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Clover

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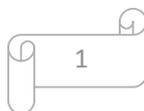


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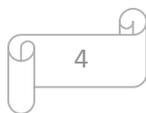
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“I couldn’t see your crossed fingers.
They were there the whole time, hidden behind your back.”
-Eris Wright

1

Some Spilled Coffee



Some Spilled Coffee

“With each new day the sun sheds light on a new idea. With each wrong turn the compass spins for a larger map. And with each broken heart, a new piece of armor is forged.”

I’m on the corner outside an apartment my family owns on the Upper West Side of Manhattan. My parents decided to let me borrow the apartment for the weekend. My best friend and I have just graduated from college and are looking to just hang out and enjoy a nice get-away.

It’s about eight o’clock at night, it’s fairly breezy for a summer night, and as I look up the street on the corner of 90th and Columbus Avenue, there’s a herd of yellow cabs coming in my direction. I hold out my right arm and flag one of the leaders of the herd.

“Christopher Street, please.”

“Okay sir,” says the cab driver as he clicks on the meter.

I shut the door and stare out the window at the city while we drive downtown. There’s tons of amazing Italian and Spanish restaurants, a few pubs peppered throughout, and random clusters of young people like myself dressed to impress on this Friday evening. At one of the red lights I look out at a girl beautifully dressed waving down cabs that seem to be nearly crashing into each

other just to stop for her, and I sit and wonder about what interesting experiences she'll have this evening. The light turns green and we're back to cutting through traffic, swerving left and right, holding on to dear life it seems. My cab driver's speedy and reckless driving makes everything outside seem to blend together into a blur of orange, red, green, and black lines. All of which swivel back into focus at each halt at a red light, giving view to a new piece of the city.

At the next stop we make, I peek out the window to check to see the street number and I see we are at 34th street. My cell phone lights up from a text from my best friend Brandon.

“Hey Eris, where are you I just got to Christopher Street.”

“I'm in the cab and I should be there soon, I'm driving past the 20's now.”

“Okay, we'll be at the Starbucks on the corner.”

“Cool, see you in a bit.”

~o~

I instruct the cab to stop right in front of the Starbucks and through the window I see my friend sitting at a table reading a magazine.

“Okay sir that will be 15.70.”

“Here's a twenty, and keep the change bro. Have a good night.”

“Thank you sir, you too.”

The cab speeds off as I wave at my friend inside, who when he spots me rises from his seat to greet me. He and I are very different yet we fit together like a perfect puzzle. His name is Brandon Roots. I've known him since we were in the seventh grade. He's a mix of black and white, can look to be almost any ethnicity, and is very well built. He's about 5'10, a few inches taller than me, and is quite handsome. I can't take him anywhere without people drooling over him.

What makes our friendship work most is the fact that we are total opposites. I'm more of the cautious, pessimistic, what-if, sort of person, while he is the more optimistic, see the good in everything sort of person. Sometimes it frustrates me because I always want him to see my side, but he helps to maintain balance.

I push open the door and I'm immediately hit with smells of freshly brewed coffee. There's calm music in the background accompanied by the soft chitter-chatter of the seated customers. I walk over to Brandon and give him the biggest hug. He as usual goes over board and picks me up from my waist, squeezing me to the point where I'm practically out of breath.

“N-nice to see you too...”

“I miss you and your lil' self!”

“B-Brandon, I-I can't breathe!”

“Oh sorry,” he says as he lets me go and we take our seats. “Here this is for you, your favorite, Caramel Macchiato.”

“Aw, thanks, I’ve been craving this all day. So, what’s the plan for tonight,” I question taking a cautious sip.

“I figured we get some pizza at that place on West Fourth, walk by the water, and then the poetry reading at the Puerto Rican Lounge doesn’t start till ten thirty, so we should be able to make it.”

“Sounds good to me you want to start walking?”

“Yea let’s go I think those older guys smiling at us want our attention.”

“Ew! Let’s go,” I say laughing, Caramel Macchiato in hand

~o~

Upon exiting the Starbucks there’s a small group of boys talking in Spanish about a club they are planning to go to once eleven o’clock hits. They were dressed in hip, trendy, outfits, and are prettier than most girls. As Brandon and I are passing them they stop talking and look at him with lustful admiration, while they all give me the look of death and roll their eyes.

“Talk about being bipolar.” I say to Brandon.

“Haha, yea they went from ooh to ugh in five seconds,” he says.

“I’m sorry I hope I’m not messing up your game,” I say making quotes with my fingers.

“Of course not, their just jealous hun. Why do you think we’re friends, but if you were ugly then...” he says covering his face mischievously.

“Wow really shallow.”

“Haha just kidding.”

“Yea, yea.”

Walking down Christopher Street to West Fourth is pretty interesting. It’s like a game of who can stare at who the longest before someone breaks and looks away. Brandon and I pass by the famous Stonewall and a few other bars along the way, and we laugh at how every group of boys that pass us is chatty then silent as they walk by, chatty, then silent, chatty, then silent. It’s ridiculous but we usually pay no mind. Coming to the corner, we start to pass a few restaurants, a gay pride souvenir store, and then an enormous sex store. The mannequin in the window is of a male and a female. Both of them are dressed in dominatrix attire, with the girl made with huge boobs and the guy of course with a huge bulge below the waistline. Brandon is walking ahead as we cross the street, while I stop for a moment to let a car pass, still looking back at the crazy mannequins laughing to myself. Suddenly as I turn to look at Brandon and to watch my step, a random guy bumps into me so hard that my Caramel Macchiato goes flying landing by Brandon’s feet.

“Oh my God I’m so sorry!” I say grabbing the guys arm as I get my balance.

“No don’t apologize it was me,” he says.

“N-no, no I should have been paying attention. That store over there, their window display is so crazy I just couldn’t stop staring at it.”

“Oh it’s okay, but I’m sorry about your drink it looked like it was full,” he said as we look at my Caramel Macchiato flooding out of the cup out onto the sidewalk.

“It’s cool, no worries, hey Bran-,” I begin to say before he the guy cuts me off.

“Hey uh, my name’s Dominic, Dominic Fields,” he says with a smile while his friends huddle in small group in the background looking in our direction.

“Eris,” I say as the guy came into focus. When I bumped into him the whole scenario felt like my cab ride, a total blur, but once he said his name, it was like the red light that made me stop to really see him. He is about 6’0, looks to be a mix between Black and Hispanic, caramel skin, a Indian style tattoo on his upper left arm, well-built football player body, small ears that poked out a little, brown eyes, great pearly whites, and a beauty mark just to right of his nose.

“Erin?”

“No uh, Eris, my name is Eris,” I say sort of stuttering.

“Hmm, well Eris if you’d like I can buy you another coffee it’s just down the block,” he says, as I look to him and then Brandon who is giving me the nudge to go with this guy.

“Oh, uh, that’s sweet and all, but me and my best friend sort of have to make this poetry reading,” I say blushing.

“Oh I see, well can I have your number, maybe we can hang out sometime?” he says struggling to grab his phone out his back pocket.

“Um, I’m actually from out of town, I’m sorry…” I say then glance at Brandon again.

“Well ok then, pleasure bumping into you Eris, see you around?”

“Okay, see yah. “ I say as I give an awkward wave goodbye.”

~o~

I’m walking over to Brandon and he is looking at me like I am crazy. I’m thinking this guy is completely my type from head to toe. My whole life I’ve been a sucker for cheesy love stories, especially that dramatic first encounter. I’m thinking have if completely screwed by not giving him my number. I’ve been single for the past three years; maybe this could have been my next potential. No use now, I look back to where Dominic and his friends were standing and they seem to have fizzled away into the crowd.

“Eris! Why didn’t you at least give him your number?” asks Brandon grabbing his head.

“Brandon we don’t even live in the city. What’s the point?” I ask ignoring a tiny feeling of regret in my chest.

“We live only an hour and change upstate. Grenwall isn’t that far.”

“I know but that would already be an obstacle.” I say while looking down the street of West Fourth at all the different tattoo parlors.

“I guess, well, just going to have to see what the universe has in store.”

“Ew! I thought I was the theoretical one.”

“I know, gross, I think it’s contagious.” He says faking a sneeze.

We’re walking past the tattoo parlors and I’m getting drawn in by a growing urge inside me to get my first tattoo. If I do it’ll be something small, and somewhere very well hidden. I grab Brandon’s arm and pull him into a tattoo parlor called “Four Guys.” It’s literally run by four guys and their all decorated in the most elaborate tattoo art I’ve ever seen. This gave me confidence that whatever I pick will come out nice. Along the walls are options for tattoos in certain categories. To my view I’m seeing biker, rocker, juicehead, and tribal freak sort of designs, all of which are not even close to me. But then towards the end I see a peaceful section of nature designs. Now this is more me.

“Can I help you boys with something?” asks one of the Four Guys. He had a pretty flamboyant personality, but his tattoos made him look like a tough guy.

“Uh, he needs help,” Brandon says pointing at me and inching backwards.

“Yea, hi, I’m looking at these two here. What do you think?”

“These two are “cute,” if that’s what you’re going for.”

“It is actually, and I think I’ll go with this one.” I say confidently.

“Okay cool, you can have a seat over there while I get everything prepared.”

“You’re nuts Eris, but I’ glad it’s not too big.” says Brandon.

“Well, wish me luck,” I say winking.

~o~

The tattoo surprisingly didn’t hurt at all and all the anxiety of getting it made me hungrier. I pay the tattoo artist and we quickly grab a couple slices at my favorite pizza place right next door. I tell the chef we are going to take it to go because Brandon and I only had about a half hour before the poetry reading begins.

We hop on the train and sit down close the doors to make a quick leap out the train. I’m taking a bite out of pizza and I can feel Brandon’s eyes on me.

“Yes?” I say with an awkward laugh.

“I still can’t believe you didn’t give that guy your number.” He says shaking his head.

“It’s not a big deal really.” I say looking away.

“It is though because I know come tomorrow I’m not going to hear the end of it.” He says sarcastically.

“Seriously, I’m fine like, sure he was so cute, but I don’t know, I’m trying to avoid drama for a while.” I say kind of annoyed.

“Alright I’ll take your word, look this is us.”

The train stops near 17th street on the Lower West Side. It's a really nice area, full of art shops and fancy restaurants here and there. The café is literally called The Puerto Rican Café, and it's covered in flyers about different open mic events. At the entrance is a security guard dressed in all black who checks IDs because you have to be twenty-one or over to enter, and just for "precaution" he taps you down to check for "weapons." It's a little awkward and I notice he tapped my butt, one, too-many times. Brandon notices and we both start cracking up.

"Hey, I couldn't help it, it's just wow." Says the security guard.

"Well the cat's out the bag." Brandon laughs.

"Oh really well that extra tap is going to cost my drinks tonight thank you very much." I say to the security guard.

"Ok ok I'm sorry, I'll let the host know. Enjoy your night guys." He says.

"Mhm." I say as we walk in.

Inside the café the bar is located to the right of the entrance and it stretches half way in almost hitting the stage. There's a large crowd both sitting at tables and standing up in front of the bar facing the stage. I speak to the host and let her know that we have tickets for a table near the stage. She peeks over the crowd and points us in the direction of our table. I take Brandon's hand and we snake through the crowd. It's a little nerve wrecking because its quiet and a girl is already on stage performing her poem. I can feel Brandon's palms sweating because he hates

feeling watched, and with so many observers, if we don't make it to that table in another five seconds he might just catch a heart attack. We make it just as the girl finished her last lines and as we sit the room is filled with finger snaps as she walks off stage.

As they announce the next performer a pretty petite waitress with long golden hair, red lip stick, and creamy white skin, comes over with the drink menu.

“Buenas, aqui esta el menu de vinos y licores.” She shows us the menu.

“Gracias, nos traes el vino tinto de la casa por favor.” I tell her that we would like the red house wine.

“Listo, Regreso con sus vinos en un momento.” She says that it'll be just a moment.

“Gracias.” I thank her.

While we're waiting Brandon is looking at me lost because he doesn't speak Spanish and I tell him it's ok that I got it. I look around and the café has a pretty large turnout. It's cluttered with small round tables that sit two or four people, perfect for a single or double date. Each table has a coconut scented candle, and leaf shaped coasters. The entire room is made of brick walls with gorgeous canvas paintings of the city, abstract paintings of microphones, pens, and notebooks, and of course a beautiful canvas painting of the Puerto Rican Flag. The stage is very small with one microphone and a spotlight with enough room for one person.

There's quiet chitter chatter throughout and claps as the next performer walks on stage. Brandon and I get our drinks, clink our glasses together and the performer introduces herself. She's a beautiful girl from Mayaguez, Puerto Rico, which is where my family is from. So I lean in a bit onto the small table to give her my full attention due to this commonality. She begins.

“...Should I have placed responsibility on this person without them knowing?

Of course not, but I wasn't sure why it was happening.

Better yet I was sure...”

As she is talking her words seem to muffle away as I'm thinking of the boy I ran into. I shoot a side glance at Brandon thinking he's probably right about me regretting it. I've wanted something with someone for some time. Did I just miss my opportunity, or did I just successfully avoid disaster?

2

Grenwall

Grenwall

“In the middle of a night lighted by a full moon, a mind is calm while a heart is stirring.”

It's Monday morning and Brandon and I are on the train back upstate from the city. The conductor announces over the loudspeaker that we are just one stop away from Grenwall. As we slice through the mountains, the train crosses over a small valley which has the most captivating view. It's so beautiful that it literally feels like you're crossing into some fairytale. The valley is vast and surrounded by mountains that look like frozen waves of trees that are fighting to keep their spring pinks and violets from the summer's dense green. Below the train are small hills and you can sometimes see deer grazing on the rich green grass. It's such a drastic yet refreshing change from New York City.

Brandon gives me a small nudge that we're arriving, and I close my journal and grab my bags to exit the train. As we get off I check my pockets for my car keys and press the alarm to find my little green Honda Civic in this overly packed parking lot. As soon as we get to the car it starts to lightly rain and we rush to get our things in my trunk to be on our way.

“Perfect timing huh?” Brandon says.

“I know but I love it when it rains over here, perfect writing weather.” I say.

“I guess but I prefer the sun.”

“Yea, yea, I can’t wait to just get home and nap, I’m closing The Quill tonight.”

“You didn’t request today off?”

“No, but it’s fine, I don’t mind.”

“So you like rain and working after a long weekend. Are you ok?”

“I can’t stand you, haha, get out will you.” I say to him as I pull up in front of his house.

“Haha thanks, I had a blast this weekend we must do this again!”

“I’m down minus the odd encounters.” I say and Brandon looks at me as though he was going to restate how dumb I was for turning down Dominic.

“I will keep my mouth shut, but I open tomorrow, what about you?”

“Yea I open too, see you then!”

“Ok see yah.”

~o~

I get home which is located in a small housing development called The Reserve. All the homes are no more than six years old, which makes the whole area look very crisp. When you enter there’s a huge stone sign saying Welcome to The Reserve. It sort of seems like you’re entering an army reserve. That’s probably why they came up with the name I always think to myself, especially since the

Green Point Base isn't more than fifteen minutes away. The street names are historically chosen as well and are very patriotic. There's Colonial Drive, Liberty Ridge, which is my street, and it actually is the longest street because it winds in a huge circle around our whole development. Our development is very hilly and the streets are aligned with young trees which each year grow larger and larger. I can't wait to see how big they're going to be in another five or six years. As you drive down into our development you can see the wave like mountains which look like a natural protective barrier. It's such a sight and it really does make you feel like you're being protected by nature. Along a side of the development near the entrance there a small park and huge baseball field that is still under a bit of construction. They were going to put a pool in but the town fought against it because they wanted The Reserve to remain sort of private and they didn't want to make it into a visitor attraction. I read in one of the newspapers a man comment that they wanted to "Preserve The Reserve." Sort of silly I think but I don't mind the privacy. It's very quiet and all of our neighbors are very friendly.

As I pull up in front of my home I see everyone has already left to work since there are no cars in the drive way. It's starting to rain a little harder now which will help me relax while I take my nap before work. I enter my home through the garage which leads up into my family's kitchen. I drop my Nike duffle bag on the ground, and I notice a note from my mom on the counter.

Eris,

Hope you had a great time in the city. There's left over chicken cutlets, rice, and beans in the refrigerator, if you want to take that with you for lunch tonight. See you soon, maybe I'll pass by to say hello if your sister gets out of her soft ball practice on time.

Love,

Mom

I can always count on Mom to always welcome me even when she's not home. This will definitely save me a couple dollars on food. I check the time and it's still only 10:30am. I decide to take a quick shower to freshen up from the travel, make a hot cup of green tea, and pass out on the family room couch, which feels like sleeping on a cloud.

~o~

I wake up to a mixture of my phone alarm and the loud sounds of what I always call fighter planes souring over The Reserve heading to Green Point, not to mention the thunder that started roaring here and there. It's 1:15pm so I should be able to make it The Quill on time without having to rush. I pack my lunch and I can't help but think about the dream I woke up from. I was back in the city, but this time I was alone without Brandon. I was walking through Central Park, close to where the apartment I was staying in is located. As I'm walking along one of the

ponds I see the boy Dominic I bumped into kicking around a coffee cup as though it were a soccer ball. I walked up to him and asked why he was kicking it around and he says because it ruined everything. I tell him it's ok and that it was my fault too, and he responded saying that it didn't matter and that he should have been paying attention. Then he kicked it straight into the pond, got so angry, and ran directly at me full force. At the moment of impact I woke up to my alarm. It was so weird and as I went to grab the coffee powder from the pantry I decide maybe I should stay away from coffee for a little while.

