get those hands moving again –" as he starting handing me the watch back, the hands ticked slowly.

To our amazement, they started going backwards.

"Well, look at that. You didn't just break my watch, you got it all confused and such." I tried to laugh, and somehow it came out easier than I thought it would.

"Now you'll always be early for everything. It's got you ready for hours before they happen." He said, tapping the cracked glass.

"That doesn't even make any sense." I smirked.

“Sure it does.” He laughed, sipping his coffee.

“This is horrible coffee.” I said, gesturing towards my untouched mug.

“You’re the one who wanted to come in here.”

“Liar! *You* asked me in here!”

“Only because you bumped into me.” He mocked feeling insulted.

“You act as if it’s my fault I broke my watch.” I said solemnly.

He thought I was still playing along.

“Who knows – maybe you did. So you could get me to ask you out.” He grinned, winking.

I tried to smile back. But he was so wrong. And I felt so wrong. But Ryan’s brown eyes were safe and he was the first man to make me laugh since Logan. Or to get me to say I “went out” with him or whatever.

The next year was...fun. I went on multiple dates with him. Never picnicking though, because “ants and food don’t mix, Samantha.” We would go to the movies, and I’d endure his criticizing of nearly every scene. He made me ride all the scary roller coasters at the fair, even when I said I didn’t want to.

But he did hold my hand during them. After I cried on the last one, he won me a teddy bear.

I shouldn’t have been surprised when things got more serious. And things like “marriage” were brought up. But then I knew I had to tell him. I was sick of making my mother lie about it. Or of having to keep my old in-laws at arms length.

“Ryan, I have to tell you something.” I told him, when he was over for dinner at Logan and I’s house one night.

He nodded, plopping a grape from the bowl on the Lazy Susan into his mouth. He kept eating grapes, the whole time I was telling him about Logan. He never even appeared shocked.

“This doesn’t...change anything...?” I asked, squinting at him.

He finished chewing his 20<sup>th</sup> grape.

“No,” He finally moved from the bowl and towards me, “I love you, Samantha. I understand...and I’m not quite sure how you were able to not tell me until now...but we’ll get through it. I’m here for you.”

He grabbed my hands in his. I smiled at him. He was comforting, but he was so unaware. He’d later ask to see a picture of Logan, and I’d have to casually say I didn’t have any.

“He’s like a phantom husband of yours.” He’d whisper sometimes when he’d walk around my house.

Not insensitively, just out of mere observation.

“It’s like...he wasn’t here.” He’d pick up picture frames holding photos of my parents and I, or of my sisters, as if Logan would magically appear in one of them.

*That’s the point*, I’d think.

“I don’t like talking about him.” I’d say every time.

He’d agree, hug me, kiss my cheek, say, “I understand,” when how could he? He didn’t even know the watch was Logan’s. The watch that I still kept up in my room.

Marrying Ryan shouldn’t have been so easy. My parents saw this as an answer to their unfulfilled grandchildren dreams. My old in-laws saw it as a

betrayal, though they smiled through the ceremony. I saw it as a solution to the emptiness Logan left me.

Ryan could never fill the emptiness; only distract me from it.

"How many kids do you want?" I giggled at him, as he was getting ready for work one morning.

"Only two, no more than two of course!" Ryan laughed, tying his own tie.

"Not at least three?" I questioned nonchalantly, reaching for the watch inside my nightstand; I'd never gotten it repaired.

"No, two is nearly more than enough – say are you playing with that old thing again?" He grinned, sitting down on the bed with me.

I quickly drew the watch close to me, "Oh, just looking at the backwards hands...I like how they go that way sometimes. It's fun to watch."

He grabbed the thing out of my hands without asking.

"I like how you look at it. Like you're still angry I knocked it off your wrist that one day." He played.

"What a horrible day that was." I scrunched my nose.

He left for work at his office job, and I went to take what would be a positive pregnancy test. Then Clarissa was born. Two years later, Andy was next.

