



The man that unlearned
how to say I love you
Maria Martins

Part I-

Once upon a time, there was a man that didn't know how to love anymore.

The signal rings, the sound that most of all weren't missing, they are coming back from summer vacation. Ryan comes with a smile in his face, white like the clouds, as always. He greets his friends with a high five each. He hugs some of them and tell them about his vacation, they say something funny and he laughs hard. He sees his girlfriend and everything stops, the attention is hers now. It's Sammy, the prettiest and funniest girl in high school. His brown hair mixes with her blonde hair in a hug full of missing. He loves Sam so much.

Ryan is a normal teenager, he goes to class and study, although his mind is always on the field. All he thinks about is his football championship, he's not the leader but everyone treats him as he was. Ryan always have company, since everybody wants to get close to someone who makes everyone laugh. He is also very respectful. He treats Sammy as she was a princess and he thinks everyone should treat their girlfriends, or any girl this way. That's what makes him so special and beloved.

Having breakfast, going to class, girlfriend, training, partying... This routine repeated daily, the same as Ryan, who is almost always cool and affective. Until the day that changed his life upside down. An episode that changed 16 years' old Ryan everyone knew.

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Part II-

It's been 3 months now. Ryan is not the same. After the worst day of his life, he became another person, at least that is what it looked for whomever see outside. He is still an sports person, but all that expression and love he used to spread, gone. His girlfriend? Sammy? He broke up with her. He didn't even accepted being consoled by her. He just wanted to be alone. Nobody have a clue about what is passing in Ryan's mind.

Ryan is always doing something, normally reading or drawing. He discovered that he likes doing this activities by his pain. So, he grabbed that to never let go. He only draws to unburden, that's what he hides from himself but it can be seen clearly. He's always finding ways to stop thinking about what he passed through in that night months ago.

His always avoiding situations that make him feel pressured, especially when the theme is love. He hasn't dated anyone else after Sammy. He misses her, but his pain and his paranoid don't let him stay with her. It seems like he's avoiding love. When the accident happened he disappeared from school per some days, that was when he discovered what would make him feel better.

His father have been suffering a lot thanks to the "new Ryan". They had an affectionate and intimate relationship, however now it is more distant than it has ever been. How could Ryan show his feelings again as he once showed? He could never say "I love you" another time.

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Part III-

It's been 5 years since that happened, I'm 21 years old now and everybody says I'm different. They say I'm not like the person I was before the tragedy. Now I'm bigger, I'm in college, I'm definitely taller, I have a beard, that's something Ryan didn't use to have. So, yes, of course I'm not like the 16 years old, Ryan child was. Although I know they're not talking about my appearance, I'm pretty sure is about how I used to treat people, to demonstrate my feelings... If

there's something I hate more than talking about how I feel, I don't know yet, not even ketchup in pizza is worse. But if you want to know that bad...

It was raining outside. The night had already fallen. The moon was waxing crescent, so it was darker than normal. Mary, my mother, had to go to the drugstore. I wouldn't let her go alone and I wanted to show her I was a good driver. So I drove her - the worst decision in my life. We stopped at the red light. I remember exactly, at the moment we were listening to a music she loved, it's called *Dog Days Are Over*, she was singing and I was laughing, she was so happy that I felt it was a good moment to look at her and say: "I love you mom, so much." I didn't know that was the last time, or even the last person I'd say that.

A car lost control because of the slipping floor and crashed our car in the front. As a weak person would do, I passed out in the exact time we got hit. I couldn't see anything. When I woke up again, the world was upside down, for real. I felt a terrible headache. I wasn't sure what was happening. Suddenly, I looked at my mother I recovered my sanity. I remembered singing, saying I love you, then the car coming and I was sure the car had overturned. I took her out of the car and then I saw her forehead, it was bleeding- as soon as I saw it I knew it. She didn't awake. She wasn't breathing. I took her hand and tried to listen to her heart beats. It wasn't beating anymore. Mine, however was. That wasn't fair.

