

Where Faith Begins

Rhylee wasn't one to believe in anything, least of all in God. Her parents had always insisted that He would heal her broken heart. At seventeen, she had learned the hard way life just was not fair. There was a time when her parents were everything she thought life could be happy and full of love. They were the picture of perfection. Her mom was gentle and patient, and her dad was strong and brave. He was a police officer, a protector in every sense. Rhylee had always admired him, the way he made everyone feel safe. Gathered around the dinner table at home, they used to share stories, enjoying meals that felt warm and steeped in love. Rhylee had always assumed these moments were everlasting, a happiness that wouldn't fade. Yet, the unimaginable occurred. One night, Mike returned home, and his demeanor changed, carrying a weight on his shoulders. The stress began to erode their marriage gradually, and before long, the idyllic life they had pieced together started to crumble. Rhylee was at a loss. Why couldn't they mend what was broken? Wasn't the love they shared sufficient?

Nevertheless, things could not have been easier for her, it was two days after realizing that her parents were filing for divorce. The phone rang in the kitchen while Rhylee was arguing with her mom about her going to a party. When Monica, Rhylee's mother took the phone to answer, all that Rhylee heard was,

"Yes, this is Monica speaking," the silence that followed was louder than any words ever could. Rhylee was too absorbed in her own anger to notice the weight in her mother's voice.

"Your father—" Monica started, her voice trembling like a fragile thread about to snap. But the words caught in her throat, and though they were too heavy to escape. Finally, she forced them out, her voice breaking. "He's gone, He's dead."

Rhylee's world split in half, leaving only a cold emptiness behind. The floor felt like it disappeared beneath Rhylee's feet. Her father was gone, shot on duty during a routine traffic stop. The world that once made so much sense had shattered along with it, her sense of purpose. Thinking it would help she snuck out to the party anyway. In her numbness, she did what any rebellious teenager might do, she snuck out to the party anyway. There was underage drinking, and soon the police arrived, to break it up. Everyone fled, leaving Rhylee standing there, drunk, a sharp reminder of her father's death. Seeing the cops reminded Rhylee of her dad and how he was shot, trying to protect someone who never asked to be saved. When the officers found her, they brought her home, the reality of her actions crashing down on her like a wave. Monica's face was stormy with anger, disappointment, and fear as the officers handed Rhylee over to her. The words came fast and sharp, cutting through the thick fog in Rhylee's head.

"What is wrong with you?" Monica yelled, while her voice was trembling. "Do you have any idea what you've done? Do you even care about how much we've been through? How much I've been through?"

Rhylee flinched at her mother's tone but didn't respond. She stared at the floor, her vision blurring as the alcohol swirled in her head. The officers gave Monica a stern warning about the dangers of underage drinking before leaving, her mind was still trapped in the fog of grief and anger, as the reality of her father's death slowly sank in.

Her grades slipped. Not that she cared. School had never been important to her, not after everything had fallen apart. Why bother? Nothing she did mattered anymore, so she stopped trying. Rhylee found refuge in her friends, Melanie and Natalie, who did not care about her problems they just wanted to have fun. This trio often skipped school, smoked, drank, and made reckless decisions, searching for an escape from their broken lives. Melanie was wild, daring,

always pushing the limits, while Natalie was more cautious but still caught up in the chaos. They were the kind of friends who made Rhylee feel like she belonged, even if it was in all the wrong ways. They did not ask questions about her dad or her mom they just wanted to live in the moment, pretending nothing mattered. Every morning, Rhylee would drag herself out of bed, the weight of the world on her shoulders, not knowing how to fix any of it. But the consequences caught up to them. Rhylee was skipping classes more often than not, failing assignments, and getting caught in petty arguments. The principal called her mom more than once, and the threats of expulsion became real.

Summer arrived, and Rhylee locked herself in her room, shutting out the world. Her mother tried to help, but Rhylee would not let her in. They fought more often, Rhylee's anger and sadness spilling out in cruel words. Her relationship with her mother, once close, now felt strained, like an old rope about to snap.

