

NINETEEN MINUTES

In nineteen minutes, you can mow the front lawn; color your hair; watch a third of a hockey game. In nineteen minutes, you can bake scones or get a tooth filled by a dentist; you can fold laundry for a family of five.

Nineteen minutes is how long it took the Tennessee Titans to sell out of tickets to the playoffs. It's the amount of time it takes to listen to the Yes song Close to the Edge. It's the length of a sitcom, minus the commercials. It's the driving distance from the Vermont border to the town of Sterling, NH.

In nineteen minutes, you can order a pizza and get it delivered. You can read a story to a child or have your oil changed. You can walk two miles. You can sew a hem.

In nineteen minutes, you can stop the world; or you can just jump off it.

In nineteen minutes, you can get revenge.

The road outside East Gate high was in utter pandemonium.

Car horns, loud music, pelting rain, chattering school kids and their dazed school teachers could be heard from miles back. Despite the weather, the kids were excited, grateful and praising God for another weekend off from school. It was going to be another weekend for shopping, new TV episodes and of course another weekend of those; 'yes, I've done my homework' lies.

In the center of all this chaos was an East Gate outcast: Tiffany Thomson – who was already having a bad enough day without the typical English weather there to make it worse. Tiffany Thomson had had missed her lunch (the only day they sold chips in the canteen) because of a detention; she was already regretting throwing her alarm clock out of the window just the day before for it not working. But that wasn't just it - her form tutor, who she loathed, had made her take off her make up. All day she had had to walk around with her biggest impurity on display: her horrid acne.

Beside her was Ashley Wilson, possibly one of the most popular girls attending East Gate high, also Tiffany's best friend of ten years. Ashley Wilson was a social outcast just like Tiffany not even a year before, but after she had appeared on an after school advert broadcasted all around Britain, she had bulletted up East Gate's hierarchy of importance.

Like always, brown haired Ashley was surrounded by her flock of followers; her followers would do anything in the blink of one of Ashley's glittering brown eyes.

Tiffany Thomson, now shivering and shifting from foot to foot, hauled up her Art textbook and held it over her head as a failed attempt at an umbrella placement.

A million thoughts were rummaging around in her mind: how was she ever going to wake up for school on time, avoiding a detention, without an alarm clock? How long would it take for the bus to come? Why had she not yet told Ashley that she didn't want to go to the local park with her now that it was showering with rain?

Tiffany caught Ashley's hypnotizing brown eyes and threw her a false smile. She knew there was no way that she would ever have the guts to tell Ashley she didn't want to do something. That was exactly Tiffany's problem: she never had the power to say no.

"Something wrong?" The high pitched, harmonized voice was what brought Tiffany out of her trance of thoughts.

"No." She lied. "I'm fine. Don't mind me."

Ashley Wilson studied her best friend with wide brown eyes, and, deciding she couldn't care less, turned back to her flock her followers. Tiffany, now feeling as if a hundred grams of pressure had been lifted off of her shoulders; broke out of her tense position.

A small Nissan car at that moment came zooming around the corner and Tiffany, thinking on the ball, stood back. She couldn't help but suppress a small laugh as a puddle of water splattered over a group of Year Eight children who each let out high pitched squeals.

The rain picked up, and thinking purely on instinct, Tiffany tapped Ashley's back.

"Ashley..." She blinked warily, "do you still think it's sensible for us to go to a park in this weather?"

"No, the girls and I were just discussing that." Ashley replied, gesturing towards her pack of followers. "We're going to get a bus into London instead."

Tiffany continued to stare at Ashley with the fake smile she had conjured up earlier. She would just wait, she decided. She would just wait for Ashley to jump up and say; 'only kidding'. Then she would laugh along although she didn't think it was funny, and then wait for Ashley to tell her that she could go home.

"What's funny?" Ashley asked, confused.

"Excuse me?"

"Why are you laughing?"

Tiffany, who didn't even realize that she had started laughing, gave a quick response. "I'm laughing at my life." Ashley remained quiet. "I think I could win the prize for being the most unlucky person."

Ashley remained quiet. Tiffany removed her Art book from covering her head in anger and allowed the rain to dribble down her face.

"Ashley, I told my parents I was going to a park!"

"Yeah, but we can't go to a park in this rain." Tiffany opened and closed her mouth in silence like a fish, considering what to say next. She couldn't even think about what to say next. All she knew is that she wanted to grab Ashley, shake her, and ask her what she was doing with her life.

"Don't you remember the last time I lied to my parents?" Tiffany spat abrasively, glaring down at the girl in pigtails that stood before her. "I'm in Year Ten now, I'm an adult! I don't want to lie to my parents anymore."

As Tiffany rounded up her sentence, another small car came twirling around the corner, it zoomed down the street at full speed in hope to beat the traffic lights and as it passed it squirted a water puddle against Tiffany's face.

Ashley, who had moved back in time, threw herself into a flurry of laughter.

Tiffany decided to take three breaths in and three breaths out. It was exactly how she had seen it on Oprah; 'how to deal with stresses'. Ashley, her 'stress' standing opposite her, continued to laugh.

"Something funny...?" Tiffany spluttered through the rain. Ashley Wilson continued to laugh and now that her pack of followers had seen her they had decided to laugh a long.

Tiffany urged herself not to allow herself to cry, not just about the group of people laughing at her (one member supposedly her best friend), but about her terrible, terrible day. Instead of crying, her sadness converted into anger – and quick.

"Do you want to know what I find funny?" Tiffany insisted, waiting Ashley's full attention, but Ashley continued to laugh. "I think your life is funny. You go out, roam the streets, do badly in tests and expect that to get you somewhere in life?"

Now, nobody was laughing.

"Calm down Tiffany."

"Don't tell me the calm down..." Tiffany breathed coldly, staring solidly at Ashley who was staring back; neither girl wanting the gaze to break.

"Look, you need to learn to stop being so boring." Ashley said.

Tiffany contemplated how to retort to Ashley's remark, and as she wondered, she thought of the past year and how she and Ashley's relationship had been damaged.

Why had peer pressure come and grabbed everyone it could in its grasp?

Still taking deep breaths, Tiffany decided that she had had enough.

"I'm going home." She said; her voice nothing more than a squeak. And then she took off - her legs now doing all her thinking for her. She belted onto the road and ran through it at full pace, hoping to reach the bus top she needed on the opposite side quickly and hoping to get away from Ashley as soon as possible.

And Ashley remembers the scene exactly how she saw it: she remembers Tiffany running away from her in disgust, as if she was some kind of vermin. She remembers Tiffany bulleting through the busy road... she remembers Tiffany slipping; all heads turning.

She remembers the number nineteen bus zooming around the corner; battling the rain. She remembers the fear in Tiffany's eyes as the bus came towards her. She remembers Tiffany's cry, her scream, before all the lights in her world turned off.

She remembers the funeral.

How could she forget the funeral when that is what she sees every night in her nightmares?

She remembers Tiffany's birthday. Tiffany's birthday was only a week after the tragedy. Her and Tiffany planned to have a sleepover. She remembers crying herself to sleep the night before, thinking it was her fault, wondering if it was right to wish herself dead just to be with Tiffany.

She remembers the text message she received at nineteen minutes past midnight, the midnight which marked the official beginning of what would have been Tiffany's fifteenth year on earth. She remembers staring down at the text message in horror; clutching her phone in shivering hands of repulsion:

Guess whose back!

Did you miss me?

Love, Tiff.