My mom, one of the best people I've ever known was dead, because of me. She was who I talked per hours, discussed, asked for advices. Maybe if I didn't want to show her I knew how to drive, if I let my father drive her, she would be alive now. Should I have told I love her? Was it because of what I said that the accident happened? It is all my fault.

Now, you may not understand, but I have the feeling that everybody that I say I love you or demonstrate my feelings would die, like my mom did. I hate that I had to pass through that. I don't think it's fair. My mother was a wonderful person, she deserved to be alive way more than me.

Than, the consequences came. I haven't said "I love you" to someone for a while. It is sad that I can't show my feelings as I once could. I feel failed. I have dated some girls, but it never last more than a month or two, I can't open myself for real, or express what I feel. I hate that.

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Part IV -

It was a normal day in college. At morning he had physics, which he hates and then maths and philosophy. He entered in the room and there was a teacher that definitely wasn't his physics teacher, all he heard was the word love. *Whaaat??* A teacher in his physics class talking about love, what is happening? Was that a nightmare or a dream? He couldn't tell. He glanced around and when he was turning around to see if he was in the wrong class the teacher said:

- Hey boy, what is your name?

Ryan looked around. He pointed at himself, as if he was asking "*are you talking to me?*". The teacher nods affirmative.

- Hi? I'm Ryan. Is this the physics class? - He said with a lowered eyebrows and squeezed eyes, confused.

- Good morning Ryan, today you don't have physics class. - Ryan smile without showing his teeth. - I'm teaching about love today. Physic about love. That can actually be the name of my class. Now you can have a sit, please.

Alright- Ryan thinks. *A teacher teaching about love? For real?* What he wasn't expecting was that this class would change his life. All the time the teacher stared at Ryan's eyes, as if he knew what passes in his head. The teacher was talking about enjoying your life, looking at people,

feeling the nature, the people, the energy, the sun, absorb the weather. All those things we never stop to look and think about, but it meant something. The teacher told Ryan to wait for him before he goes to the other classes and told him:

- Your name is Ryan, right? I am Leo Buscaglia. I could see you're passing through some bad things, you seem close, unexpressive, while everyone was talking and participating. I have this, how can I say? "Gift"?

Ryan stared Leo and thought if it was worth it to share his life with that man. He never talks about his problems with anyone. What else could he lose? That man seems to have a lot of knowledge to give. Buscaglia's eyes were the most honest he had ever seen.

- I have problems on showing my real feelings. Your class made me think about declaring my love again, as I once could, something I prohibited myself to think.

After that, Ryan told Buscaglia his story. The car accident, what he felt and what he had passed in the last 5 years. They talked for a long time and only one conversation was able to start changing his perspective of life.

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Ryan was looking through the window, that perfect sunset, after a beautiful sunny day, which he loves. The orange, pink sky mirrored in his green eyes. Besides the view, there was a hot coffee on the table, how could he be more grateful? He reflected about his life, that moment. All he felt was gratitude, for being alive, for being able to see that perfect landscape, something that he didn't feel for many years. He is searching that old Ryan person inside him, because he wants to change.

Suddenly, he decided to go to his father's house to have dinner with him. Ryan is in college which is in another city. So he traveled to Anthony's home, it's an hour travel, it's very near. They ordered Japanese Food, his favorite. They talked a lot, even about that wonderful teacher.

When he was leaving he thought about what the teacher had said: "tell your loved ones you love them", "don't wait for tomorrow to declare your love". He decided to say something. The last time he expressed his love by saying was in the car, five years ago. When he looked at his mom smiling and told her:

- Mommy, I love you so much.

Ryan hugged his dad, said goodbye and when he was at the door he smiled and said:

- Daddy, you know what? I really like you. - his dad knew that Ryan loved him, but hearing him saying it was way more precious.

Ryan left and just saw at a glance, tears in his dad's face.