One morning, when Rhylee emerged from her self-imposed isolation, she found an official-looking letter on the kitchen counter. Monica had opened it. Rhylee didn't need to read the whole thing to know what it was. Her mother had signed her up for a Christian summer camp far away from home, away from everything Rhylee knew. The idea of it made Rhylee's blood boil. A Christian camp? She had no faith, no interest in religion, and had no desire to spend a summer with a group of strangers who thought that prayer and a bit of faith could solve everything. Her mother had given up trying to reason with her. She was sending her away. Yet, the more she looked at it, the more she understood that nothing was waiting for her back home.

The day came Rhylee was on the car ride to camp. Rhylee sat in silence. Her mother said nothing. They had nothing left to say to each other. Rhylee fell asleep as the quietness was calming to her. The silence was then broken by Monica's voice in prayer, "Dear God, please help

my daughter recognize your righteousness, please help her understand that even though there are bad times you are still there for her and that you have something better for her.” Rhylee was listening and her thoughts came, “How can she still have faith, God must not love her if He’s letting her go through all of this.” “If He’s so powerful like they say, how come He let all of this happen?”

When they arrived at camp she noticed a sign before entering saying, “*Welcome to Horizon of Grace, Where Faith Begins.*” Rhylee noticed when she entered the camp how peaceful it was. The air smelled fresh, pine trees towering above her like silent witnesses to the world’s problems. She did not like the place, for everything was so full of hope, of joy. She could not relate to them at all. She then got an assigned student to show the camp around. That’s when she met Florina. She was tall, brunette, and with blue eyes. Florina was everything Rhylee wasn’t, bright, calm, and impossibly kind. She was also a strong believer in Jesus Christ. The first time they talked was not the best, as Rhylee thought her mother had talked to Florina about her, but Florina did not push Rhylee to believe in anything; she simply listened. She did not try to fix her like her parents tried to, neither force her into religion.

Florina showed up, day after day, with patience that slowly started to crack through Rhylee’s defenses. Throughout the summer, Rhylee’s walls began to dissolve, piece by piece. Florina shared her own story about how she had once felt lost too. Both of her parents had died in a car accident when she was fourteen. She said she had always been a Christian but after the incident happened she questioned whether God was really there for her or not. She then quoted,

“Sometimes God allows hard things to happen because He has something better in mind. It’s about trusting that He sees the bigger picture.”

She had also said to Rhylee, “God doesn’t promise we won’t face pain,” Florina said softly. “But He promises to be with us in it, we’re never alone,” She said with a promising smile.

She then remembered her mom's words in prayer. And she could now recognize God’s work on her path to a true belief in God.

The camp became a place of quiet healing, and slowly, she started to let go of her grief. She began to see that she wasn’t alone and that even in her darkest moments, God had been there, waiting for her to turn toward Him.

The end of the summer came, and Rhylee didn’t have all the answers. She still missed her dad, still sad, but she was not the same girl who had arrived. Rhylee returned home with a new sense of purpose. She didn't make perfect decisions every day, but she no longer ran from her emotions. She had learned to face them with grace, not as a perfect believer, but as someone willing to believe. Her relationship with her mother began to heal, too. They started talking more, honestly, about their pain, their love, and their fears. It was not easy, but for the first time in a long time, Rhylee believed things could get better. She reached out to Melanie and Natalie, but this time, she set boundaries. She knew she could not keep walking down the same path, surrounded by people who didn't care about their future.

Rhylee wasn't saved in a single moment. It was more like a slow awakening, a steady realization that maybe the world did not have to be all darkness.

She wasn't lost; not anymore. She had Florina’s friendship, her mom, her faith, and most importantly, she had God. Deep down in her heart, she knew God would always be with her, and she would glorify him through everything.

Word Count: 1690

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