~o~

I look out the window and the rain seems to have gone from a severe down pour to a calm normal rain shower. I quickly dash to my car since I forgot my umbrella in the trunk, turn on the engine, and switch on the radio.

“This 94.4, your local number one radio station, next we have our number four song of the day, Miss Mia Christies Love Missed.”

“Great,” I mumble to myself as I pull out of The Reserve and drive into town.

The actual town of Grenwall is about fifteen minutes away from my home. In order to get there I have to drive past an intersection known as Four Corners. I consider it to be the heart of upstate New York. It's equipped with three gas stations, a Dunkin Donuts, two supermarkets, and a random Chinese food restaurant. Everything a traveler would need once they make to this point from

whatever direction they were coming from. Once I make what seems an impossible turn from one of the four corners to the next one, I then have to journey over an old bridge which is just a few feet above raging rapid water. The rapids are usually pretty rough when it's raining heavily, but on sunny days the rapids are far calmer. After the bridge it's just one straight away into town.

The town of Grenwall is very old and every time I drive through it, it reminds me of pictures I've seen of London in the 1800's. The streets are thin, and are peppered with tall black street lamps with diamond shaped tops encasing the large light bulbs. The buildings are quite rustic and are different shades of browns and greens with chipping paint. A majority of the buildings are small family owned boutiques, a pottery shop, a bakery, a Pub called Mickey's, a souvenir shop, and at the very end of the winding streets is my work at The Quill.

The Quill is a bookshop/café/lounge, where people can come and get some of the newest fiction and non-fiction books, grab a cup of coffee, or relax and chat. It's quite mellow, and a lot of Grenwall's artsy people have dubbed it their "spot." I've met some pretty cool people and I couldn't think of a better place to work during my summers. I've become sort of like an assistant manager to my boss named Arthur Petals. He has inherited the Quill from his father, and his father inherited it from his father and so forth. My favorite perk about The Quill however, is its location. It's right next to Grenwall's main attraction, "The River."

The River is basically a plot of land which is naturally elevated a few feet from the river which is outlined by large boulders. To get to The River you have to take a short dirt path behind The Quill, and it can only be reached on foot. Once you make it out from the dense vegetation you come to a view that is like none other. You feel as though you are a tiny ant facing these gigantic mountains which surround the river. It can be very windy sometimes because the mountains create sort of an air pocket in this area. One the plot of land which looks out to this view are several scattered trees whose trunks are so thick and wide, they act as natural look out towers. You can actually climb the trees to a center which is safe to stand and look out to the river. On my breaks I usually come here for some quiet to clear my thoughts or I walk over to The Grenwall Park which is just a bit further up from my store.

The park is small and quaint with three gazeboes at the three corners of the pond. Here is where Grenwall holds its town celebrations, fairs, farmers markets, and it is best known for its Fourth of July fireworks show. I try my best to come every year with my family.

~o~

I make my way inside and there are a few people chatting in the lounge area, some on their laptops in the café, and a mother with her small daughter in the children's book section.

“Excuse me sir,” the little girl says to me while her mom smiles.

“What can I do for you hun?”

“Can you get me that book with the green dragon on it please sir.”

“Of course, here you go, and you’re sure you’re not afraid of dragons?”

“Oh no sir I love them,” she says making a funny face and gestures her hands like claws.

“She’s got quite the imagination.” The mother says.

“Don’t let her lose that,” I say winking to her and they head over to the cash rap to make their purchase.

In the back I knock on Arthur’s door to let him know I was in and he throws me a thumbs up since he was taking a call.

“Hold on Kevin, hey Eris?”

“Yea boss? What’s going on, sorry to interrupt.”

“No, no its fine my boy, can you take these flyers and place one in each of the shopping bags. It’s got all the information for the Fourth of July event.”

“Sure, I can get started now, it’s pretty dead today.”

“Yea the stupid weather, but ok let me get back to this call, thank you Eris. Kevin, uh Kevin, so you were saying.”

~0~

I tell the cashier before me, a boy named Matthew Pollen that he can take his lunch break. He's pretty fidgety and I've never seen him before, so he must be new. He grabs his things and heads out for his break. I take a seat by the register on a spin chair and open the box of flyers. I'm impressed with the flyers; they're a thick sort of cardboard material in the shape of small squares with a beautiful picture of Grenwall, and cool Fourth of July graphics with information about the event. I'm about to throw the first flyer into a shopping bag when I catch in red letters at the bottom right hands corner,

“MUSICAL GUEST MIA CHRISTY WILL BE PERFORMING HER NEW HIT LOVE MISSED.”

“You've got to be kidding me.”

~o~

The store is getting ready to close and our final group of customers are making their way out. It's about 8:30pm and my mom texted me that she was sorry she couldn't stop by, it is starting to rain again and she doesn't like driving in the rain at night. I text her that is okay and I will be home soon, and she text back “be careful.”

“Eris my boy, it's looking pretty bad out there you can leave now before it starts to get worse.”

“You sure boss? I mean, the café needs a little more cleaning up.”

“Oh don’t worry about it, I’d rather you get home safe, you’ve got a bit more of a drive than I do.”

“Okay boss sounds good. I’ll see you tomorrow morning.”

I grab my umbrella and run over to my car. It’s really windy by The Quill because we are so close to the water. I get in and start to slowly back up out of the gravel parking lot, when what looks to be a Ford truck speeds by nearly clipping me from behind. “What a jerk,” I mumble to myself and grab my chest because my heart started to beat really fast from the near impact situation. I check to see where the truck was headed once I pulled out and it looks as though it’s making the same right onto the bridge that I am making to head back home. The rain is pretty heavy at this point so all I can see are the back red lights of the truck and the yellow right blinker. I drive at a slow pace behind and make the turn onto the bridge, squinting to try and find the red lights of the truck again. However, despite my intense squinting through the rain fall there is only blackness and the white beam of my headlights on the street floor.

~0~

Once I cross the bridge the streets are still pretty empty. It’s a little creepy on this leg of the drive because the road to Five Corners has trees and miles of forest on both sides. It’s a good ten minute drive through darkness with a street lamp or two near the tight turns in the road. I’m almost half way through this

stretch in my trip when suddenly the Ford truck comes flying out of one of the dirt roads to my left nearly hitting me once again. I swerve out of the way and slam my on the breaks to stop myself from sliding into the low shoulder.

I'm infuriated and begin to wonder if the driver of the truck is literally trying to kill me or the driver is just lost and keeps making all of the wrong turns. Either way I just want to get home in one piece. I begin to back up slowly onto the road again, using all my mirrors to check if there are any headlights lurking in the darkness waiting to crash into me. I then notice in my rear view mirror that the truck is stopped a few feet away from me and up the street. However, as I start to make my way back onto the street, the truck makes a quick U-turn and drives away toward the bridge. I think about following the truck, especially since at this point the rain seems to be letting up. Nonetheless the weather was pretty bad earlier and I don't want to worry my parents. Also, Grenwall is very small town and if this mystery person lives in Grenwall I'll find his or her truck at some point.

3

A New Officer

A New Officer

I'm arriving the next morning at The Quill and I see Brandon setting up the café, getting everything organized. Brandon loves working at the café section of our store since it's much more of a social setting. I'm more timid so I prefer working in the peace and quiet of the New Fiction desk. Plus on down times quiet allows me to get some of my own recreational reading and writing done.

Before checking in with Arthur I walk over to Brandon to fill him in on last night's events.

"Uh why do you have bags the size of shopping bags under your eyes?"

"I had a rough night some crazy driver nearly hit me twice on my way home last night. I was up all night trying to relax from nearly getting killed."

"What? Where?"

"Once just out front and a second time just past the bridge."

"That's insane do you know who it might have been? Have you seen the car before?"

"Yea, I guess I'm ok just still ali- omg look!"

"What? What?" Brandon says startled dropping a set of glass coffee cups on the ground.

“Outside, it’s a black Ford Truck that just drove by,” I say while looking out the window.

“You think that’s the same truck?”

“Probably, maybe he or she is looking around the area in the sunlight because they seemed pretty lost last night.”

“Unless you’re being stalked.”

“Great Brandon, that’s just great to have that in my mind now.”

“Well I’m just saying.”

“Eris my boy how was your trip back home last night? Easy going I hope.” says Arthur.

Brandon and I looked at each other and I just tell Arthur everything was ok because I didn’t want him questioning anything. Arthur tells us that he’s going to head out to the high school because they are in charge of planning the Fourth of July events. This year they thought it will be beneficial for the small businesses in the town to set up little booths showcasing their stores. Each year for the past four years the Fourth of July event has gotten more and more outside visitors due to locals bringing relatives or friends. It’s become a pretty big deal and the school thinks it will bring some good exposure to these small businesses. Arthur is planning on setting up a booth where we can showcase some of our new fiction, as well as promote a new event he wants to start for the store. He hasn’t told us what

it is, but he thinks people will show up for it once they learn what it will be about. He also wants Brandon and I to run the booth since some of the other workers haven't been there as long.

“Okay boys I'm heading out. Matthew should be in around one to look after the lounge area. Feel free to help him out, he seems a little fidgety.”

“Sure thing, I'll help him, I sort of met him yesterday when I sent him on his break.”

“Thanks see you guys later.”

“We have a new worker!? Is he...” Brandon says with eyes brighter than the sun.

“I don't know Brandon, really?”

“What? I was just going to ask if he is cu-nice.”

“Yea, yea, how about you focus on those coffee glasses you just shattered all over the floor behind the counter. You're lucky Arthur didn't catch you.”

“Uh, that was you're fault for having scared he crap out of me when you saw the truck outside.”

“I guess so, I'm sorry I'm still just shook up.”

“No worries but, hey Eris.”

“Yea?”

“I'll help Matthew when he comes in, you just go take it easy.”

“Oh Brandon what am I going to do with you?”

~o~

I take a seat by the register in the New Fiction section of the store and start looking through e-mails about new shipment coming in of the latest fiction authors. Arthur gives me the option of choosing which kind of stories to choose for the store. My favorites are usually fantasy, horror, or adventure stories. It's actually an honor to be able to do this because in a sense people who come into the store are picking books which I felt are pretty good. And more often than not the books I choose people seem to buy the most. In a way it makes me feel like I'm on the same page with the people who live in Grenwall. I never tell Brandon his picks aren't really as popular but, sometimes he gets lucky.

After going through a few e-mails my eyes are starting to hurt. I look out the window at our view of The River and I notice a group of guys in army fatigue uniforms heading toward the store. They're pushing each other around and laughing and they're all really cu...

"Finally, we get a little break from that workout," says one of the guys as they enter the store."

"I know the sergeant has been real tough on us." Says another.

"Hi, can I help you guys?" I ask them.

"Oh we just were going to grab something from the café."

"O ok, Brandon can help you over there."

They each order from the frozen Frappuccino section and start talking about the Fourth of July event. Apparently since this year there will be the highest turn out in the history of the event, the Green Point Base will be sending out some of their officers to help keep the area secure. Brandon seems to be tied up helping Matthew out with the lounge and the New Fiction area was pretty slow, so I decide go organize the coffee area because it was looking sort of messy. While I clean up some of the spilled milk, sugar, and cinnamon crumbs, I over hear the young officers talk about initiating a “newbie.”

“Did you meet the new guy?” one of them says.

“Which one the one Jason is training?” asks another.

“Yea the new guy from the city, you know the one that supposedly got lost the other night in that storm.” says another.

“Oh yea, what’s his name uh, Donavon, Donald uh...”

“No you idiot, Dominic. He said he kept making the wrong turn by the bridge and kept going in circles and eventually he just gave up and stayed at one of the Inns near Four Corners.”

As the name fell from one of the officer’s mouths, I drop the bottle of skim milk and shatter the glass sugar jar. I quickly grab a handful of napkins and just start cleaning up the mess rapidly. Brandon and Matthew I see out the corner of my eye rush over to help. I’m shaking and I don’t know why, so I pretend to have a cut

and ask Brandon and Matthew if they would mind finishing the clean-up while I run my hand under some water.

“Was it something I said?” says the officer who mentioned Dominic’s name.

“Oh no, I just have butter fingers today.” I say.

“Oh ok, would you like us to help?”

“No, no we got it.” says Brandon.

“Can I get you guys anything else? A pastry, muffin?” asks Matthew.

“No we’re ok we’re actually on our way out, duty calls. Great frapp’s by the way.” says one of the officers.

“Thanks you enjoy and please come again,” says Matthew.

~o~

I run to the back to the bathroom, switch on the light, close the door and stare into the mirror. I’m feeling completely embarrassed and I’m freaking out over a name. A part of me is freaking out probably because I feel like it’s too good to be true, I don’t even know if it’s the same Dominic. However, another part of me for some reason had an odd feeling I was going to see him again, just the possibility of facing it has had me nervous since I got back home. I throw water over my face and I hear a knocking on the door. It’s Brandon.

“Eris, are you ok, you bolted out of there like something scared you.”

“Yea, yea I’m fine, I’m just really clumsy sometimes.”

“Uh no you’re not, I’ve never known you to be clumsy, what’s going on?”

“Nothing, I’m telling you I’m fine.”

“Did one of them say something ignorant to you? Because I’ll go back out there, they’re still out front talking and being annoying.”

“No, no, nothing like that at all. It’s just. It’s...”

“What? Did you think one of them was cute?”

“No, I mean they’re all cute, but, it’s just that one of them said that they are training a new guy from the city, who got lost the other night in the storm, and his name is Dominic!”

“What!”

“Yea I know, there’s no way though right, like, I mean, it’s just not, like, I can’t.”

“Eris, if it’s Dominic from the city this is going to be so awesome!”

“What the hell do you mean awesome. More like awkward!”

“Are you joking, he was so your type, so cute, and what are the chances! He’s going to die when he sees you.”

“He’s going to die? More like I’m going to die!”

“Well, first off relax because I feel like you’re excited that it is him, and I don’t want you be let down if it isn’t. And besides when are you even going to see him.”

“Hmm I wonder! Maybe the uh Fourth of July Event you idiot.”

“Oh right, they are going to be on duty that night. Wow this is going to be one for the books my friend. Let the games begin.”

“I, I gotta go. You think you and Matthew are ok, I need to go get something to eat.”

“Don’t worry go ahead, but relax ok, no stress.”

“Please, stress is like my middle name.”

I packed a lunch today so I grab it from my locker, and head out to The River to one of the gazebos. While I’m sitting here looking out, the wind is blowing kind of strong, but it’s a nice warm wind with moments of cool air. Its smells of trees and the sounds of the water crashing on the large boulders are very relaxing. I contemplate the possibilities of what could unfold in the next couple weeks. If this Dominic is the same Dominic, has my past come back to haunt me? And will the haunting be a friendly ghost, or some horrible nightmare?

4

The Black Truck

The Black Truck

Today Arthur closed the store because The Quill's staff is going to be in the gym at the High School to help with setting up the booths. Most of downtown Grenwall is closed for the day and much of the community is actually here giving a hand to help make these booths look creative and unique. Our booth is not too shabby. Our table is made up of a giant open book, with small slanted slits along the top where we can place our latest author's novels. On both sides of the booth are giant wooded Quills which act as a support for the banner on top which says our store name. On the inner parts of the booth are shelves where we have some random merchandise such as candles, journals, oversized coffee mugs, pens, pencils, t-shirts, book ends, and book marks. We paint the booth in green, brown, and burgundy, to maintain this sort of earthy look.

"Looks like this booth is coming together pretty nicely," says Arthur.

"Yea, I think this idea is going to be so perfect to bring some attention to our store." Says Brandon.

"Matthew my boy, how do you think it's going are you getting a hang of the store?"

"Yea definitely, Brandon and Eris have been a huge help."

“That’s what I like to hear, I’m proud of you guys. Oh and by the way your gal Lauren Stemings is coming to help out as well. She called in yesterday that she’s back from school as well.”

“Aw that’s great she always seems to come in the nick of time.” I say.

“Yea we all look forward to her arrival.” says Arthur.

“Oh great, we ran out of burgundy paint.” says Brandon from the back.

“Hey Eris you think you can go run out to Home Depot and grab a couple cans of the burgundy, and maybe one more green. Just bring me back the receipt and I’ll reimburse you.” says Arthur.

“Ok sounds good, I’ll head out now.”

“Want me to come along?” asks Brandon.

“No it’s ok I’ll manage, plus you guys are not getting in my car with all that paint all over you.”

“Oh lord, you and your car, well ok hurry back.” says Brandon.

~o~

Pulling up to Home Depot the lot was pretty empty so I was able to grab a nice parking spot near the entrance of the store. I turn into a spot and after I put my car in park, I check my rearview mirror and about four rows of cars behind me I spot a black Ford truck. My heart stops, and I think to myself if I should wait in the car and see who comes to it or if I should go inside and just face what I think is the

inevitable. My hands are held tightly onto the steering wheel, and are slowly sliding down the sides as the sweat in my palms starts to increase because of my nerves. I let go of the wheel, wipe my hands on my jeans, and shake out the nerves. I take a breath and head out into Home Depot.

Inside it looks as dead as the parking lot and the feeling is very eerie. Walking past the garden tool station I wave hello to one of our regular customers at The Quill and sweet woman named Paula. I look up at the huge signs and the paint section was just four aisles away. Once I get there I'm looking to match the burgundy color on the small piece of cardboard Brandon gave me to the different sample sheets they have neatly organized along the wall. I pick up one and then I accidentally drop it to the floor. While I'm bending down to pick it up I look forward and I see a pair of combat boots and what looks to be army fatigue pants in the next aisle. I froze. And I watch the combat boots as they walk toward the open area in front of all the aisles. The boots turn in my direction, but then suddenly stop and then walk back the opposite direction. I let out a breath and slowly stand back up.

