

Silent Summers

Tay Gallagher

My name is Alan Summers, but people call me Silent. Why? Because I've never said a word in my life. Being mute's a difficult struggle, especially when you're sixteen. I came to realize there are two types of voices, external and internal. People with external voices are the lucky ones. They can say whatever they want. While people limited with only internal voices like mine, are less fortunate. Sometimes I think my life is a window between me and the people around me. Only it's one of those police station one-way windows. I watch as people blissfully pass. No matter how hard I try, I can't get someone to understand me.

Even as a baby I couldn't make a sound, not even a babble. Doctors tried to figure out why. My parents worried it was because of some unknown disability. Some of my teachers thought I was pretending, and my peers just label me "retarded". I'm none of those things. Just because I can't speak doesn't mean I'm brain-dead. Since I don't have many friends to hang out with, I spend my time reading books: classic novels, history, science, philosophy, and sometimes a comic. You name it, I read it. Though I want to share what I have read with people with similar interests, my condition makes me feel like I'm in a bank vault, containing vast knowledge to share yet I can't even crack the code.

When I learned how to write, my parents bought me a notebook to communicate with them and others. Whenever I wrote to communicate with kids my age, they just get uncomfortable and leave. I still keep the notebook with me, but only for my parents and teachers to understand me. Summer break's even worse. Other kids would go play in the pool, go to sunny places, or spend a few weeks at a camp with their friends. But for me, I usually go to the park and read a book, in silence. I've been doing that every summer for six years now, same old routine and nothing changes. Until now.

I'm at my usual spot in the park, under the shade of the tallest tree reading *Treasure Island*. A radiant voice catches my attention.

"Hello." I look up from where I'm sitting. I'd seen cute girls before, but she's one of the few who don't need to overpaint their decent-looking faces to feel beautiful. Her red hair fell to her shoulders like a waterfall pouring autumn leaves, her freckles are sprinkled brown sugar, and her smile is so genuine that it might cause me to believe anything she would say.

"Is this seat taken?" she asks. I shake my head, not sure if it's to answer her question or in disbelief that a cute girl wants to sit next to me. She sat down next to me, not caring that she barely knows me.

"I couldn't help noticing you're reading *Treasure Island*. Usually it's *Harry Potter* or *Hunger Games* that other kids read. I'm more into the classics myself. Oh, sorry, what's the matter with me? Here I am, a complete stranger, gabbing away. My name's Lucille. What's yours?"

Oh, geez, here we go. Time to get the notebook and get this over with. I pull it out of my backpack and begin to write down my name, having someone to talk to was great while it lasted. I show her what I wrote.

“*Alan, but people call me Silent.*” Lucille reads “Silent? That’s a cool nickname, it makes you sound mysterious.”

My jaw drops. Am I dreaming right now?

“So, Silent, what kind of books do you like to read? Besides *Treasure Island*.”

I scribble down a quick list of genres and show it to her.

“Oh! History? Cool. Can’t say I’m a history buff, but I dabble a little here and there. Like, did you know that it was a couple of bike mechanics that invented the airplane? I mean I know who they are I just can’t quite place their names.”

The Wright Brothers?

“Wright Brothers! That’s who. I think it’s really incredible that...”

Lucille just keeps talking, changing the subject every two minutes. She talked about how she likes living here because of the weather, which led her to talk about how the weather here was different from the weather back East, which led to talking about where she’s from and how she likes to travel, which led her to discuss traveling in general. She even brought up how her dad is starting a business here. All she did was talk and change topics. It didn’t bother me. I was enjoying her company.

“... And there was this one time where my friend Judy took one of those free samples, you know those little snacks you get at Costco? Anyway, after she took it, her face swelled like a balloon. It turned out the snack had nuts in it, she’s allergic to them. But she came prepared and had her epipen with her. I think it’s important to be prepared and... Am I doing that thing again where I talk for hours and hours? Sorry, sometimes I don’t know when to stop. I hope I’m not boring you.”

No, I don’t mind.

“Oh, that’s good.” Lucille turns her head away and looks as though she wants to ask me something but not sure how to do it.

“So... I know we just met but I’m curious. How come you don’t talk?”

After getting over the short moment of hesitation, I wrote *It's a long story*. She nods.

"Maybe, you can tell me about it sometime." Lucille said.

I nod and write *Any plans for the weekend?*

"Nah, it's been kind of a boring summer. Hey, we should hang out sometime. That way we both don't have to have a lame summer." I nod.

"There's an ice cream parlor that I wanna check out. Wanna go there on Saturday?" Her invitation to join her for ice cream took me by surprise, but I manage to write down my answer.