They finally filled some empty parts of me. They finally completed a woman that should have already been whole. There's nothing like loving a child. But there's nothing like seeing your spouse's features in their faces either. By the time Clarissa was seven, she was a mirror image of her father: big brown eyes with white-blond hair. Andy had my brunette hair, but was still brown-eyed like Ryan. They were insanely unique children, both aspiring to do big things.

"Momma, I wanna be an astronaut." Clarissa stated when she came home from school one evening.

"That's going to take some work." Ryan laughed, eating leftovers from the night before.

"I can do it!"

"What about you, Andy?" I smiled at him.

"I want to be a doctor someday!" He grinned.

My heart stopped in my chest, but only for a moment.

"You're going to save people?" Ryan asked.

He didn't even look at me or skip a beat. Did he not remember Logan was in medical school? Did he not get it?

"No, I don't think that's the career for you, sweetie." I said calmly.

Andy got upset, and Ryan looked like I had just stolen candy from our son. I didn't really have an explanation, so I let them all carry on having their daydream conversations that I didn't feel a part of.

Later that night, Ryan confronted me.

"What's the deal with squashing Andrew's dreams at the ripe age of 5?" he nearly laughed, "Is it because of those stupid hospital shows you've been watching?"

He didn't even remember. He didn't even remember.

And now to this day, I lay at night, every single night, next to him, next to my husband, when every night I wish it were my *husband* that lay there instead. And Ryan has no freaking clue.

He thinks that my phantom husband is nothing but a memory – stored away and only surfacing in small moments. He doesn't know Logan consumes every one of my thoughts and actions. That the years haven't dulled the memories but only made them more rich and painful. That I still pull out the watch and sleep with it next to me at night, trying to remember what it looked like on his wrist, what it felt like.

It's not anyone's fault – it's not Ryan's fault. Ryan is safe. Ryan is home – a home I moved to when my other one burned down. I love Ryan, I love him. But I don't love him nearly enough.

Is it fair to him? That I never got over Logan – not even for one second. Not when I told him, "I love you," or even when I said, "I do," for the unfortunate second time?

Is it fair to my children? That every time I look into their sweet brown eyes I desperately wish they were blue? Do I tell them that I found their father not because every other guy I dated wasn't perfect for me, but because the perfect one had died? That their father was a convenience in order for them to be made?

How could they ever understand? How could they ever see it how I did?

"Oh, Logan would have liked you." I want to tell Andy, when he shows interest in biology or laughs like I do.

I wish it were Logan having father-daughter dances with Clarissa, not Ryan. I'm very selfish. I know that. But I just can't get that one morning out of my head. It replays in my mind every day since the moment it happened.

If I had found the watch, if I had looked on the dresser, been smart enough to get on my tiptoes and look for it there – where would we be? Logan wouldn't have rushed to the hospital; he wouldn't have wound up there in a stretcher only minutes later.

We'd be sitting on our porch, talking about our three kids, Clarissa, Andy, and maybe Sophie or Matthew. They'd have his black hair, and his mesmerizing blue eyes. And Ryan would be somewhere else, unaware I even existed. Maybe he'd walk by that café, bump into me, see my wedding band, and then I'd let him go without worrying at all about the watch. Because I wouldn't even be wearing it.

It's just a stupid watch. Logan was going in for his clinicals that morning; he was rushing to them, because he forgot the stupid watch. I should have found it. I'd be sitting with Logan right now, with my perfect Logan.

"Sammie, have you seen my favorite jacket?" Ryan calls from the closet the next day.

"Don't call me that." I whisper, reaching for his jacket hanging on the doorknob.

He doesn't hear me, he never does.

"Please don't rush." I say, as he gives me a peck goodbye.

I do love him. I do. But he'll never be Logan. He'll never build me a white picket fence, and he'll never get the watch to work correctly again.

"These hands will never go forward, it seems." He sighs every time he works on it.

"Good." I close my eyes and whisper back each time, knowing full well it would be so much easier if they did.