"Excuse me sir do you need help?" says the Home Depot employee.

"Oh, yes, uh, can I have two cans of this color burgundy, and one of the rainforest green over there to the right."

"Not a problem, which brand do you prefer?"

"I'll take the Behr please."

“Ok it’ll just be a moment while I run to the back.”

“Sure, I’ll just wait here.”

While the employee turns to go to the back, I look ahead and just down the aisle I see someone walk past sort of quickly into the next aisle dressed in army fatigue. I turn around grab a catalogue from the main desk and bring it up to my brow, peeking over it every so often. I look back down at the catalogue, then peek up again, and again I see the same person bolt by. I lift the catalogue up so fast I think I might have sliced my forehead.

“Okay sir, here we are.”

“Would you like any help carrying these cans to your car they’re pretty heavy.”

“No, no it’s ok, I’ll just use this cart here.”

“Okie dokie. Well they’re 27 dollars each, you can go right over to that girl over their waving like a crazy person. She’s so bored so you’re like the golden ticket right now.”

“Haha, aw, has it really been that dead today?”

“Yea everyone’s getting ready for the Fourth of July event.”

“Yea that’s exactly what I’m doing. Well thanks! Enjoy your day.”

“You too.”

The girl was so sweet and took extra time to scan my cans of paint and place them nicely in a bag. She even counted the money I gave her three times,

pretending like she miscounted. Eventually after my five minute transaction, I tell her thanks and head out side. I walk to my car glancing to my left every couple feet. I place the cans in my trunk, and then bring the cart over to the designated “cart lot.” The nearest one was behind me and as I pushed it towards it I look to see if I can see the black Ford and it was gone. Great another hit and miss I think to myself. But as I’m thinking back to those quick flashes of this person through the aisles I know for a fact that his skin was caramel. It has to be him, but then again, it still could just be anyone.

~o~

Back on the road I get a text from Brandon asking me where I was. I let him know that I was on my way back to the school, and as I look into my rearview mirror at the sign I pass to give Brandon an idea of how far I was, I see a black Ford truck turning on the same street as me. I tell Brandon I have to go and as I’m placing the phone down while trying to hit the end call button I can hear Brandon faintly yelling at me to hurry up. I stop at the red light and try to nonchalantly look to see if I can make out the driver. He must have some sort of tint on the top quarter of the windshield because I can’t see his face, just his hands on the steering wheel. I squint a little harder to see if I can pick up anything from what I remember of Dominic from that night in the city and he seems to be covered up to his neck in the army fatigue uniform. The light turns green and as I start to roll on forward the

sun begins to slowly pour into the driver's seat of the person in the truck and I see a glare of what looks to be a large ring, possibly a school ring on the driver's middle finger. I have one as well, so I recognize the shape. I try to think if I remember Dominic wearing a ring, but I don't remember looking at his hands. This is surprising because I'm obsessed with hands. Usually I'll know if I'm going to go on a second date with someone based on their hands. It's something about a nice set of hands to drives me insane, but if the person's hands are gross and not well kept I may be over it. I mean who wants gross hands all over them one day.

I make a right at the light onto a road that leads straight to the High School. The High School is just after the bridge so I don't have to cross it. On this leg of Grenwall most of the land is peppered with different large corporations, like Wal-Mart, Home Depot, a small mall called The Market Place. The mall has all the commercial stores that are found in the city, but it's far enough away from downtown Grenwall that our small boutiques don't feel the competition. One other good thing is that Grenwall doesn't have a Barnes and Noble, so The Quill has been doing pretty well. I just hope in the new construction site that is being claimed doesn't plan on having a Barnes and Noble, poor Arthur will be devastated.

I move into the right lane, and so does the Ford. I decided to move back into the left lane to see if I can let him pass me to see who he is, but he also moves into

the left lane. Clearly if this person is on to me my moving into the right lane will be pointless so I stay at a steady pace in the left lane. I notice he begins to tailgate me a little so I speed up. He stays a good distance away for a time so I just focus on the road so I don't miss my turn just before the bridge to head back to the school. Then out the corner of my eye I see my rearview mirror becomes clouded in black and I look and once again the Ford is tailgating me. I speed up a small bit more and so does he. I grip my steering wheel as I start to get nervous because not only was I nervous about the tailgating, but maybe if this person behind isn't Dominic, maybe he really is some crazy person trying to hurt me and they realized they've found me again. I move into the right lane now because I couldn't take it and like clockwork so does he. My palms are sweating and I'm beginning to freak out a bit. I adjust myself in my seat and lean forward a bit in my seat trying to maintain control of my speed and not let the Ford behind me get too close. I look ahead and I see my exit is coming up. "Almost there, almost there," I whisper to myself. I lower the radio, he's still on me, "Almost there, almost there," I say again. Then I look back to my rearview and it seems like the Ford is about to ram right into me, I brace myself. "Ok, ok, please don't," I murmur. And then at the last moment, he turns left onto a road. I look to my side view mirror and I see two Green Point officers waving him into the entrance of the base. I let out a breath and I can feel all the blood that was rushing to my head slowly drizzle back to the rest

of my body and my heart starts to slow and calm down from what I thought was going to be another accident. My phone starts to ring, I jump, and I see it's Brandon again.

"I'm turning onto the street now, relax," I say.

"No, just calling to make sure you were ok because it took you a little longer than usual." he says.

"Yea, yea I'm fine, just had a little set back. It was the Black Ford, we had another run in."

"Are you joking? Was it him, did you see if it was him?"

"No, I couldn't tell because the upper part of his window was tinted, but I did see a ring."

"A ring, like a wedding band?"

"No, not a wedding band, more like a school ring, like the one I have."

"I see. Well now we have another clue I suppose."

"Yea but nothing that helps."

"We'll see. But hey Eris."

"Yea?"

"Will you hurry up!"

"Oh my God I'm here, I'm here."

5

Disruption At Home

Disruption At Home

Later in the night I'm home with my family helping my mom in the kitchen prepare the evenings dinner. My little sister is in the living room sitting on the bean bag watching some of her favorite Disney Channel shows, and my younger brother is up in his room talking to his girlfriend. My Dad is on his way home via bus from the city, he texted me that he was by The Market Place, which means he was about a good fifteen minutes from Four Corners where the bus drops him off. His car is in the shop so I'm going to pick him up when he arrives.

"So Eris how's your store's booth coming along?" my mom asks as she places salad in a brown bowl in the middle of the table.

"It went really well, we got so much done, but half way through we ran out of paint so I had to go for a quick run out to Home Depot." I say grabbing glasses out the cabinet.

"That's great I can't wait, I've invited your aunt and your cousin to come up to visit for the event, because you know her husband is a drunk and is never home." She says tying her brown curly hair into a pony tail with a black hair tie.

"Is he still being that way with her? I feel like this is the same story I always here about him. He's around but never like around." I say now grabbing the utensils from the drawer.

“Well Eris, she met him when she was really young. He was the bad boy she always wanted. She sort of knew what she was getting herself into, and like other girls who chase a bad boy, thought she could change him.” She says pouring the pasta in the drainer over the sink.

“I know but Mom I mean, really though they’re like in their 30’s and they have a daughter, don’t you think he’s getting tired of the “scene.” Is there even a scene at his age anyway.” I say laughing, bumping her lightly with my hip as I walk over to the table with the napkins.

“Hey parents can be cool too. But yea he never got over it. And well she says he treats her good, he just is more present in the home and not very involved with much of her life outside of the house.”

“I see so it’s like a closeted relationship.”

“Yea, you could say that. But to be honest no one really wants him around, because every time he does come out the closet, he’s annoying and always causes some kind of drama. Remember when he picked a fight with you Dad because he bought Coors light instead of Coronas.”

“Oh my gosh I know that was ridiculous haha.”

“Well yea, we hate him haha. But everyone does they’re best to accept him because your aunt loves him. But one day she’ll get out. I just hope when she does

it's not too late." She says, pouring herself a glass of wine. "But anyway I think your Dad just texted you."

"Yea, he did, he said he's at the gas station at Four Corners, I'll head out now."

"Ok be careful, oh wait and Eris remind your father to buy milk."

"Ok see you in ten minutes."

~o~

As I'm driving from my Palace, also known as my home, I call it my Palace because it's the biggest home we've ever owned, I think about my parents. We used to live in a teeny-tiny apartment in the Bronx, and then with my Dad's promotion, and my Mom's raise, we were able to build this home here at The Reserve six years ago. We are the first owners of this house, so I think of it as our little kingdom. But as I'm thinking of my parents, I think of them as the exception to the rule of short relationships that start when you're young. My parents met when my Dad was 16 and my mom was 18. My Dad is 41 and my mom is now 42 going on 43 and they've been together ever since without a single break-up. They were each other's high school sweet hearts and I've always wanted to have something like what they have. My little brother has a girlfriend and there are already going to make two years in August. He's Junior and she's a Freshman in high school. It's sort of just like my parents accept my brother is older. They're all very much in love and I'm happy to be surrounded by these two flourishing

relationships that are so rare in our society. I know that my being gay makes things a little more complicated. However, I still have hope that I can find something like them. I've had some small relationships; well I wouldn't really call them relationships more like dates. They went no farther than five months. It's sort of pathetic, but many of my "dates" had complications such as distance. I haven't met anyone who has been close to me. Usually they're a long car, bus, or train ride away. Partly because I wanted to keep it a secret from my family before I came out, and other times it was just circumstance. This is a huge reason why I kind of walked away from Dominic; he being in the city was just going to be another complication if something were to ever happen. But now the possibility of him being near sort of changes things. If Dominic is here, and if he is the mystery man in the Ford Truck, and if something does happen between us, maybe finally, I can have what my brother and parents have.

~o~

Pulling up to the gas station I see my Dad wave at me from across the way. He's always so well dressed for his job; always in a nice suit with cufflinks and all. Some people think he is a cop because he's pretty built and has a bald head with a silver mustache. He gets cop all the time, sometimes he hates it, but other times he likes it because people think twice before they try to pull anything funny in front of

him. However, the best part about my Dad is despite his bulldog exterior, he's the nicest guy on the planet.

"Hey papi, thanks for picking me up tonight. The car should be ready by tomorrow." He says coming in the car filling it with his cologne.

"It's no problem Dad, you know I love to drive."

"Yea you're always in this little thing."

"It's the love of my life, what can I say."

"Haha, good one son, and I'm assuming your mother wants us to get milk?"

"Whoosh I'm glad you said that I almost forgot to tell you."

"Don't worry she just text me to get milk now haha."

"Really, so why did she, I can't with her."

"Yes your mom is definitely a character. So Eris you know that now that I've got you in this car we can have one of our car chats."

"Yea yea go ahead."

"Well son, you've finished college, got your BA, now we're waiting on this Master's program. You need to have plan because the next two years are going to fly by faster than you can blink."

"I know I know, if I get in, I figure I'd move into that apartment in the city and commute to school."

"Ok that sounds good so far, it will save you money on dorming."

“Yes indeed.”

“I’m proud of you.”

“Thanks Dad.”

~o~

Back at the Palace we walk into the kitchen smelling wonderful. My mom definitely did a good job tonight. It smells of the garlic and Adobo on the meat, and the warm tomato sauce just grabs you and puts you in a choke hold. On the table the steam is dancing off the food like a ballerina doing a pirouette. I can’t wait to dig in. My mom opens up the curtains which lead to the back yard and the view of the sun setting turning the sky pink. My sister and brother come and join us, and we all dig in and talk about our days over the sound of our clinking utensils.

After dinner, I help my mom while everyone else sits bellies full on the couch watching American Idol. Suddenly my phone starts to buzz and I see I have an incoming call from The Quill.

“Hello?”

“Hey Eris it’s me Matthew.”

“Hey Matt what’s going on, everything cool at the store?”

“Yea, yea everything is cool, I just have a question.”

“Sure thing what do you need?”

“Ok so you know how we started the new thing where we can save people e-mails into the system so we can send them out information about the store and sales and all that good stuff.”

“Yea, so ok I had a customer just come in, his name was Dominic, uh, Dominic, uhh, Dominic Staten. And he signed up for the e-mail list I just don’t remember how to get to the program on the computer to input it.”

“Oh, uh, i-is B-Brandon there?” I say stunned.

“No, it’s just me and Arthur is tied up with phone calls I don’t want to be annoying and ask him something again.”

“Ok just on the main screen click the green file with the mailbox symbol on it.”

“Oh my God duh, obvi!”

“Thanks Eris sorry to bother you, do you work tomorrow?”

“Y-yea I close, but ok, Matt talk to you later.”

“Later.”

How do I keep missing this guy? This town is not that big and I just can’t seem to run into him. I’m thinking to call Brandon, but I don’t want him to come up with some crazy idea since we are both off from work at the moment. I ask my mom if she can manage the rest of the dishes and tell her I need to get to work on stuff for my writing portfolio. She says that everything is done and the rest are just going into the dishwasher. I run upstairs and into my bedroom, turn on my lamp on

my desk, grab my journal, and start writing. My desk is placed by my windows which are right next to each making an L-shape. The windows in my home are quite large so my view of The Reserve is flawless. I chose this room specifically for the view. I can see all the tops of the older homes in our development, as well as a perfect view of the mountains which are surrounding us on all sides, and as I look out I see how the pink sky is slowly turning into a cool lavender. While I stop every so often from my writing, I'm fiddling with the rope holding up my rollup ladder. It's a ladder I found at Home-Depot which I used to use when I was in high school to sneak out sometimes. I didn't do it often, but sometimes Brandon, Lauren, and I would sneak out and head out to The River and just stare up at the stars talking about our futures and laugh at the silly rumors and high school drama that goes on. In one of those nights I came out to the both of them, and Brandon said he always had a feeling and was happy I felt comfortable coming out to them. Lauren screamed of excitement that night because she didn't have to make many more girl-friends. She hated girls and their shadiness, so to her, Brandon and I are the next best thing because as much as she tried being one of the boys, they always hit on her.

After a good half hour straight of just jotting down random ideas into my journal, I stare at my phone and contemplate texting Brandon. Why am I obsessing over this? I already know what he's going to say; probably something along the

lines of let's go drive around and spot the truck. But then again, Dominic is probably living in Green Point so his truck probably will be parked inside. Either way I know Brandon will have a lot to say and probably force me to e-mail him. So I just won't text him. I grab my phone and turn it upside down and hide it under my pillow. I look at the time and it's nearing ten o'clock and I have to be up early tomorrow to help set up for The Fourth of July Event. I grab the string hanging from my night table lamp, and whisper "Well, let games in fact begin."

6

The Fourth of July Event

The Fourth of July Event

Today I wake up to the smell of buttermilk pancakes, bacon, eggs, and apple cinnamon tea my mom loves to make. My little sister runs into my room blowing a little pink and purple horn yelling it's Fourth of July yay! She is literally the happiest little girl on the planet. If she's not laughing or telling a joke, she's laughing or telling a joke.

"Eris, breakfast is ready. Oh and Arthur Petals called. He wanted to know if you can be at the park around 10:30 so you guys can get a head start."

"Okay mom on my way down, and yea I'll call him now."

"You ok honey you sound a little out of it, did you sleep ok?"

"Yea, I did just had some weird dreams."

Weird dreams seem to have been happening a lot lately, and I usually don't remember my dreams but these I remember as though they actually happened. Last night I was in the middle of a war field. I was tucked behind a large cement wall with a gaping hole that was created from some large explosion. I'm huddled behind it with a large gun in my hand waiting for someone to walkie me that the coast was clear. I look to the left and I see a grenade rolling on the ground. Instantly I jumped up and bolt into the direction past the gaping whole. The grenade goes off, and I'm grabbed by the left arm by someone who pulls me down

into a pit in the middle of the building next to the wall. I'm screaming from fear of the explosion and the person in the dark covers my mouth telling me to be still and calm that it's ok. As the dust from the explosion clears and the sun light is able to slice through the smoke I see the person who helped me was Dominic. I've got you he says it's going to be fine. I ask him where we are, he says on one of the main fronts. I told him I don't even know how to shoot the gun in my hand and he tells me not to worry that it's almost over. He signals me to start crawling through a tight passage in front of us, and that the enemy can't see us once we cross the building. I go ahead and then suddenly there's an odd silence. All the shooting and explosions have come to a stop. I try to crawl a little slower to lessen the noise my body is making on the gravel beneath me. I turn around and Dominic is a few feet behind me. I see him looking up not moving and suddenly BOOM, Another explosion and the floor is beginning to cave in on him. I rush over and shout NO! And the next thing I knew I woke up to my sister blowing the horn.

~o~

I throw some water on my face to get the thought of the dream out, then head down stairs and grab some breakfast. My brother has already eaten and he's cuddle up on the couch with his girlfriend watching the movie Dear John. Definitely her idea I presume, since he's lying there sleeping with his mouth wide open. I snap a picture and she laughs quietly. He wakes up confused and I walk by

whispering revenge! While I'm serving my breakfast I look at my phone on the counter and see a missed call and a text from Lauren. She texted me that she's back and is already helping out at the park. I'm so excited to see Lauren she's one of the coolest people I've ever come in contact with. She's a little shorter than me, I'm 5'7 she's 5'5 and she's got the prettiest green eyes and long brown hair. Her family is from Ireland and she loves to party. She's the girl who the boys chase and she never gives in. I definitely look up to her and how she doesn't let relationships with boys affect her everyday life. She's strong willed and can also be a little stubborn. But I'm a little stubborn too, I guess it's a Capricorn thing, we share the same birthday, January 4th, and while I'm the writer, she's a painter. Sometimes we collaborate and she paints moments in some of the stories I've written. She's quite stylish and adds a sparkling touch to our little bohemian crew.

