

Saying Hello

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Characters from Our Chemical Hearts by Krystal Sutherland

“Sometimes I lie here and think about the world without me. Or how dark and depressing it is, all the hatred. Everyone’s greedy and lying.” Henry turned his head to see her, staring up at the stars and face blank of expression. He turned to the night sky as well, looking around at all the small white dots so far away from them. They’re staring into the past when they stargaze, that’s what Grace had said the first time they had been here.

“I think there’s plenty of beautiful things in the world.” He whispered. His tone was soft and secretive, drowned in affection and spit out to sit between them in the silence.

“Yeah? Like what, Henry Page?” They both stared upwards, into the darkness surrounding Earth.

“The way the sky turns different colours when the sun rises, the sound of leaves crunching underneath my feet. The smell after it rains. The excitement I used to feel at the first snow of the Winter, rushing to get all bundled up so I could go outside. The way I can feel the emotions of others, not just watch it happen. How my heart pounds when I run after you. The feeling of tears drying on my face. The moments like these ones, when I’m alone with you, and it’s not you replacing a dead man. When I get to see you being you, the true you. Not the fake person you pretend to be.” His voice lowers for the last sentence, his voice cracking on the last word. They bask in the silence, the rest of the world slowly growing louder, overpowering their lonely voices and thoughts.

“What would you know about wearing a mask?”

“I’ve learned a lot. Watching you teaches me plenty.” The conversation went flat, mellow and putty in their hands as they work, muscles tensing, brains thinking. Lungs breathing. Lips moving.

“Why would you spend so much time on me, if you know I’m a poison?”

“Because sometimes, beauty is worth the pain. I’ll be burnt to a pile of ash before I’d leave you.”

“You’re a reckless idiot, then.”

“Another lick of flames.”

“There’s always a flame, Henry. You’re the one who chooses to remain ash.” She sits up slowly, turning and looking down at him. When they make eye contact, she smiles.

“I haven’t ran in some time now.” Henry sits up too, his hand connecting with hers on the edge of the wooden planks. He thinks back to the time he found her, alone on the track, running and beating her leg with the cane to prevent her body from healing.

“So you’re saying goodbye, for real this time?”

“No. Not a goodbye.” She frowns, slipping her feet into the water.

“Then is it a hello?” She smiles, her lips splitting to reveal her warm smile, a smile only Henry gets to see.

“Yeah, it’s a hello.” Henry smiles too, features soft and his warm brown eyes watching her as she traces her feet in circles in the water. His hands slip into hers, fingers intertwined.