Sure, what time?

"Maybe at 2?"

Sounds perfect.

"Great, I'll see you then. It was very nice to meet you, Silent." Lucille gets up and walks away to resume the rest of her day. She looks back to smile at me, as though she was leaving me something to remember her by. I tried to get back to reading, but I just couldn't focus on the words. All I could think about was Lucille, the beautiful stranger who became my friend.

Because of Lucille, I never felt alone. We did everything together: chill at the park, went to the movies, even trekked on hikes. Each day I spent with her, my feelings for her grew like an ever-raging California wildfire in my heart. She did most of the talking - about her day, her friends, the time she went to the dentist. Her breathless talking became her most endearing quality. I know now that our time together would last forever. That might sound like a childish notion garnished with sappy sentiment, but that's how I feel about her.

The day before school starts, I've decided to tell Lucille how I feel about her. I intend to do so with my voice. I'd been practicing for a couple weeks to sound out the three very important words. Staring at the mirror and mouthing out the words, like I'm my own vocal coach, no surprise that I can't get a voice to go with my words. I thought about writing my confession in my notebook and showing it to Lucille, that would help get my point across. But writing words on paper doesn't carry the impact and importance of confessing your love to someone. For Lucille to really know how important she is to me, she needs to *hear* it from me. I'm gonna tell her my feelings, even if I have to force them out.

I wait for Lucille under the tree where we first met, pacing, anxiety escalating in every step. As I turn around to repeat the pattern, she comes walking into my view. She's beautiful as ever, but on her elegant face was a look of sadness. When Lucille walks up I wave to her in the

similar fashion of a shy little kid. She looks up, putting on a smile that said I'm-happy-to-see-you-but-still-miserable-inside.

“Hi, Silent.”

We sat down. *What's wrong?*

“Oh, it's nothing really.”

C'mon you can tell me.

She looks at me but then looks away. She sighs and looks back at me.

“I, I'm... moving.”

My heart fell like a chandelier, it's chain cut from its canopy and falling to break onto a sewer grate.

“My dad's store's going out of business, and we have to move back. He got his old job back. I don't want to move. I like it here. I was even looking forward to school. But we're moving.”

I shake my head. My writing coming out as a discombobulated mess from my shock-induced quivering hand.

Couldn't your dad find a job here?

“We tried, but there were no job openings. That's when he asked his old boss for his job.”

I keep shaking my head and closing my eyes. This has got to be nightmare, it has to be. I don't want Lucille to leave. She's the best friend I ever had. The thought of her leaving, and me being left alone again, is just too hard for me to handle. Then I feel soft touch on my shoulder, I open my eyes and look over to see Lucille. She gives an understanding smile and said.

“I'm sorry. This town is amazing, and the best part of it all was spending time with you. You gave me the best summer I could've asked for. I know I can get carried away when I talk about who knows what, but I'm happy to have a friend who doesn't mind it at all.”

Then she does something that's unexpected, she hugs me and whispers.

“I hope you find your voice, Alan.”

Alan; no one except my parents called me by my actual name before. And when Lucille said my name, it's as though she's longed to call me by it. I hug her back and wished that it could just be this moment forever. Then she lets go of me and gets up.

"I gotta go, those boxes aren't gonna pack themselves." As she walks away I get up from my spot and grab her hand. She looks back to see her hand being held in mine, then at me with curiosity.

I hold up my index finger, I begin to try to get my voice to come out. My eyes close, my mouth opens, but nothing. Are you kidding me?! I'm not giving up, not this time. I try again but no voice, again.

"Alan, are you okay?" Lucille asks with concern.

I nod and point at my throat, telling her I'm trying to talk.

"You're trying to tell me something?"

I nod again.

"Oh, why not write it down?"

I shake my head and point at my throat again with emphasis.

"You. You're wanting to 'talk' to me?"

I nod once more and try to get a word out, but still nothing. I close my eyes again and tried harder, forcing a sound to come out. I try to talk again but no sound. I feel red in the face, not only from the effort to get a voice out, but with the growing frustration of not expressing myself to the girl I love.

"It's okay, Alan, just write what you're wanting to tell me. I don't want you to hurt yourself."

I shake my head and close my eyes again to get a voice out, determined this time. I have to do this, I need to tell Lucille before she moves away, before I am left alone and... *Come on, say something, anything, just anything.*

Author Bio:

Anthony Gallagher is currently living in St. George, Utah as a student at Dixie State University. He was born in Colorado and moved around in the Western States. He served an LDS mission to Kentucky. Anthony has been a writer since he was fourteen. He works for his parents' wilderness therapy program.