~o~

Driving up to the park I can see all the different boutiques setting up their booths along the edges of the park. I grab a box of supplies and carry them over to my little gang over by our booth. I see Arthur on the phone as usual delegating and making business calls, Brandon staring at Matthew while he's bending down to pick up some fallen merchandise, and Lauren jumping up and down because she notices me walking down the hill.

“Eris! Yay you're here!” She shouts and everyone looks over to say hello as well.

“Aw Lauren you look great love.” I say.

“Thanks baby doll you too! Are you excited for tonight, supposedly there’s going to be a really big turnout.”

“I know tons of people from the city are coming I hear so we should get some good exposure for the store.”

“Definitely, so tell me what’s been going on.” She says as she helps me unpack the box of merchandise and set them up along the inner shelves of the booth.

“Well, I’m not sure if you know but I think some guy I ran into in the city is going to be working as an officer up at Green Point.”

“Shut up how do you know?”

“Well I overheard some offi-.” As I was going to continue telling her about everything that’s been going on Brandon cuts me off and points ahead at a group of officers who look like the guys who came into the store.

“That’s them alright,” I say and look cautiously from the back of the booth to see if I spot Dominic with them.

“I don’t see Dominic,” says Brandon.

“Hey Matthew,” I whisper to him, “are any of those guys walking up the hill, that Dominic guy that came in last night?”

“Uh, no, not that I can see.” He says.

“What was that?” asked Brandon.

“Oh Eris just wanted to...”

“To know if he understood how to input people e-mails into the system is all.”

“Okay...” Brandon says looking at us leery.

“What was that all about?” Lauren whispers to me.

“I’ll tell you later.”

~o~

The event is starting to kick off, and it is now 2:30pm. Brandon, Lauren, and I, are all heading to the food area where they are having BBQs, funnel cake, pizza, shish kabobs, and cotton candy. I’m in the mood for a cheeseburger and cheese fries. The food every year seems to get better and better, and this year there’s literally an entire huge truck full of food to be given out throughout the day and night. The day time is perfect for all of the booths because people can get a better look at things. They can take their time and still find themselves a good seat on the park for the fireworks show. As we walk past the food area toward the gazebo which will be right under the firework cannons, we see a stage being setup for Mia Christy and her band. It’s really colorful and they even have a large marquee over the stage with her name in bright lights.

“Oh my gosh you guys I’m so excited! I love her.” Says Lauren.

“Ehh, she’s ok,” I say.

“Oh don’t be a hater Eris,” she says with wink and a light elbow to my stomach.

We find a seat under one of the largest trees in the park which is situated on the highest hill in the park. We eat our lunch and watch as cars are flooding in from Route 32, which is a main route that leads directly to and from the city.

“Sheesh no wonder Green Point is sending down some officers.” says Brandon.

“Well it’s better to be safe than sorry,” says Lauren.

“Yea I agree,” I say.

“So, Eris any new “Black Ford” sightings?” asks Brandon.

“No, not today, can we not talk about that right now?” I ask.

“You’re going to run into him so just get over it and get excited.” He says.

“But, what if it isn’t him, then what?”

“It has to be.” He says.

“Ok boys lets calm down, and besides Arthur is calling us over that is getting a little busy and Matthew is having a little trouble explaining some of the ins and out about The Quill.” says Lauren.

~o~

Back at the booth, I’m noticing we sold two boxes of our t-shirts, and plenty of journals. Our e-mail list in somewhere in 70’s at this point, and someone new is filling out their information. Arthur looks very pleased with the work we have done thus far and I feel like as the night goes on we’re going to get to the point where we are running out of stuff to give people.

I look at my watch while I'm replenishing some of the merchandise on the shelves when I look out into the crowd and I see Green Point trucks circling the event and parking in the lot near the food stands. I look over to Brandon and he gives me the "this is it look." A million things are running through my head as I begin to realize that this is the moment where I may find out if this mystery person really is Dominic.

Lauren is chatting with a small family about the history of The Quill while I watch attentively as the officers make their way from their vehicles and to their designated stations throughout the park.

"Well, well, if it isn't The famous Quill," says one of the officers who came in the other day. I didn't even see him and his small little gang even leave the car.

"Hello officers how can we help you today." I ask.

"Oh just browsing, were you able to get that area cleaned up before old Arthur saw?" he asks.

"Oh yea it was nothing. I can be a little clumsy."

"Haha well the frapps were delicious, I've been telling all the boys about it back at the base."

"Thanks that means a lot." I say as I look around his little gang to see if Dominic was around.

“Ey D! Ayo D! come here check out this station, I know you’re a big reader,” another of the officers says.

“This guy has always got his head in a book,” says the first officer.

As they are calling officer “D” over my head literally is beginning to pound. I can hear the crunching of the grass on the side of our booth as someone is walking up. I look over at Brandon, he looks at me, and as I’m facing him I see the dim sunlight turn dark, due to the shadow of the person who is now standing over me. Brandon’s reaction sort of looks a bit odd, so when I turn to look, it isn’t Dominic.

“Officer D? What does the D stand for?” I ask.

“Oh its short for Donald, D just sounds better.” He says.

“I see.” I say as I let out a disappointed sigh.

“Did I say something wrong?” he asks.

“No sorry, I just thought you were someone else.” I say.

“It’s cool,” he says as he fills out a form leaving us his e-mail.

~0~

Another hit and a miss I’m thinking to myself. I tell Lauren I’m going to take a walk to see if my family made it to the event. It’s nearing seven o’clock and as I look around at the officers I see none of them are Dominic. While I’m walking I see people from all over setting up their blankets and fold out chairs. I see

mother's putting out sandwiches and little juice boxes for their younger ones. There's a group of people my age in their 20's pulling our coolers of beers. Some of the boutiques have cool games set up. One of them has a make believe red carpet, another has a small runway playing different dance music. There's a game area set up near the food stands where you can win prizes like small stuffed animals. A lot of the high school kids are out hanging out with their friends. It's interesting to think about it and to reminisce because four years ago I was here with my friends after senior year excited for high school to be over and excited to finally be on my own in college. Now college is over and it feels like just yesterday Brandon, Lauren, and I were here just hanging out. I remember one time Lauren got into a huge fight with one of her ex-boyfriends because she saw him talking to another girl from the neighboring towns high school. Brandon we couldn't find half the time, he was always behind a tree somewhere making out with some random guy. Nonetheless, we always had something crazy to go home and talk about that night or the next day.

One thing I did hate though about the Fourth of July Event is, shockingly enough, when the fireworks went off. To me there's nothing better than enjoying the fireworks with someone you love. Lauren despite her arguments with her boyfriends, always had someone to curl up to while the fireworks were going on. Brandon, whether it was someone he was dating or just someone he couldn't stop

making-out with, he always ended up with someone while the fireworks were going on as well. I on the other hand, well let's just say I was always accompanied but my pounding heart and a small lump in my throat. I never knew what it was like to enjoy that moment with someone and I had always wanted to. The guys I usually met were either during the winter or the spring, never during summer. I guess you could say I met them during the cuddle seasons. However, despite my little moments of sadness and I felt lucky to be able to have such great friends and family to sort of fill that void of the love I never experienced with a partner. They're goofiness always kept me in a good mood and I was always able to come up out of whatever little funk I was experiencing.

It's starting to get darker, and according to my watch it's nearing 8 o'clock. Mia Christie is about to make her way to the stage. I get a text from Lauren that she, Brandon, and Matthew are all on their way to meet me. The booth had sold out of all its merchandise and Arthur wanted us to go ahead and enjoy the event and that he'll take care of the rest of the evenings duties.

"Grenwall are you ready!" shouted the MC on the stage and the crowd started to cheer.

"Grenwall I said are you READY!?!??" he shouted again and received an even louder roar from the crowd. Lauren came rushing over and grabbed my arm while Brandon had his arm around Matthew who looked like he was in heaven.

“Grenwall tonight we have a special guest performing her latest single. Grenwall Let’s hear it for MISS MIA CHRISTIE!!!” The crowd roared, the girls cheered, and the guys whistled as Mia Christie sashayed onstage.

Mia started performing and she sounded pretty good. I was afraid she was going to lip sync, but she actually was singing live. Her dancers were doing a great job, and her extravagant outfit which was made up of a Pink Cat suit with black red bottom six-inch heels, and platinum blonde hair that fell down to her waist, was stunning. This was sure to be a history in the making moment for Grenwall. The whole of the park cheered and it was such a fun celebration. As the crowd were jumping and dancing to her song, I look around and everyone seemed to go in slow motion, and I tune everything out into silence. I scan the crowd and the park to the farthest point my eye could see, in a pathetic hope of seeing Dominic somewhere. There’s no way he couldn’t be here if it is him. The whole town is here and the sound of the music, I doubt anyone will be home trying to relax and get some peace and quiet. I look around and after my fourth scan I realize it was hopeless.

“Thank you Grenwall!” Mia Christie shouts after her song.

“Now ladies and gentlemen it’s about 30 seconds to nine o’clock and the fireworks master has signaled me to do the count down,” she says.

“10, 9, 8, 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2,1!!”

Then suddenly the crowd goes silent. All that can be heard are three tiny, yet piercing whistles, then BOOM, the fireworks show begins. Mia Christie started singing some popular Fourth of July Anthems, and as I look out ahead of me as each firework explodes, all that can be seen are the shadows of the tops of everyone's heads as families and couples cuddle up together to enjoy this year's fireworks show. It is truly something to see and the fireworks are very creative. Some are massive, some are loud, some swirl, some pop, some sparkle, and some are so bright it feels like it's morning again. My little sister and her friends literally after each firework would shout, "Whoa, whoa, whoa!!" It is so cute I can't help but hug her. Lauren puts my arm around her and looks at me smiling with her pearly whites, and whispers,

"You're totally my boyfriend this year Eris."

"Haha wow is this really your first July 4th without a boyfriend."

"Yea depressing right?"

"Really," I looked at her like uh hello.

"Aww no you know what I mean. Depressed and pathetic for me. You should feel lucky, at least you're not spending it with some loser who's not going to stick around. You wait Eris, there's something in store for you one of these days. You're a good person, just be patient." She says. Lauren has always been somewhat of a big sister to me. She's only a year older but nonetheless, she has always given me

the best advice and always kept me confident in myself. Whenever I was feeling over it she always knew what to say. Then in the midst of her compassionate little speech she starts to laugh and turns my head. Brandon and Matthew are profusely making-out to the point where Matthews hands are flaring about and Brandon is holding Matthews cheeks as he plants one on him.

“I swear Brandon is a mess,” I say and Lauren starts hysterically laughing.

“Well now let’s see if we can find you a boy out here, there’s tons of fresh meat.”

She says.

“I highly doubt it,” I say.

“You’ve got to be optimistic my friend. Think positive.”

At this point the fireworks show is coming to a close and Mia Christie is finishing the last verse of the last song. My Dad calls out that he’s going to start heading out before the traffic gets crazy, and I tell him I’d be home a little late because I am going to drop off Lauren, Brandon and Matthew at their homes. While we’re walking over to my car, a small group of officers darts by us laughing and talking about some cute girls they saw.

“Yo, did you see that chick, man if I wasn’t on duty.”

“Yea she was pretty hot, but let’s focus gentleman shall we.”

“Oh and has anyone seen that new guy Dominic?” Immediately my ears seem to go up like a dog when they hear an odd sound.

“He was stationed over by the second gazebo, the one farthest to the left.”

“Yea I saw him over there but then I haven’t seen him since the area cleared out.”

“He’s probably back up at Green Point, I think the sergeant said something about needing to speak to him about something.”

This explains why I couldn’t see him. He was all the way on the other end of the park where no one really goes because the view of the fireworks isn’t that great from that angle. Maybe it was a good thing I didn’t run into this “Dominic.” It could have possibly ruined my night. Plus being that he works at Green Point, I’m not quite too sure how he will feel about confronting me and being an officer. I know that there is a Don’t ask, Don’t Tell policy, so perhaps it was for our best interest to not have run into each other, or is this just me being optimistic.

7

Wrong Place, Right Time

Wrong Place, Right Time

After dropping my little gang off at their homes, I receive a text from Arthur that he needs some help bringing some boxes back to The Quill. He got most of it but the rest didn't fit in the back of his pick-up truck. I am worried about driving back because I fear it will take me forever to get through because of the traffic, but surprisingly the entire area is cleared out. The Green Point officers surely had everything quite organized because there isn't a car in sight at the park, and Grenwall was back to its quite self again. While driving up to the park I can see the ground is littered with pieces of trash here and there, it looks like the aftermath of a huge party. The park's cleaning crew will definitely have their hands full in the morning.

I park my car near the spot where they had the food stands, and I receive another text from Arthur that the boxes will be near the public bathroom building. I look out and sure enough there are three boxes piled on top of each other just beneath one of the lanterns near the bathroom. I bring one box at a time to my car, and as I'm carrying the third, I feel a heavy gust of wind pass by me. I look out to the pond in the center of the park and I can see a clear reflection of moon on the water. It is a full moon, and its light was astonishingly bright. However, as I'm walking admiring the view the light of the moon is suddenly blocked out by a

passing cloud. I hear a few taps on the box I'm carrying and when I look I see they are water droplets. It's starting to rain, so I rush over to my car and quickly slide this last box into the back seat.

Luckily the Quill was just down the road I don't have to drive far. It's starting to rain pretty heavily and it's only been about five minutes. This little storm came out of nowhere. However, I'm not surprised because usually in the summer we do get random rain storms at Grenwall. Driving into town I see The Quill, and looking ahead up the street at all the little boutiques and other stores, there isn't a soul in sight. It's quite eerie and I'm starting to feel like I should have forced Brandon to come with me. I grab the keys to the back entrance to The Quill and luckily I have my umbrella this time so I can run in real quick and grab one of our large book carts so I can easily bring the boxes in and stay dry at the same time.

Running to back the storm is definitely starting to pick up and the rain is falling harder. It's really windy because I'm so close to the river, so I try my best to hurry up. I make it inside and I try to flip the switch on one of the lanterns in the lounge but none of them were working. I use my phone's light to guide my way through The Quill. I remember the last time I used the book cart was for our last shipment and I left it in the fantasy section aisle. Walking past the front entrance, I stop for a sudden moment because it seems as though a shadow had just flashed

across my eye. I freeze in my tracks and click my phone light off. I close my eyes and take a few deep breaths. I slowly open them and blink a few times and again I see the shadows. It hits me it was probably just my eye lashes. It's happened to me before, my eyelashes are so long that sometimes it seems like someone walked by but really it's my lashes while I blink. I guess that's just my wishful thinking.

Shaking it off, I continue forward to grab the cart. It is precisely where I knew it was so I grab it and head back out the back door to get these boxes in and get the hell out of here. Getting the first two boxes in is a piece of cake but on the third one, the cart was getting a little wet so the bottom of the box was dampened. As I go to grab the box and place it inside all the merchandise falls from the bottom and scatters all over the floor. It is mostly pens, pencils, little pins, etc. My adrenaline has me wanting to just leave it all and come back in the morning to clean it up before Arthur came in since I had the key. But I feel so drained from today, that I know I'm not going to be waking up tomorrow early enough, and I will never hear the end of it from Arthur.

I shut the back door and quickly do my best to clean up all the fallen merchandise. Half way through I again notice a set of shadows flash past my eyes. This time I know it isn't my lashes. My heart is pounding and I'm wondering if I should just be calm because there was just a large celebration, perhaps whoever is out there are just people heading home from the event. Instantly though, I'm

reminded that as I drove past, there wasn't anyone in sight. I try to keep calm and continue picking up the merchandise, I scan my phone light around the floor and it seems I've gotten it all. I pack everything neatly away in one of the cabinets in the front desk when I hear four loud crackles on the front window. I'm assuming it's just from the falling acorns from the trees around The Quill due to the heavy winds. At least I hope that's what that is. I lock up the drawers, grab my umbrella and get ready to head back outside. I'm a little hesitant, but I know as soon as I get in my car I'll be fine. Once outside the rain is just pouring down, similar to the storm last week when I first came back to The Quill. I look around and the coast is clear and I make it to my car in one piece.

Placing the key in the ignition, I turn it a few times and my car isn't starting. "Come on don't do this to me." I say to it.

I try it a few more times and still nothing. "Damnit!" I shout.

I look at my phone and I dial Brandon's number. I hear it ringing on the other end.

"..."

"..."

"..."

"Hel-.."

"Hello?"

“Brandon?”

“Can you, can you hear me?”

“Brandon!! Damnit!!!” I shout noticing my phone has just died. Things just can’t get any worse. I look around and I’m starting to freak out. This storm is definitely sucking the beauty out of Grenwall, and it’s turning it into some creepy set for a horror film. The trees seem to be dancing, and the lighting in the sky reminds me of something out of an old Frankenstein film. I check to see if I see any passing cars, and nothing. I figure its already 12am at this point, I might as well just sleep in my car for the night, besides Arthur will be here around seven, so hopefully the night will go by quickly.

I start to doze off when an odd orange glare starts to burn through my eyelids. Slowly opening my eyes I look to see where the glare is coming from and in one of the boutiques I see a small light coming from inside it. I figure it must be someone who is working the booths just as I did and was bringing back extra merchandise as well. I grab my umbrella and head over to see if whoever is there can help. As I’m walking over however, I start to hear smashing and loud thumps. I slow down and stay out of the light of the street lamp. As I’m slowly walking closer to the boutique I stepped on something which made a loud crunching sound. Looking down I see its shattered glass and one of the pieces was quite large. Picking it up I tried to wipe away the mudd and it was the first two letters of the

name of the boutique. At this moment I realize something is wrong. I look ahead and quietly creep onto the porch of the boutique. Bending down I look inside and I see six tall figures dressed in black with black wool masks on with holes for their eyes and mouths. In shock of the realization that they were robbers I jumped back and slipped on the wet wooden floor knocking over a vase that was sitting on a small table just outside the boutique. In that moment all the noise stopped from inside the boutique as the men inside notice my presence. On my back I'm slowly getting up and one of them shouts...

“Hey whose there!”

“I said whose there!?”

I get up, pulling myself up using the ledge of the porch. My body felt like I was in a bad dream where when you try so hard to run you can't. I can't take my eyes off the men while I pull myself up. I'm thinking to myself this is it, this is it, and tears start to form in my eyes. Finally I get myself up and make a break for it down the street and towards The River.

“Hey get back here!”

“Come on boys we can't let him get away.”

“Help! Help!” I scream hoping someone, somewhere can hear me, even though I knew better.

“You won't get away! Get back here!” they shout.

I'm running and trying my hardest not to fall and I notice not only are they chasing me but they are throwing rocks in my direction. One of them hit me really hard on my shoulder, but my adrenaline keeps me from stalling, and I push on.

"Help! Please somebody Help!" I shout.

"We almost got 'em boys."

I hear their footsteps gaining on me. Their voices are so clear behind me that they sound almost as though they were right next to my ear. I'm running as fast as possible and I make it to the narrow path which leads towards The River. I make it to the opening and decide to run towards one of the large trees. I figure I can defend myself better by getting to the top and doing my best to fend them off.

As I get inches from the tree one of the men comes out of nowhere and tackles me to the ground. I feel the weight of his body force me to ground and my face hit the gravel. The water from the rain is cold and my clothing is completely drenched. I'm out of breath when the man who pushes me down turns me over.

"Please, don't hurt me."

"What's a little fellow like you doing out here all alone."

"Please, I just was bring stuff back to my store."

"Oh really, what store, everything is closed. You sure you want to lie to us?"

"I really was, m-my c-car stopped working, and I was just looking for help."

"Well my friend you picked the wrong night, what should we do with him boys?"

“Please, don’t hurt me, I swear, I swear I won’t tell anyone!”

“Like we haven’t heard that before, get up you look pathetic.”

I got up and they each surround me. The leader of the pack pulls out a gun and holds it to my stomach. I watch as he shoves the gun into my stomach and grabs my shirt telling me to give him anything of value I may have. The other guys surround us laughing, but at the same time appear hesitant to act.

“Ok J enough is enough, you scared the shit out of him let’s go before anyone else comes.”

“No, we need to finish this and finish this now, if any word gets out of this we’re done.”

“The kids scared shitless J, just leave him, we rough him up as it is, he’s not tellin’ a soul, are you kid?”

“N-no I-I-I, oooh,” the man with the gun hit me in the side.

“I-I-I- what are you stuttering Stanley.”

“J come on enough.”

“Will you shut up! Get out of here will yah and the rest of you idiots go back to the store and pack the truck.” They do as they as he says and within moments it’s just me and the man.

“Ok you little shit, what are your last words.”

“Please don’t! Someone HELP!” I shout, then take another punch to the ribs

“Please stop, stop, don’t do this!”

“Say goodbye to your little Grenwall!”

As the words slid out of his whisky smelling breath, and as the tears flooded my mouth into a salty puddle, I look ahead of me and see a light. My eyes are closing because of the mudd burning my eyes, but as I’m looking behind the man I see a bright light getting larger and larger. The blow to my head from the tackle causes my ears to ring and all goes silent. I’m thinking I’ve been shot and this is that moment when they say you’ll see a light. I feel my body swaying back and forth still in the man’s grip when suddenly I’m dropped to my knees.

I look ahead and I see someone pulling the man away from me in a choke hold. With the flashing lightening I see it’s someone in an army fatigue uniform. I see the gun get tossed into the river, and again with each flash of lightening I see a fist go up and then crash down on the man who had me in his grips. I stare and watch till the last hit and as soon as I see the man is knocked out I fall onto the ground on my side and feel the rain fall onto my wounds. My hearing comes back again and I hear rushing footsteps coming in my direction. My eyes widen because I’m thinking oh no he’s coming back to finish the job, but it isn’t the man.

“Hey stay with me now stay with me.” Says the man in the army fatigue uniform.

“Stay with me, keep your eyes open,” he says as he is pulling me up to sit me up against the tree. “My name is Officer Dominic Staten, you’re going to be ok.”

“D-Dominic?” I question.

“Yes, my name is Dominic Staten, I’m an officer at Green Point. I have help coming now. You’re lucky. But just stay with me alright.” He says as he wipes my face and gently cleans the mudd from my eyes. I hear his name, and I touch his face as though I am trying to pinpoint him to see if this was a reality when the next flash of lightening came. When the light flashed I saw through my blurry vision, which reminded me of my cab ride, and as he pulled me under the cover of the tree I am able to see his face clearly. It is him, it is Dominic.

“Dominic it’s me, it’s Eris.” I say as he looks at me confused.

“Eris, how do you kn-...” his eyes widen.

“It’s me from the city, the coffee, W-west fourth.”

“Eris...” he says and held me in a tight hug.

8

Not A Dream

Not A Dream

The next morning I'm waking up in a hospital bed, I have bandages on my torso, and a few butterfly bandages on my face in the areas where my face hit the ground. I slowly turn my head to the right and I can see my Mom and Dad sleeping on one of the sofas, across from them are my brother and sister, also sleeping. The lights are kind of bright so it's difficult for me to see, and I close them every so often so that I can get used to. I'm not sure how long I've been asleep but I'm assuming it must have been for a while since the last thing I remember was seeing Dominic under the tree in the storm. But then again, did I dream that whole scenario. I mean I have been having weird dreams lately, and it was just as crazy as all the rest, but it couldn't have been it felt so real. What a way to finally meet again, I can only wonder what is going through his head. I hear a door open and it's the doctor and a nurse.

"Susan, can you get me his record."

"Well, hello Eris it's good to see you're finally awake." My family immediately jumps out of their sleep.

"Oh honey you're awake, we've been so worried," says my mother.

"How long have I been out?" I ask

"Well you slept through the night and now it's about 3pm." says the doctor.

“Eris are you feeling better?” asks my little sister.

“Yea I feel ok still a little shaken and my body hurts.” I say.

“Well it’s a good thing that Green Point Officer was there otherwise I fear the worst may have occurred.” says my Dad.

“Alright everyone, let’s allow him to rest. He should be ok to leave in the morning.” says the Doctor.

“Ok doc thanks for all your help. Eris I’m going to take the gang out to get some food, we’ll be back later on ok. Eat some food and get some rest we love you.” says my Dad.

“Thanks you guys I’ll see you later.” I say as they all shuffle out of my hospital room.

Once they leave I take a few bites out of the sandwich the hospital offered me. It was surprisingly delicious. I remember my brother telling me how amazing the food was when he had come to the hospital a few years back because he had Scarlet Fever. It was a very scary time for everyone in my family. We were told by the doctors that he may not be able to walk again since the disease attacked his hip bones. And this information for my brother was horrifying because my brother is so active and very much of an outdoors kind of kid. He loves sports so if he wasn’t able to walk I fear his life would have been full of sorrow. He was in the hospital for nearly two weeks trying to get better and one thing he always looked forward to

was the food. So as I tear through this sandwich I'm thinking he was right, the food really is good.

After I eat I grab the little remote for the TV and I turn on the news. They're talking about my attackers and how they were caught and taken under arrest. Several people from Grenwall were interviewed by reporters and they were saying how shocked they were and how nothing has ever happened like this before. They even feared limiting the amount of people who come to the next Fourth of July Event. They were upset also because this Event has always been one of happiness and celebration, and now people are never going to forget and rather than have complete fun they are going to be leery and cautious. I personally don't think people will be that uptight about the whole situation since the next one will be in a year and things change over time, wounds heal, and people grow stronger. I think with the help of the Green Point officers next year will definitely place peoples mind at easy and allow them to enjoy the event just as any other year before.

I flip to the next channel and start watching some re-runs of a few reality shows I like and for a while it's taking my mind off everything that has happened. A part of me does wish I had my journal just so I can write to further take my mind off the situation, or at least write about it so I can let it out my system. As this idea came to mind I hear a knock on the door.

"Come in," I respond.

“Hello Eris, it’s me Susan.” she pokes her head in.

“Hey Susan,” I say wondering if she’s come to tell me some further information about my injuries.

“I have a visitor for you, would you like me to send him in?” she asks.

“Sure,” I say hesitantly.

Poking her head back out and closing the door, I watch attentively. About a few moments pass and I see the doorknob turn, and in he walks. He’s dressed in his army fatigue uniform, and as he walks in he politely pulls off his cap. I watch him as he closes the door behind him, I look at his hands and he’s wearing a yellow-gold class ring. He looks at me and immediately I can feel my face turn red.

“Hey Eris...” he says in a low tone and grabs a chair that’s leaning on a wall, pulling it over next to my hospital bed.

“I’m so embarrassed to have to see you like this,” I say touching my cheeks.

“It’s ok, no need to be embarrassed. How are you feeling?” he asks and softly touches my hand.

“I’m in some pain on my sides where he punched me, and my eyes burn a bit.”

“Ugh it gets me so angry, that this happened to you.”

“It could have been a lot worse, and I’m so thankful for you.”

“This is my job now, and I’m glad I was out there.”

“Speaking of that, what were you doing out there and better yet I still can’t even believe that you’re right in front of me. I thought I was never going to see you again after that night in the city.”

“I know, when I realized who you were under the tree I was in complete shock. I’ve thought about you a lot since that night.”

“I’m sorry I felt like I came off kind of harsh.”

“It’s cool, no worries haha. I kind of liked that about you in a way, I like a challenge.”

“Yes yes, well you never answered my question.”

“Oh about why I was out there, well...”

I was lying there and he slowly let go of my hand and started to rub his hands on his thighs from what appears to be nervousness. I nod my head letting him know that I’m listening. He starts to say that he was out by The River thinking about where his life was going to take him in the next couple of months. He said he has been living in the city for about a year and has dreams of becoming a police officer. However, due to some troubles where he was unable to afford his apartment he had to move back home with his mother who lived in Boston. He was finally able to find a job as a security guard at a clothing store somewhere on the Upper East Side and as much as he enjoyed the position, he hated the hours. He really wanted a change and did not like the idea of standing in front of a clothing

store for 12 hours out of the day. He heard news about the position here at Grenwall in Green Point. He says he heard from someone one who was also a security guard and ended up joining the Air Force. He says he went for the interview and they wanted to recruit him for training right away. There are some aspects of the position he is leery about, and he fails to mention them during his little narrative.

When he gets to the part where he was out at The River, he is saying that after the Fourth of July Event was finished, he for some odd reason felt he should hang around a little longer. He phoned his head officer who approved and who also liked the fact he was taking some initiative even on his first semi-major assignment. Once he saw that the area was seemingly cleared out he went to The River and sat under the gazebo when he saw that it started to rain. He had a book in backpack that he started to read under the dim lights that automatically turn on in the gazebo after a certain time in the evening. He says while he was reading he heard a muffled echo of someone shouting. He couldn't make out what it was he says and figured it was coming from across The River. He says he continued to read when the muffled sounded became clear and he heard my shouts of help. Immediately he says he phoned the Green Point Based that there was some sort of disruption. They responded quickly and sent to word for a group of officers to check out the area. After he phoned them he says he saw the limber trees along the

path from The Quill to the River swaying rapidly and he slowly crept along the edge of the trees as to see what was going on. It was dark and he couldn't really see what was going on and he remembers seeing six bodies circling something around one of the large trees. He waited unfortunately unaware of what was unfolding due his distance away from the scene, and he saw when five of the bodies ran back through the path towards The Quill.

He saw the one remaining figure of someone still by the tree, but then when a few flashes of lighting sliced through the sky he saw the figure taking blows at someone on the ground and he immediately reacted. He says he flashed his light rapidly to get the mans attention and that's when he attacked the man to stop him from hurting me any further.

“When you told me it was you and when I saw your eyes, I honestly started to cry.” He says.

“Why?” I ask.

“You just seemed so fragile and battered, and it just reminded me of something that happened years ago in my life, but let's not get into that, let's just get you better.” He says.

“Well I hope you can share that story with me one day.” I say.

“In due time, but hey I really should get going, I'm glad that you look ok and that we have met again.”

“Likewise.”

“Alright well, here’s my number, let me know once you’re out, maybe you can show me around this small town.”

“I’d love too,” I say as he gets up, taps my hands softly, and walks towards the door. “Hey Dominic.”

“Yea?”

“I know I said this already, but thank you.” He then looks at me and nods his head, placing his hat back on his head as he exits my hospital room.

After he leaves my mind is put at ease. The universe definitely has a way of playing games with you, and puts you in situations you least expect. I grab my clicker which I can use to message the nurse. I press the red button and about five minutes pass and she arrives. It’s the nurse Susan again and I ask her if I can have a couple sheets of paper and a pen. She smiles and quickly grabs some from the front desk.

“Here you go, a dedicated writer I see, even all battered up.” She says.

“I don’t think I am able to wait till I’m home haha.”

“That’s great, well enjoy and if you need more paper just let me know I’ll be at the front desk for the rest of the evening doing random paperwork.”

“Ok thank you.”

“No problem.”

I wait for her to leave and I start write the words, “Finding the Pieces” at the top center of the page. I start...

“It’s been such a tough collection of days.

Normally I love it when it rains, but the rain that hit, hit like a destructive storm with no possibility of stopping.

But waking up this morning the sun finally broke through the thick cloud cover and smiled over my country home way up in the mountains.

I was alone for the day, being that my family had all gone...”

I’m about to finish the sentence when I hear a rapid knocking at the door. Come in I say hesitantly, and in flies Lauren and Brandon holding a vase of flowers and a huge stuffed teddy bear. My eyes water and I realize how lucky I am to have them and how lucky I am to even be alive.

9

Insecurity

Insecurity

It's been a week since my stay at the hospital. I'm back at home relaxing and doing my best to not think so much about the attack. It was an experience I'll never forget. I still can't even believe I'm here to talk about it with my friends and family. If Dominic wasn't there who knows if that man would have pulled the trigger. Those men are being brought to justice and I will ensure that they receive every punishment that they deserve. One thing for certain, I will never be caught dead walking anywhere alone. It's quite unfortunate because I always felt safe in Grenwall. Now since I've been home and I'm walking anywhere, any little sound I jump. I feel as though my entire body is crumbling on the inside whenever I have a moment of fear and it is something I wish I could just snap my fingers and get rid of. I even went as far as telling my brother and father who are quite the pranksters to not jokingly scare me because they just might end up giving me a heart attack.

I am still pretty badly bruised up from the whole thing, but I don't want to sit at home so I grab my cell phone and call Arthur to let him know that I'm coming in.

“Hello this is Arthur.”

“Hey Arthur it's me Eris.”

“Eris my boy, are you finally out of the hospital? How are you! I’ve been worried sick. I was actually just about to call your mother to ask her if it was ok if I could stop by this evening to check up on you.”

“Yea Arthur I feel much better than a week ago. But I was actually calling because I need to get out the house and away from my thoughts. I want to come in to The Quill and work.”

“Eris now you know it will be better for you to get completely healed before doing anything.”

“I know but Arthur I miss The Quill, the people, the normalness of everything. I can’t let this take control of me.”

“We all miss you too and you know if it were up to me I wouldn’t let you come back for a while, but if you’re certain you think you’ll be ok, then sure come in. It’s been one week too long.”

“Thanks Arthur, I’ll come in tomorrow ok.”

“Ok Eris see you then.”

~o~

The next morning I head out to The Quill to take an opening shift that Matthew was happy to give me since it was a Sunday and he had gone out last night with Brandon and some friends from around the area. As I’m driving I pass by the boutique that was broken into. There are caution tapes wrapped around the

front entrance, a police car, and the owner directing a few construction works to different spots of the boutique that was damaged from the robbery. While I pass by quick snippets of the night replay in my head and it makes me sick to my stomach. I can't bear the thought so I quickly pull into the small parking lot at The Quill. I see Arthur heading to the front with a bunch of papers in his hand. On Sunday's its usually quite slow at The Quill so Arthur has plenty of time to do any extra paperwork needed for the store. I wave hello to him and we enter together. Lauren and Brandon were already there a long with a couple other workers. Lauren today is in charge of the café, and Brandon is keeping the lounge area clean. As usual I go to my station in the New Fiction section by the register and help out Arthur by organizing some merchandise to be displayed.

Throughout the day we are surprisingly busy. I'm assuming people are shopping to get there books for the week. We also have a lot of visitors to the kids section today oddly enough. I decided to clean out the filing cabinet towards the bottom of the register area because I noticed a few of the new workers just throwing random junk in there. I can hear a little boy nagging is mother about a new book on wizards he really wanted, I think to myself that he sounds just like my little sister. She obsessed with fairy tales, kind of like myself, so maybe she gets it from me. I'm reaching for something that is jamming the bottom drawer from opening all the way when I hear the bell of the front entrance ring, signaling

that a customer has either just entered or left. I can't seem to figure out what is caught in this cabinet, I'm reaching as far as I can and I can't grasp it. While I'm reaching I hear the little boy shout to his mother.

"Mommy, Mommy look it's GI-Joe."

"Oh honey don't be silly. That man is an officer."

"An officer? What's an officer Mommy?"

"Well it's sort of like a GI-Joe but with not so many guns."

"But Mommy they wear the same outfit."

"I know, I know. I'm sorry sir, this little boy and his imagination."

"It's ok mam, so you like GI-Joe huh little man."

"Yea, uh huh, he's my favorite character."

"That's good GI-Joe is a hero, it's always good to look up to a hero. Looks like you got a fighter on your hands mam."

"Let's not give him any ideas, haha, but you were kind, let's go honey, we're going to be late to pick up your father."

"Have a good day mam."

~o~

As I hear them say goodbye, I slowly stand up from my difficult task of trying to clean out the bottom drawer and sure enough it is Dominic. He's holding the door open for the woman and her child as they leave The Quill. He's spots me

and sends me a smile and a wave, while again politely removing his cap when entering the store. He walks over and out the corner of my eye I see Brandon wiping the table moving left and even once the table was no longer under his rag he was still making the wiping gesture. Lauren goes to him and touches him on the shoulder to have him help her in the café. I try my best not to grin, but I fail and Dominic notices and looks to the left, but Lauren and Brandon make it out of sight just in time.

“What are you smiling at?”

“Huh, oh nothing just thought of something that happened earlier.”

“Oh ok, well, hi, how are you feeling? I’m surprised you’re back at work so soon.”

“I’m feeling much better, I’m still in some pain but I just had to get out the house already.”

“I totally hear you with that one. Has it been busy so far this morning?”

“Not really just some people here and there. I have time to help Arthur, the manager of this store out with some organizing of merchandise and paperwork.”

“This is a really nice little shop you guys have here. I came in the other day and wrote down my e-mail. The cashier that was working here was pretty aggressive about me signing up. Is that one of your like main goals to get people to sign up for the mailing list?”

“Aggressive was he, hmm, well yea it’s one of our goals because that’s how we can personally reach out to our customers about new arrivals and stuff like that.” I say as I start losing myself in him. He seems to have gotten a fresh hair cut from the barber in the nearby town. They give really good urban style haircuts, and his skin is nice and clean. He keeps licking his lips and it’s driving me crazy, and his eyes I hadn’t noticed before, but are a dark green with a bit of yellow in the middle. He has a few freckles on his face, and I remember his beauty mark just to the right of his nose.

“I see well I look forward to those e-mails, I love to read. Some of the guys were getting on about that back at the base but hey they can kick rocks for all I care.”

“Yea, they seem like a bunch of, well, I’ll just keep my comments to myself, momma always said if you don’t have anything nice to say...”

“Don’t say it at all haha, well what time do you get off?”

“I get off at 5. Why?”

“Cool I’ll come pick you up. Maybe you can show me around some?”

“Okay that sounds cool.”

“But if you’re not up to it because you’re in pain I totally understand.” As he says this I look to my left and I see Brandon and Laurens heads poking up from the coffee counter nodding yes.

“Don’t worry it’s a plan, I’ll see you at 5.”

“Perfect, see you later.” He says and as he’s walking out he waves at Lauren and Brandon. They both try to duck out of sight and accidently bump heads. He looks back me, I shrugg, and he waves goodbye as he walks out the door.

~o~

After he leaves Brandon and Lauren give me their approval after seeing him again. They always know my hesitant ways, and Brandon is proud that after I denied him in the city, accepting to hang out with Dominic later was a good move. I’m growing very nervous because he seems like a genuinely good person, I mean he saved my life for God’s sake, how could I not at least give it a try. As per usual I start to create all these scenarios of how our little hang-out is going to go. Usually when I do this I sike myself up and then the end result isn’t what I had hoped for it to be. So this time I’m going to go into it with no expectations and just go in thinking I’m just about to go hang out with an awesome friend who I haven’t seen in a while. However, there’s still one thing bothering me about this last encounter with Dominic, but I’d rather not think it into existence. Here’s to wishful thinking and hoping for the best I guess.

~o~

While I was going to go back to working on organizing the cabinets and the merchandise displays, a glare from out front of the store catches my eye. I look out and I see its Matthew’s car. I see Dominic wave hello, and Matthew nodd in

response. Dominic walks towards his truck and heads out down the road. However, I notice Matthew stopping and watching as he left. He comes in and as usual is a little flustered. I'm beginning to think it's in his personality because he's always flustered. Nonetheless he waves hello to me and the rest of the gang and goes over to help Lauren in the café.

I'm trying not to think of anything odd but my instincts are flaring and I immediately have a raised eyebrow. Brandon walks over because he can tell I'm a little annoyed.

"Hey mister why you have that serious face all of a sudden. Not five minutes ago you were just all smiles."

"Oh nothing just focused I guess."

"Eris really...how long have I know you? We were practically in the same womb. I saw you see Matthew outside."

"We all saw Matthew outside."

"Yea but I know you saw him look back at Dominic and as soon as he did that I looked at you and it was as though all the happiness went flying out of you."

"Ehh no. It was just the glare from his car that was bothering my eyes."

"Well I wouldn't worry about that. I'll keep him occupied. But I highly doubt Dominic will want anything to do with Matthew, I mean look at you, you're gorgeous. Matthew is a cutie but, you take the cake, if you get my drift."

“Oh lord, haha ok you can go away now.”

“Yes! Score I got a smile!! If you need help, lifting stuff let me know ok.”

“Ok crazy.” I say as he winks and walks back to the lounge area.

10

Clover Valley

Clover Valley

Five o'clock rolls around and I'm finishing up some paperwork and helping a customer complete their transaction. I see the time switch to 5:00 on the computer screen and I look out the window and right on time I see Dominic pulling in the parking lot in his black truck. I pack away the customer's items and wish them a good evening. Brandon and Lauren are busy with their customers and I see Matthew coming to the counter to take over the rest of the shift. I sign out the daily sheet with my hours, grab my messenger bag from the back room, and head outside. As I walk out Dominic pulls down his window and smiles. I smile back and I nervously head over to his truck.

The door opens and I'm hit with pleasant smelling cologne and there's an R&B song playing on the stereo. He grabs some miscellaneous items off the seat and places them in the back seat. His truck is a little high so he gives me his hand as he helps me up into the truck. His hand is cold when I touch it and it gives me a chill. I take a seat and close the door looking out the window. My heart is racing at this point and I try my best to put on my best poker face. Looking back at The Quill I see Brandon and Lauren peeking out the window, I smile and he notices.

"What's that smile for?" he asks.

"Just my friends, they crack me up sometimes."

“I noticed, I hope I get to meet them one day.”

“Definitely.”

“So where to tour guide?”

“Well there’s an amazing view off route 9W, but my favorite spot which not too many people know how to get to and it is just below the train tracks in the farm village.”

“Yea I think I’ve seen pictures of the view on postcards.”

“The train stop is Grenwall but the view that it passes over before the stop is Clover Valley.”

“Ok let’s check it out.”

“Basically all you need to do is once we cross the bridge, make a left on the first road on the right it’s really hard to see so just drive really slow.”

We find the road swiftly and make it to the farm village. It’s a small cluster of homes and several farms scattered here and there. The farm village is known for its amazing Halloween Haunted Hay rides, it’s great apple picking fields, and some small food markets that sell mostly organic foods. However, it is especially known for the valley just below the train tracks.

“So how do we get to Clover Valley.”

“Come, I’ll show you.” We park the car near one of the organic markets and I lead us through one of the farms. I come here quite often and the family who owns the

farm doesn't mind me cutting through. The weather today is so beautiful, it's not too hot, but the sun is warm enough to give you a slight tingle as it touches your skin. The path to the valley isn't long at all and as we are walking through the forest towards the open valley I point out into the distance ahead of us at the train tracks. They're so high up that you can see the arches of the bridge holding them up. I show Dominic and his eyes widen,

"I can't believe we look like we're so low."

"I know it's pretty bizarre how this whole area was made."

"You can say that again."

We walk about another ten minutes just admiring the forest, listening to the sounds. At one point we have to cross a small stream, Dominic crosses first and he holds his hand out for me to cross over with him. He winks as he helps me and I blush in response. I look ahead and I see the opening of the forest leading out to Clover Valley and the train tracks are in a much better view. He runs ahead and I follow behind and we both exit the forest and run out into the field.

"Wow this is amazing Eris."

"Yea I love it here, oh my gosh, wait Dominic come here real quick hurry." I half yell, half whisper.

"What? What? What happened?"

"Come here with me behind this little hill but duck low."

“Uhh, this doesn’t sound good.”

“No trust me come on, ok now look over there just by the bottom of that long beam.”

“Where, uhh, oh! Deer!”

“Shhh.”

“I’m sorry I just never been like around them and not in a car.”

“Yea it seems like there’s a little family but let’s just stay here for a minute in case there’s a buck around.”

We watch the small family of deer for a while grazing and sure enough the buck came out from hiding in the bushes and leads the family back into the forest looking back before entering the forest with them. There are two calves and a fawn and they look pretty happy. They head back into the forest because just over head there was a train coming and the sound of the train crossing over the bridge frightens them.

“Whoa that was some sight. That buck was huge did you see his antlers.” He says.

“I know I usually see that family all the time here when I come when the weather is nice to do some writing.”

“Yea this is definitely a great spot to relax in, it’s so spacious, it’s like a different world compared to Grenwall.”

“Well Clover Valley is part of Grenwall; it’s just sort of hidden.”

“I can see why, if too many people found out about this place who knows what would happen, humans and their constant building.”

“Yea I think I would die if they ever tried to build here, but the farmers keep it under wraps and don’t let many people come. I grew up here so many of them know me well enough to not make this known to a lot of people.”

“What about your friends.”

“I’ve told them about it, but I kind of like this being just my spot.”

“Why did you bring me?”

“Hmm..well.. uhh..”

“You don’t have to answer that, but thank you for bringing me here.”

“So Dominic tell me about yourself. I don’t really know much about you or your job at Green Point.”

As we spoke we walk up a hill which in this the only hill in the valley. It’s like a small little hump and at that top of it stands one single tree, which is dressed at the bottom with thousands of clovers, and has a short trunk with long extending branches. I usually sit under this tree and do most of my writing. I’ve fallen asleep here so many times and woken up in the night with the most amazing view of the stars. My friends have asked me if I was ever afraid and I never felt scared being out here. And plus the farmers are just a walk away if anything were to happen.

When we get to the tree, we both sit side by side and Dominic begins to tell me a little bit about himself. He tells me that his family lives in Boston. He has a mother and an aunt who raised him. I ask him about his father, and he responds with, “What father?” He tells me that his father left when he was very little and that he’s only just recently came randomly to visit his family, and he didn’t want anything to do with him. I ask if he has any brothers and sisters, and he says he’s the oldest of three and his older of the two younger is gay and the other has autism. This led me to ask him if he is out to his family. He tells me he’s not, but that he’s pretty sure they have questions since he has never brought a girl home and he is already 23.

Based on that info I tell him I am also the oldest of three, but my family does know about me and are very accepting of it. And since I am unable to relate with him on part of that area of our lives, I tell him that my father too grew up without a father and I can sort of sympathize with him based on the stories my father has told me.

“How old was your father?” he asks while moving a little closer to me while trying to find a more comfortable spot under the tree. I feel myself tense a little and I wrap my arms around my legs and clasp my hands together and tell him...

“Well my Dad was about seven or eight and um, his Dad moved away to Mexico supposedly to pursue a singing career, and he left him, his mom, and his brother alone in the Bronx.”

“Whoa that’s pretty crazy.”

“Yea and my Dad went to Mexico actually to try and find him and he did.”

“Did you ever meet him?”

“No, he’s only seen pictures of me as a baby, I never actually met him which is honestly kind of sad to think about it.”

“Well there’s not much to say about my Dad just that he’s an idiot.” He says, and then looks out across the valley. For a few moments we both sat there in silence, feeling the warm breeze, and listening to the sounds of birds, and the wind blowing through the trees around us. I looked at him as he looked out into the valley and I took a deep breath and looked again at all his features, especially his lips as he would lick them every so often, and his perfectly curled lashes. He is beautiful to me. He is rugged, and I wouldn’t call him a pretty boy, but his hard exterior makes me curious to get to the soft spot on the inside. I think I felt this way because so far in our brief conversation, I felt like I was doing most of the talking and his responses about his life are quite limited.

“So, what’s on your mind you look so serious,” I say breaking the silence.

“Oh, just some stuff I was told earlier today by my head officer.” He says.

“Anything bad?”

“No just about a new assignment he wants me to take on.”

“New assignment?”

“Yea, some trip, but um, so tell me you write a lot huh? What exactly do you like to write?”

“Well right now I sort of just write random stuff that I’m thinking about in the moment, but I’m planning on going to the city this upcoming semester for grad school.”

“Graduate school? You already have your bachelors?”

“Yea I just finished this May, when I ran into you, my best friend and I were celebrating.”

“O ok, that’s pretty great.”

“Yea, I can’t believe its over, it went by so fa...” I stopped short in my sentence as he placed his arm around me. “...went by so fast, I feel like it just started.”

“You want to know what else is great though?”

“Su-sure.” I say as he takes his hand and gently turns my face towards him, and stares intensely into my eyes. The grip of my hands clasped together gets tighter and I stare deep into his brown eyes look back and forth from his lips to his eyes again.”

“This...” he kisses me, first with a soft tap, then he backs a little away to see my face, then again another tap, but he holds it a little longer, and then again but this time I feel his mouth open slowly and our tongues touch. My heart is racing and I feel his fingers gently touching my neck and chin. The arm he placed around me is gripping tightly my torso and my grip I have on my hands slowly loosens. I gently take hold of his shirt and pull him in closer. It was instant sparks, I didn’t want my eyes to open and I keep thinking how amazing he kisses. He’s taking his time as though he’s trying to savor each second. It’s a little awkward the way we are sitting so I make it a little more comfortable for us by turning my body towards him. As I turn he gets on his knees still holding me in his arms and slowly pushes my back to the soft patch of clovers beneath the tree. He takes my legs and opens them placing his body between me and pushes me in closer to him by pushing me in with his hands on my lower back. I wrap my arms around his neck and he begins to kiss me while on top of me. I feel pins and needles rush through my body, my palms are sweating, and all I am thinking is *I don’t want this to ever end*. For a second he stops to look at me, he smirks and his smile curls to the left, he winks, and kisses me with a kiss that will be the one to last forever on my lips.

11

Rocks on a Window

Rocks on a Window

The next day after being in Clover Valley with Dominic, I have off from work at The Quill, but I still went in to see if Brandon and Lauren were in to tell them all about the craziness that happened the night before. They text me that they are on their lunch break so I meet them inside and wait for them in the lounge area while they go to the back to get their wallets. We decide to go down to one our favorite lunch spots called Sally's. They have the best cheese burgers and their cheese fries are to die for. As we walk we pass by some of our old high school friends who are also on their summer breaks, and as we pass by the boutique that was robbed we see that they've already gotten pretty far along with the reconstruction of the front porch area. We get to Sally's and there is a back seating area where we go and begin discussion on my, as Lauren calls them, shenanigans.

"Someone is glowing today." says Lauren.

"You can say that again," says Brandon.

"You guys I can't even deal with you some times haha."

"So spill the beans where did you take him?" asks Brandon.

"I took him to the valley."

"To the valley!" shouts Lauren, "but you barely take us there."

"I know right, I'm actually pretty surprised about that." says Brandon.

“Yea I wasn’t sure if it was a good idea but, I feel like I wanted to be more open and show a piece of myself that I don’t really show much.”

“Well I’m glad you’re taking a risk and going with your gut.” says Lauren.

“I’m glad too! Sheesh and you did it all by yourself without me even telling you like any ideas.” says Brandon.

“Oh lord always want all the credit.”

“Hey I can’t help it if I carry the word of wisdom.” He says.

“Brandon.”

“Yea Lauren?”

“Shut up. Hahaha.” We all sat there cracking up when I get a text message.

“Hmm what’s that smile for huh?” asks Brandon.

“Nothing gosh can’t I smile casually at my cell phone. It makes me happy.”

“You’re so bad at being discreet. It’s him isn’t it.” says Lauren.

“Yea, he wants to pick me up again from work. But he said he might run a little late that something came up at Green Point.”

“Oh I hope nothing bad,” says Lauren.

“I don’t think so, I feel like if it were he probably would have just cancelled all together.”

“Yea I’m sure everything is ok don’t even think twice about it,” says Brandon.

After lunch we head out back to The Quill. We see a bunch of cars parked out front so we hurry because it looks like it's pretty busy today. We walk in and sure enough there's a line of ten people waiting to buy some of our new fiction pieces, the lounge areas are filled with people on their lap tops, and the café is completely packed with people reading in magazines and books, while sipping a tea or coffee. The morning shift workers seem to have everything under control, but Arthur looks like he's seen his savior when I head to the back.

“Oh Eris my boy I'm glad you guys got back a little early from your break. Listen I need you to take over right now at the register, Matthew called out today.”

“Is he alright?”

“Yea he said everything is fine, just something about his Dad and a hunting accident.”

“Oh that sounds horrible.”

“Yea so can you please please cover for a few hours.”

“Sure it's actually not a big deal, my plans for later got pushed back anyway.”

“Thanks Eris I really appreciate it.”

~o~

The hours roll by pretty quickly due to the amount of people who were shopping today. I definitely think that the July 4th Event helped in getting the word out there about our little business. Also I heard that my development is building

more houses towards the back end of our area and many of those people are here shopping or spending the day in downtown Grenwall while they discuss deals about their new homes.

Eight fifteen rolls around and while I'm getting the closing paper work for my register complete I look out the window and I see Dominic's truck pull up again. Brandon and Lauren haven't noticed because they were very busy in their areas. I finish the paper work, and give a quick holler over to Arthur and let him know I'm done for the day. He checks over my work and says I'm free to go. I grab my messenger bag from the back and hurry out to meet Dominic.

"Where to today mister Eris?"

"Well we can drive past my house and I can show you The Reserve."

"The Reserve?"

"Yea it's what they named my housing development and I'm assuming it's because we are so close to Green Point."

"That's pretty cool, ok let's go check it out."

"Let's" I say smiling looking out at the road.

~o~

I show him where my home is and no one was home so I was able to show him the inside of my house. He keeps saying, "Oh my God you live in a mansion," but it really isn't. It's just big but it's definitely not a mansion. I show him the

foyer when you first walk in with our cathedral ceilings, our small living room off to the right and our dinette area off to the left. We walk to the end of the stairs and I just point out family room and kitchen which make up the whole first floor. Then I lead him upstairs to where the bedrooms are. At the top of the stairs is my sister's room and right next to it is my parent's room. Down the hall passing our indoor balcony is my room and my brother's room right next door. I nervously open the door to my bedroom and I'm thinking a million things at once.

“So this is where the magic happens?” He asks laughing.

“Haha well not much magic going on here lately.”

“Well we can change that,” he says as he lifts me up by my waist wrapping my legs around his waist. I rest my arms on his shoulders and clasp hands together while he kisses me. He throws me down to the bed and the feeling of the fall makes me laugh and he starts to laugh as well.

“You're crazy,” I tell him.

“I know.” He says and continues to kiss me. I feel his body thrusting and his hands moving up and down my legs and torso. I'm again getting pins and needles throughout my body and while he kisses my neck I'm looking up toward my ceiling, and then out of my window. I see the sky turning from lavender to a midnight blue as the sun finishes setting, and the view of the mountains surrounding my housing development never looked so beautiful. I close my eyes as

I feel his lips on my neck and I know he can tell I'm enjoying it because of the way my body reacts to each touch. However, I feel him try to pull down my pants and I stop him.

"Not yet."

"You sure," he says breathing heavily.

"Yea, I mean, I, I want to, but just not yet."

"Okay, damn you drive me crazy." He says squeezing me tightly.

"You too," I say just holding him in my arms feeling his heart beat race with mine.

"I can lay here all night."

"Me too, but my family will be home soon so maybe we shou-,"

"Eris? Eris we're home."

"Oh my God quick." I say rushing him over to the ladder by my window.

"Oh shit. Wait you want me to climb down that?"

"Yea trust me it's fine I did it all the time in high school it's very secure." I say as I quietly roll the ladder down the side of my house.

"Eris honey are you here?" I hear my mom call.

"Okay if you say so," he says as he starts to climb down, "but wait when can we hang out again?"

"Text me when you get home, but go..." I say hurrying him out.

"Okay I'll do that," he says kissing me before he quickly scurries down the ladder.

“Eris?” my mom says as she opens the door to my room, and I’m shutting the window quickly.

“H-hey Mom.”

“What are you doing by the window?”

“Oh I just was going to start writing and I wanted to shut the window since it’s a little windy out.” I say and I can feel my blood rushing to my face causing me to turn red. I am literally the worst liar.

“Why are you so red?”

“No reason you just startled me, I had my head phones in so I didn’t hear you if you were calling.”

“I see, we’ll we brought some food over from Sandy and Joe’s house if you want any. It’s on the kitchen counter down stairs.”

“Ok mom sounds good.”

“Oh and Eris did you noticed that black truck out front?”

“What black truck?”

“The one I front of the house, the Ford.”

“No I’ve been in my room since six.”

“Oh ok we thought maybe one of your friends stopped by.”

“Oh no it’s just me, Brandon and Lauren are still working they get off at ten.”

“Okay, I just have never seen it before around here.”

“Maybe it’s one of the new people who are moving into the new homes being built.”

“Oh duh I don’t know why I didn’t think of that. Well ok honey I’m going to get undressed and take off these heels. Love you.” She says as she closes the door.

~o~

Over the next couple weeks Dominic and I had seemed to develop a pretty good relationship with one another. I showed him all of Grenwall, I showed him the high school, the marketplace, the park now that it was all cleaned up after the July 4th Event, and several other places where I grew up. We haven’t however stopped by The River just because it still reminds me of the whole situation that happened and I just didn’t want to think about it more than I needed to.

On the nights that he was off duty he would come in through my window and spend the night with me. My parents never knew because they never came into my room, but just to be sure I always made sure I was awake around the time they were getting ready to go to work just to keep an eye on the door. The nights we spend together were amazing. He tried several more times to go all the way but I just still wasn’t ready to go all the way with him. A part of me was scared to not be good at it, and the other part of me was just stubborn and Lauren always said not to give it up fast because it keeps them wanting more. Apparently it seemed to be working and as much as I didn’t want to hold back I did. One night was very

special to me; he looked me in the eyes and told me he could love me. The word love was a scary thing. I've used it before on the guys I've dated in the past but for some reason this time around it felt different to me. The guys in the past that I dated, as horrible as this sounds, I always felt like they were for the moment, but there would always be someone new in the future. I never felt longevity with any of them. However, being with Dominic for just this short amount of time, I had already come to a conclusion that I wanted this moment to last forever.

~o~

By our fifth week of hanging out, Dominic picks me up from The Quill and as he was driving me home we get into a huge dispute over the word love.

“You don't know what it is to be in love,” he says to me.

“Sure I do. I've been in love with someone before. I was hurt beyond belief and I couldn't imagine not being with him.”

“Was he your boyfriend?”

“No, but we acted as such.”

“But you said you never saw him being the one.”

“I know but...”

“But nothing you weren't in love, you might have loved him but you weren't in love.”

“What does love mean to you then Dominic since you always seem to have the answers to everything.”

“Whoa where is this coming from?”

“One thing I’ve kept to myself is that whenever we speak you always seem to have some answer and if I were to dispute it I’d always be wrong.”

“Well maybe your arguments are weak.”

“Whatever.”

“Being in love is like when you’re life seems like it’s coming to an end when the person is leaving you. You can’t sleep, eat, or do anything because your body and mind is so involved.”

“That’s obsession.”

“No it’s not, its love. You would kill for that person, and you’ve never mentioned having a situation like that so no you’ve never been in love and you don’t know what it is to be in love. You’re stupid.”

“Excuse me?”

“You heard me.” He says as I feel my blood boil. However, I am angry not with him, but with myself. I had to tell him something but I was being too stubborn to admit it. My body and mind were so drained and weak that I felt almost drunk and because of that I tell him the words I never thought I’d say to him.

“Dominic I’m not stupid, and I do know what it’s like to be in love,” I say as I throw a pair of dog tags he gave me one night onto his lap. “I’m in love with you, but I think you are too stupid to even notice.”

As I said the words he was speechless. He just stared down at my lap with a blank expression. This argument came out of nowhere, but I think it was for good reason. We’ve been hanging out with each other so much, and I know I’ve been putting myself out there, but he hasn’t made moves of his own. He is just going with the flow letting me come up with all the answers. I picked up the dog tags from his lap as I got out of his truck and slammed the door. I stopped half way in my driveway, and looked back to the street as he pulled away and I saw the dim red of his back lights disappear into the dark. When I see him turn the corner my eyes filled with tears and I run up to my room without saying hello to my family who were all sitting in the living room. I quickly went to sleep just to escape from what had just happened.

However, around four in the morning, I heard several loud taps which woke me up from my sleep. I open my eyes and the taps were coming from my window. At first I was frozen under my blanket because I wasn’t sure what it could be but with my blanket wrapped around me I crept over to the window and jumped back when a small rock flew at my window. I looked down and it is Dominic.

~o~

I open my window and since it was the middle of the night I am able to whisper to him. I ask him what he was doing and he wants to come up to “talk.” I let down the ladder slowly and he climbs up. I help him in through my window and as I did I dropped a book that was resting on the window sill and it made a loud thump. We both freeze in fear that someone would wake up and we waited motionless for about five minutes but there wasn’t a stir in my house. Once we feel that everything is ok he lays down next to me on my bed.

“Eris, I’m sorry for snapping at you earlier. It is just a subject that I really have a lot of passion for.”

“I understand, but sometimes if you have a point to make you can make it without being so overbearing.”

“I know I have a tendency to do that I will admit. I guess it’s because I have mood swings.”

“Yea I’ve noticed, one minute you’re happy and the next you’re sometimes a little bit of a grouch.”

“Haha, just you’re not subtle at all.”

“Well I call it as I see it.”

“I see.”

“Yea...”

“So, um, I wasn’t going to come back. Usually when someone makes a scene as though they are done with me I don’t turn back, or at least I try too. My best friend always tells me I always go back, but this time I think its ok.”

“You should know, its ok, I’m in lo...” he cuts me off with a kiss. He turns his body towards me and as he kisses me he lightly touches my neck similar to the way he first did in the valley. Then as he kisses me he slowly ran his hands down my chest, past my stomach, and down into my briefs. His hand was cold at first so it shot goose bumps all over my body. He applied pressure with his fingers and as he kissed me I feel my body becoming weak. I feel him slowly pushing my briefs down my thigh and I let him. I help him by sliding my body slowly left and right. He comes over me and with both hands pulls off my briefs and then my t-shirt. I’m completely naked and he’s still in his uniform. I start to unbutton his shirt and he unbuckles his belt. He pulls his pants off while keeping my legs wrapped around his waist. I pull his shirt off and all that’s on him is his cap and boots. His body is much larger than mine so he holds himself up with one arm to keep from being too heavy on me. I don’t let him and want to feel the pressure of his weight on me. He whispers in my ear if I am ready. I tell him yes, and still over me and reaches over to his pants and grabs a condom from his pocket. He within seconds it seemed was able to slide the condom on and he turns me over onto my stomach. Lightly kissing my neck I feel him enter me, and instantly I fall into a feeling I had never felt

before. He is like the perfect fit, it was a perfect medium of pain and pleasure, and we made love while the sky went from black, to pink, to baby blue.

~o~

12

Don't Ask, Don't Tell

Don't Ask, Don't Tell

The next morning we wake up and he kisses me good morning. He quickly throws on his uniform and heads out the window. He says he'll see me later, and from the bed I look at him wrapped up in my fluffy white covers and blow him a kiss. He smiles and like that he is gone off to start his day. I turn over in my bed and I can smell his cologne on my sheets. I smother my face into the pillows and place one between my legs. It was the best night I have ever had and I can still feel him all over me. I can't wait to see him later, and I can't wait for the next time. I close my eyes and fall asleep quickly. My body is sore but in a good way. I set my alarm to wake me up at twelve since I had to be a work by two.

~o~

Waking up at twelve I get dressed and head out to The Quill. I call Brandon on the way in since he had off today, and I'm sure he's going to love every minute of what I have to tell him.

"Hello, hey Eris what's going on?"

"Oh nothing just on my way to work, but I have to tell you something."

"Uh oh this doesn't sound good."

"No, it's actually very, very good."

"No!"

“What?”

“You whore! You slept with him didn’t you.”

“Oh my God why am I a whore haha.”

“I’m only kidding but yay it’s about time you prude.”

“Brandon it was everything I imagined and more.”

“Was he packin?”

“Beyond.”

“Haha, you’re too much, but I’m glad, so does that mean you guys are official.”

“No I mean, I’m assuming that since I told him I loved him, and we made love that things are going to get a little more serious.”

“Well hey go with the flow, just be careful and enjoy what’s coming, don’t pressure it any more than it needs to be.”

“I won’t but ok I’m pulling into The Quill now I’ll talk to you later.”

“Ok sounds good tell everyone I say hi, and hug Matthew for me.”

“Haha your insane but ok talk to you later.”

~o~

At the Quill it was another busy night. We sold tons of some of our new fantasy novels, and a couple of our non-fiction pieces. Arthur came in with some news about an event he wanted to throw at The Quill this coming month since we’ve been so busy lately. He passes me a flyer and basically it is talking about

possibly having an open mic night in our lounge area. It was saying that anyone in the town can sign up and read some of their poetry. I'm not much of a poet but I do have some things I could possibly read and maybe something I can write now. I am in love with the idea and I can't wait. With each customer I tell them about the event and I place the flyers in their bags. I'm hoping for Arthur that we get a huge turn out because he's been wanting to have an open mic night for a while lately.

As I'm finishing bagging some customer's items I look over and I see Matthew replenishing our fiction shelves. He's wearing a low cut V-neck t-shirt and I noticed a black and blue bruise on his neck.

"Hey Matthew so what's that?"

"Oh my gosh is it that noticeable?"

"Yes! Haha looks like someone's been having a good time lately."

"Haha I'm so embarrassed!"

"Was it Brandon? I see you guys flirting all the time."

"Oh no, not at all, I don't really like to date people I work with."

"Oh so who's the lucky fellow?"

"Just some guy, I'd rather not say, I feel like when I talk about a guy I jinx it and it never works out."

"Tell me about it, I know exactly how you feel. Well ok I won't press you about it.

As long as you're being safe and having fun, that's all that matters."

“Yea I’m happy,” he says blushing walking away to the back. I wanted to ask him if his father was ok but he seemed to be sort of in a rush to leave so I decide not act like some crazy reporter asking twenty-one questions.

~o~

After the last customer left I quickly finish up some more register paper work and then check my phone to see if Dominic has texted me. He did and he told me to meet him out by the park. I’m excited to see him again and I’m thinking about asking him where he sees this situation going. I really hope that he’s thinking of us in the same way that I am, but I know I have to just not think too hard about the whole thing and like Brandon said “ go with the flow.”

I close up shop with Arthur and wish him a good night. It’s the middle of summer so the sun is still out and shinning, and the sky is a bright pink. I walk over to the park and I spot Dominic sitting under one of the gazebos.

“Hey you,” I say as I walk up.

“Hey sexy,” he says giving me a tight hug.

“Haha how are you?”

“Good, feeling splendid now that I’m seeing you.”

“I’m glad,” I say blushing.

“So how was your day,” he says putting his arm around me as we start to walk around the pond enjoying the warm air.

“It was good, really busy, and I have exciting news!”

“Tell me.”

“We are actually going to try and throw an open mic event at The Quill.”

“Really? You know I have some stuff I wrote when I used to live in Boston.”

“Did you ever share any of it?”

“No it was mostly just for me, therapeutic reasons, to help get over some relationship issues.”

“I see, well I’m planning to read some of my own writing. I can’t wait for people to hear it.”

“I can’t wait to hear it ei...” he immediately takes his arm off my shoulders and moves away from me. I stop and look ahead of us and I see a bunch of Green Point officers running in two single file lines, it appears to be some sort of training session.

“What’s wrong?” I ask.

“Nothing I just, can you wait right here?”

“Um sure...?”

“Actually I gotta go, look I’m sorry Eris, but..”

“Hey Dominic I get it, don’t worry I understand.” I say walking over to him.

“Look stop talking to me for right now, just let me go I’ll talk to you later alright.”

He says with an annoyed tone which surprises me and comes out of nowhere. I feel

my heart race and I decide to just not bother and turn around and walk away. But as I'm walking away I stop and turn to see what he was going to do. I see him talking to a group of the guys who were running, and they point at me. He looks over and shrugs his shoulders and nods his head no. They point and laugh but then give him a hand shake and continue their run. I wait to see if he was going to walk back over now that they were gone but he continues walking in the direction away from me and disappears behind the trees heading towards The River without looking back once.

13

Caught

Caught

That night I go home and yet again walk past my family and head straight to my bed room. I sat on the floor near my bed by my window with the latter and just looked out to the sky. I am in a weird position. A part of me understood why he reacted the way he reacted. I can understand why he didn't want it to be known that he is gay. But at the same time he knew we were out in the middle of the park where people do walk and it was bound that we were going to run into someone. He chose to put his arm around me. I didn't ask him too, it was his decision, so for him to have reacted that way shocked me. I am hurt because it's so hard to find someone who is comfortable with PDA but at the same time I understand because he is working at a base and being gay is unfortunately frowned upon.

I check my phone and I had not received a call from Dominic. Was he upset with me? Was it my fault? Did he get caught and did any of his fellow officers even see him? But then again I question, that he was in the city in a gay area, and he is constantly out in the open, so why is this time different? So many questions, and like his talk about life with me in general throughout the past few weeks he remains a mystery as to why he does certain actions.

I decide I need to stop pondering and I grab my journal and decide to instead focus my energy on writing. I came up with an idea and I just start jotting down some thoughts...

“As we sit under the stars

The warmth of your arms

strengthens my security

in this world filled with horrible impurities.

It’s summer and love is floating about the air,

you can feel it as you close your eyes and let it blow through your hair.

Is it trickery? This feeling that strikes us like a million darts.

Perhaps maybe summer is simply the joker playing us like a deck of cards.”

I close my journal as I come to a block, and decide I need to lie down and once again sleep this day away and hope for a better one tomorrow. I find myself tossing and turning for the first time. This feeling I haven’t had in a long while. A part of me is angry because I knew this is exactly why I walked away from him in the city, but then again things are different, he saved me that night, so shouldn’t he have been more compassionate. I’m beginning to feel like I’ve put too much weight on his actions to save me and not realize that he was simply doing, well, his job. I start way looking at my window hoping to hear a tap from a rock letting me know Dominic was back to spend another night, but no not a single sound. Only

silence lingers throughout my room this night, and my bed is emptier than ever. I still smell his cologne on my sheets, and wonder did this moment in the park make him question the possibility of wanting to continue what we have going. I feel things will begin to be too risky and I don't want to place him in an awkward position. When I met him in the city I thought our only complication was distance, but now with the course of events, I feel now distance would have been the least of my worries.

~o~

The next morning I wake up and take my brother and sister out for lunch and then drop them off to the Marketplace to go shopping. My brother actually works a summer job at a sneaker store and my sister just wanted to stop by the toy store. It is a good idea to help continue get my mind off of the situation and also just spend time with my siblings. They mean everything to me and I felt like I haven't spent as much time as I should with them since Dominic has been in town. While at lunch and then on the ride to the Marketplace my brother notices that I'm really quiet.

“So how's it going Eris you seem a little off lately?” asks my brother.

“You can tell?” I say.

“Uh yea, you're usually always acting like the biggest dork. Lately you just go into your room and are always serious.”

“Whose serious?” ask my little sister.

“Oh, no one sweetie.” I say, “Well I don’t know if you’d want to hear about this.”

“What is it about, a guy?” he asks.

“Y-yea...”

“Eris you already know I don’t care, I got your back. I mean even though your my big bro I’m still bigger then you and will be your body guard if need be.”

“Haha, well there’s no need for that at the moment.”

“So what’s going on?”

“It’s just this guy, the one who saved me, the Green Point officer, he’s been distant.”

“What like he’s not calling you?”

“Something like that and he kind of got scared that someone might have seen him hanging out with me around town.”

“Well then screw him, he’s an idiot for caring so much about what people think. Everyone in town knows you and cares about you, so he shouldn’t be worried.”

“I think he’s afraid it might get back to his family in Boston, he is not as lucky as I am.”

“Yea but Eris if someone loves you they wouldn’t care about all that, you’re the coolest kid ever, all my friends love you so you shouldn’t be stressing, it’s not a

good look, I know you're like the "girl" in the situation, but don't be a bitch, you feel me?"

"Yea you're right, don't worry I'll be good, thanks I needed that kick in the ass."

"I got you bro, and if he tries anything let me know I'll get my boys, and you already know that's the whole football team."

"Haha ok, so you're going to take Gia shopping for a bit? I'm going to run some errands."

"Yea I'll call you when we are ready."

"Ok bro see you later."

~o~

After I drop them off I decide I need to get away from everything and decide to go to the Clover Valley. It's mid-day and the farmers should be home doing their mid-day chores in the fields. While I'm driving I switch on the radio and hear talks about a new hunting family that's living in Grenwall. Hunting is something I don't really believe in so I not excited to hear that there were hunters moving into town. As the DJ was talking he mentions that they are the Pollen Family. I am shocked because Matthew's last name is Pollen and Arthur did say that his dad got injured. I'm surprised they're even discussing this on the radio. But then again it is a small town and when things are new, it gets the most press.

I switch off the radio because I was over the whole hunting talk, and I pull into the road leading to Clover Valley. I park my car and walk past the farm waving at the farms wife who was putting wets clothes on a clothes line. She's so sweet and bakes the best cinnamon-apple cookies on the planet. I pull out my journal from my bag as I walk through the forest to the valley and I start to ponder some more lines from the poem I was beginning the night before.

As I'm walking on the trail to the valley I notice caught on one of the fallen branches a piece of cloth. I look at it and it is the same army fatigue design as Dominic's. I notice it because it's not the original camouflage pattern it looks more like a computerized print which Dominic said that he hated. He must have got it torn off the last time I took him here, but I never noticed any rips in his uniform before. Nonetheless its neither here nor there so I continue on forward excited to just relax in my favorite spot under the tree.

As I'm emerging from the forest I see a black back pack lying on the ground. "Odd," I think to myself, as I open it to investigate what's inside of it. When I open it I see a few piece of paper that's sticking out that says "The Quill" at the top. As I pull it out it's a work schedule, and the hours that are highlighted at Matthew's hours. Then it hits me, I remember seeing Matthew with a black back pack that day he came in when Dominic was leaving and he turned around to look at him. I drop the back pack and my heart starts to race.

I head towards the hill with the tree and as I look ahead, my fears had come true. Dominic is there with Matthew and they were making out extremely passionately. I gasp to myself and I trip over a small rock which goes rolling down the hill hitting a few more rocks along the way making a loud crackle sound. I look up and I see to the right of me the family of deer, their ears go up and they spot me and immediately gallop away into the forest. Dominic and Matthew stop and look up when they hear the sounds and they see me at the bottom of the hill. Dominic pushes off of Matthew and buckles his belt. Matthew scurries backwards on his hands to try to hide from sight. Thankfully his clothes were still on. Dominic gets up and starts calling out to me. I with tears flooding my eyes and blurring my vision push myself off the ground and run for the forest and back to my car. I hear Dominic behind me calling out my name telling me to please wait, and to stop. But I just keep running, running as fast as I can because I can't bare the sight of him. The vision of them together kept replaying in my head and it felt like as each step I ran a hole in my chest was growing. I don't know how I manage to run at a smooth pace, but I dip and dodge each natural obstacle the forest has and make it out to the farms without a scratch. I could still hear Dominic calling me to stop but I refuse. The farmer's wife is still outside and she sees me running and also hears him calling out to me. She runs over as well as I'm passing by...

“Eris my dear what’s wrong?” she says as she hears Dominic’s voice calling from in the forest. “Is someone attacking you? Should I call the police?”

“No, no it’s fine just a little argument, please don’t tell anyone.” I say as I stop for a breath. “He’s a friend of mine and we just had a little argument its ok though I just want to get home. If you see him and he asks if you saw where I went just say you didn’t see me.”

“Ok honey I will.”

I get to my car and speed away. I can see him in my rear view mirror huffing and puffing pending over gasping for air. I don’t stop. I keep driving. I can’t believe this has just happened, and I knew it, I knew it. I saw it coming from a mile away, but I was listening to Brandon. I wasn’t giving it much thought and now, look, my fears came true. Not only was the person I love kissing someone else, but my place to escape away has been tainted, tainted by a memory I wish I could physically pull out of my head and burn to ashes.

14

Dear Eris...

Dear Eris...

Heading back into town I get a text from my brother that him and Gia are ready to be picked up from The Marketplace. They are waiting outside when I get there and I look in the rearview mirror and I see that my eyes are blood shot red and swollen. I grab a pair of my shades from the glove compartment and put them on as my brother walks over to the car with my sister. I can see his face has a leery expression on it so I try to loosen up and act as normal as possible.

“What’s up bro, where’d you go?”

“Oh,” I clear my throat, “just to the library to fill out some online applications.”

“Oh okay sounds good did you get a lot done for the school.”

“Yea plenty, are you guys ready t-to go?”

“Yea we are ready.”

“Hi Gia did you have fun at the toy store.”

“Totally! I got some awesome video games for the Wii.”

“That’s great let’s play them when we get home.”

“Um obvi!!” she says laughing.

“Okay put on your seat belt.” I say as I turn on the radio to the hip-hop station my brother and I love just to avoid any conversation at the moment. I see him looking over at me out the corner of his eye and he’s biting his nail sort of watching my

mannerisms. I try to remain calm and mouth to the lyrics of one of the songs that are playing. He goes to say something but I think he can tell not to ask because I don't look open for conversation.

~o~

As we pull into The Reserve I see just by the entrance a black ford truck which is clearly Dominics. I can tell by the little American flag hanging from his rear view mirror but it didn't look like anyone was in the car. I get home and brother and sister get out the car and head inside through the garage. As they walk in and I get out of the driver's seat I see my front door open and my mom and dad are there leading Dominic out of the house. Apparently it seems like he got here before me and was looking for me. I stand there in the drive way waiting for them to notice me.

"Eris you're home." says my Dad.

"Yea, I just got back, what's he doing here?" I say calmly.

"Oh honey he just wanted to stop by and say hello but I told him you were out, but your back now." She says smiling.

"Hey Eris." He says, but I don't acknowledge.

"Well ok honey lets go inside and let them have some time to talk," my dad says to my mom.

“Okay, and Dominic if you’re hungry and want to stay for dinner, I have food on the stove.” My mom says.

“Thank you that sounds great but I have to be at the base tonight. But it was nice seeing you.” He says as they head back into the house.

As I stare at him from the driveway, he has the most worried look on his face. At first I’m feeling remorse and I thought it is big of him to show up at my house especially after what just happened but then I push that small thought aside and anger just fills my body. I cross my arms and look away. He approaches taking off his cap as he walks over to me and attempts to say something but fails each time. What can he say, there’s nothing he can say.

I look him in the eyes and hold back my tears. It’s such a shame how someone who was my hero turned into such a villain. Our story could have been beautiful; it could have been one for the books. It could have been a story like that of brother and my parents. The relationship that I thought I was going to have, one that was honest and pure, was no longer possible. It is as though he stabbed what we had going with a dirty needle and infected it with the worst of all poisons. It is a poison that has a possibility of being treated, but a poison that will leave everlasting scars.

“Eris, I’m sorry.”

“No you’re not, you knew exactly what you were doing and wanted every minute of that to happen.”

“Eris, look I wasn’t thinking, I was stressed, and I knew I had offended you.”

“So you go to a place that is sacred to me and defile it by doing what you were doing with my co-worker? My co-worker!”

“Eris it meant nothing.”

“Oh please, you took him to a romantic place, and you’re going to tell me it meant nothing. How could you do that? It would have been one thing if I caught you guys, but to catch you guys there is the worst of it.”

“I know and I knew it was a bad idea, but I just wanted to be private and that was the only place I knew no one would find me.”

“Well surprise because I’m NO ONE and I found you guys!”

“Eris please, I know you’re upset, but Matthew means nothing to me, you mean everything, and I will do anything to make it up to you.”

“Listen don’t do me any favors. This is done. I want nothing more to do with you. You ruined us forever, and I want you to know that one day when I write the history of my life, you will be known as nothing more but a plague.”

“Eris please let me make this up to you somehow. I mean we found each other again, and we both thought we’d never see each other, and we found each other, and that was all done by fate. Do you really want to throw that away.”

“You threw it away when you did what you just did! You threw it away. The universe surely brought us back together from our meeting in the city, but then the universe also brought me to you with Matthew to show me that you are nothing more than a piece of...”

“Eris come on let’s go play with the Wii!”

“Just a minute Gia I’ll be in, in a minute.”

“Listen get the hell out of here, delete my number, stay away from me, my ladder will never again be let down for you to climb, and you will never again here me say I love you.” I say as I spit to floor and walk into my house.

~o~

A few weeks have past since the whole situation with Dominic and Matthew. I see Matthew at work and as infuriated as I am with him, it isn’t his fault. He had no idea of the situation between Dominic and I. He may have seen us hanging out because he saved me, but I never once mentioned to him that we were dating. Dominic was playing the both of us, so if it wasn’t me catching them, it would have been Matthew catching us.

Arthur and the rest of the gang are getting things set up for the open mic which is going to occur in a few nights. It’s already mid-August and the summer is slowly winding down. I received my acceptance letter to a school in New York

City for a Master's program in Creative Writing, and I was excited to turn over a new leaf in the craziness of the city.

I haven't seen nor heard from Dominic. He took my advice and left me alone which I am glad he did. Not speaking to him sure has been hard but it made things easier to handle. My brother and sister began noticing that I've been much more of myself and despite all the challenges I went through this summer, the support I have from my friends and family has been the rock which has kept me sane. I feel lucky and grateful because I know most people don't have the safety net that I have and I have no idea what would happen to me if I didn't. Hell I'd probably be still communicating with that idiot. Nonetheless I'm strong now, and I will continue to stay true to my standards and not let such foolishness ever stand in my way again. Sure the big things matter, and saving my life I guess is supposed to make me forever indebted to him, but he paid that bill himself and set me free once he made the mistake he made. Regardless if we were official or not, his reaction afterwards is proof enough that he knew what he was doing was wrong whether there was a title placed on us or not.

~o~

Two days pass and it's the night of the Open Mic at The Quill. We have a huge turnout so instead of having the Open Mic inside, we decide to have it by the river. It's been about a month and a half since I've been over here but I think I've

been able to let it go a little and with so many people here for such a fun event it didn't seem like the same place it was when I was attacked.

The Quill team and I set up candles in a large circle near one of the large trees and we set up a bunch of benches in a circle. Behind The Quill we had a stump that was cut from an old tree and it was wide enough for someone to stand on. So we rolled it to the center of the circle of candles and it will act as the platform that the readers will read their poems from.

Off to the side of the candle lit circle are tables with refreshments and warm food. Most of the town is here, and it is nice because after all the chaos from the Fourth of July Event it was nice to have it be just us as a town enjoying something special together. As the last few people started to stroll to The River, wonderful old Arthur makes his way to the stump to give everyone a warm welcome.

“Hello my wonderful Grenwall how are all of you this evening?” he said in his deep voice, as everyone cheered and say random responses of “Doing well, doing great.”

“I'm pleased to be able to hold this Open Mic to show case some of our very own talent. Reading over some of the submissions which will be read tonight I couldn't be happier to share the art of the written word with you through the voices of these many talented writers. Please sit back and enjoy, and I ask that after each reader, as opposed to clapping you snap, while the next reader goes onto the platform. Also I

ask to please keep the talk down, since we are outside we want to hear each word being said.” As he spoke Brandon, Lauren, and I were handing out small bags of cookies, chips, and cans of soda to the audience.

“Our first reader is our very own Eris, he’s been through so much this summer, so everyone please give a warm welcome to Eris reading, ‘What Happened.’” I made my way to the platform and brought along my journal which held the piece I was going to read. I look out to the audience which has the view of the mountains and the river behind them. I take a deep breath and begin my piece.

“What Happened

Sitting up on the roof top, on the very edge of my building...

With nothing more than my notebook and a box of flares...

I think about what journey my pen is going to take me on this evening...

A light bulb turns on in my head and as a cloud covers Old Luna’s shining light, I decide to spark up a flare...

With the sparks of light floating all around me I prepare to begin my nightly adventure...

Then suddenly I hear a huge racket coming from below me and it interrupts my thinking...

Looking down, it was my dear good friend Evol...

Evol had been gone for quite sometime...

We got in a little mishap a few months back but we were able to patch things up, thankfully...

Telling Evol to come up and sit next to me I tried to make his seat quite comfortable...

After all Evol was my friend...

I showed Evol some of my writing and he seemed to love it...

He got really attached to one of them and from that single piece Evol decided to stay a little while longer...

Looking at my flare, it was about to go out and I look up and it seems like Old Luna was going to be hiding for the rest of the night behind the clouds...

That's so unlike her...but hmm oh well... so I decide to let Evol light one of my flares...

He lit my flare and we both took a few adventures together with my trustee blue ink pen...

Some of them totally stress us out and some of them make us laugh...

It is great...

I really feel like this time Evol is going to stay for quite some time...

But then I started to notice the flare Evol lit is going out much faster than mine, and mine has been lit for a while already...

I thought it is weird so I reach back into my box to light another flare and Evol smacks them out my hand...

The box went tumbling down the building...

As I went to reach for them I almost fell off the side of the roof...

Thankfully the bracelet my family gave me caught onto the gutter and I was able to pull myself up...

I asked Evol why he didn't help me up and he just stood quiet...

And then Evol had to leave...

Feeling horrible I let him go and wish him a safe trip home...

The next night Evol didn't come back...

And not the next night or even the next...

But I remember that each night, as I would look around the city, I saw a flare go off on many different buildings...

"I'm the only one who had flares so how could this be?" I question myself...

Then finally, one night, Evol returns with my empty box of flares...

"Why were you sharing my flares with all those people Evol" I ask him...

Rather than give me an answer Evol just looked at me with the most horrible grin I've ever seen...

Frightened by this grin I grab my notebook and ran back into the building shutting the door behind me...

Leaning up against the door with my notebook clutched over my heart, all that could be heard is Evol's laughter...

More confused than sad, I wonder what happened...

What happened to my dear good friend Evol...

Can someone help me answer that...

Please someone tell me..

What happened to Evol?"

As I read the last line. It is silent at first but then snaps came. I look over at Lauren and I see Dominic walking up behind her. He taps her on the shoulder, she says hello, and appears delighted to see him, since I hadn't told anyone about what happened. He holds an envelope in his hand and gives it to her. He points to me slightly and she turns her head facing me. She holds the letter in her hands and he turns and walks away. I watch as he walks away towards The Quill, and in that moment, I knew, that it was over. Stepping down from the wooden platform I walk over to Lauren and she hands me the letter. I pick up a candle and walk over to one of the trees to not disturb the readers. I look at the letter and on the back of the envelope it says please read in green ink. Slowly opening the letter my hands are shaking. I pull out the piece of loose leave paper, unfold, and read with shining the candle above it.

Dear Eris,

I know what I've done can't be undone. I feel horrible and if I could say sorry to you an infinite amount of times I would. I understand that you no longer want anything to do with me, but after everything that has happened I can't help but fear life without you. I wanted to give you this letter to tell you, I am going away. My head officer is sending me to 8 months training in Texas. I can't say what the training is for, but I am going. If you could find it in your heart to forgive me, please write to me with the address I have on the back of this paper. I'm so sorry.

Love,
Dominic