

Ana and Jack met in freshman year of college. He lived one floor below her (the boys and girls were separated by floors) and during Thanksgiving break, they were the only two left in the small dorm building. They met one evening when Ana was pacing in her hallway, toothbrush in her mouth, inspecting the various flyers and posters that covered the walls. Day three of break—only three more days until everyone was back on campus and she didn't have to be so bored. When she reached the end of the hallway, she pushed open the door and padded down the cold cement stairs as quickly as she could in her bare feet. This hallway was similar to her own, but with a more distinct smell of "boy." Ana turned to go back upstairs, her mouth still full of toothpaste, when a single voice drifted down the hallway.

"Hello?"

This word, from a boy down the hall, was followed with choking and spit, from Ana. The boy appeared about six doors away from Ana, wearing old, light-wash jeans, socks, and a light red T-shirt. His blonde hair stuck up in a million different directions. When he saw Ana, in her sweats and tank-top, covered with toothpaste, his eyes widened.

"Are you okay?" He had a thick Irish brogue. "Are you choking?"

"You scared me," Ana said through a mouthful of toothpaste, putting her hand over her heart. She pulled her hand away when she felt the wet toothpaste that she just choked up and made a face. The boy laughed and pointed to the bathroom, telling her she could use it—he was the only guy on the floor here right now. Ana washed herself off in the bathroom—again, which had so much "boyness" about it—and started back to her room, but stopped herself when she saw an open door. She made her way to the room and leaned against the doorway, watching the boy, who was now sitting at his desk. His laptop was open and he was surrounded by papers. On his bed there was a blanket with the colors of Ireland's flag.

"You're Irish," Ana said, because she never was good at small talk, and she couldn't think of anything else to say—but she knew it was best to speak, instead of just standing in his doorway with a toothpaste-covered tank top, watching him.

"I am." He laughed. "How could you tell?"

"I have this weird sixth sense where I can sense Irish people from twenty miles away."

"Ah, I thought it would be the accent."

"It always helps, but I'm a bit more advanced than that. Not one of those girls who falls head over heels for a guy with an accent."

"Yes, in the short time I've been here, I've noticed that. If only men went crazy over my accent like women do."

“You’re gay.”

“Yep.”

“Gay and Irish.”

“That’s me,” He burst out laughing. “I believe that’s all I had to write on my application to this school. Just, you know, handed in a sheet of paper with ‘gay and Irish’ written on it, and they sent me a private helicopter to take me here.”

Ana laughed and made her way from the doorway to a big red bean bag that was sitting in the middle of the room. She played with the hem of her sweatpants, which was frayed and coming apart, while Jack shut his laptop and shuffled his papers together until they were in a neat pile. He put the pile at the upper right corner of his desk, and set his computer right next to it. On the other corner of the desk sat a coffee mug full of pens and pencils.

“Happy Thanksgiving, by the way.”

“I’m Irish.”

“I know, I was just trying to get you to say it to me. It was a hint.”

Jack grinned. He had a small gap in his front teeth and a big dimple on the left side of his face.

“Happy Thanksgiving...I’m sorry, I don’t know your name.”

“Ana. And your name is Jack.”

“Is this your sixth sense speaking?”

“Yeah,” Ana said, lips turned up in a smile. Her eyes flickered to his door and then back at him. “Some people read the nametags on the doors, but like I said, I’m a bit different.”

“That must be handy,” Jack said, pulling his knees up to his chest. “I called my lab partner the wrong name today. I’ve known her for four months, and I could not, for the life of me, remember if her name was Emily or Emma, so I took a guess.”

“Never just take a guess,” Ana said. The corners of her eyes crinkled when she smiled. “That’s when you just refer to them as ‘buddy’ or ‘pal.’ Or ‘your majesty.’ I don’t know, anything but just taking a guess.”

“I finished the setup, your majesty,” Jack said in a terrible British accent, gesturing at open air. “Have you formed your hypothesis yet?”

Ana laughed, but more at his fake accent than anything else. Jack's face turned rosy pink but he looked pleased with himself. They talked about the people they've met and whose names they've forgotten. Ana asked Jack about his lab—biochemistry was his major, she found out—and if he liked his classes here in the US. Jack asked Ana about her classes and what she wanted to do after college—Ana answered by shaking her head and waving her hands, saying 'no thank you, we don't talk about the future right now.' Ana talked, and she made Jack laugh. Jack talked, and smiled with that big gap in his teeth. It was simple and sweet and they both were wearing socks with holes in them.

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The day after they met, Jack showed up at Ana's door, asking if she wanted to grab takeout with him. They walked to a pizza place a few blocks away, Ana talking excitedly with her hands the whole time. She flailed a lot, always had. She accidentally hit Jack on the arm and came close to his chin one time, but by the time they reached their destination, he had learned to avoid it. Her flailing and her talking and her jokes were strange and funny and Jack loved every second of it. He had only been in the US for a few months, and hadn't found anyone yet who made him feel like Ana did. Until this, it was all about small talk and polite laughter. Ana had him in stitches and it was the only second day they spent together. She had said, "you're Irish and gay," but she didn't expect him to fall directly under those categories. He wanted to tell her how relieved he was that he met her, how happy he was that she came onto his floor yesterday and spit toothpaste everywhere. But, again, it was only their second day together, and he didn't want to be excessive.

Ana was filled with a sense of dread like no other when she smacked Jack in the face. She knew she was twitchy, she knew she flailed around a lot, and she knew it was weird. She wasn't the most popular in the past, and was often labeled "the weird one." And now here she was, smacking the nice gay Irish boy in the face while talking about her favorite graphic novel. But, to her relief, Jack didn't even say anything. He listened to her talk, laughed at her jokes, no matter how many times she had been told her sense of humor was not too normal, and by the end, she had controlled her flailing a bit and stopped accidentally hitting him. Jack chimed in with stories and opinions of his own, which Ana tended to vehemently agree with. He seemed so genuine—Ana met lots of men (and women) in her life who are kind, but once you dig beneath the surface, the kindness fades and it turned out the generosity was really just an act. But Jack was clear. There was no other word for it. When he listened, it was clear—his eyes and ears were only for the one who was talking. When he talked, he was clear—his stories were not fabricated, but they were still good and funny and interesting. He was clear right to his bright blue eyes—clear like a little peaceful pond, never touched by pollution, so that you could easily see all the pebbles and stones and the little fish swimming around in it.

A day later, students started coming back to campus, and the dorms were buzzing again. Jack and Ana didn't hang out again until the end of the next week, when they ran into one another on campus and grabbed coffee before their next class. There was a coffee kiosk next to the science buildings that was run by a man with dreadlocks and countless

piercings. Ana was obsessed with him. Before they knew it, Thursday afternoon coffee officially became a thing, and when Jack's biochemistry lab took too long one time and he wasn't able to meet Ana, he looked at his phone and was met with four loud text messages (if text messages could be loud). He couldn't help but laugh at her use of caps lock, exclamation points, and creative threats she promised if he didn't show up to get his small black coffee. He sent an apology text and poked his head in her room when he got back to the dorms. Ana threw a shoe at him. Jack got out his laptop and started in on his theology homework while Ana sat at her desk and worked on calculus. They listened to a Bruce Springsteen album.

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This new friendship of theirs carried them through December, the long, snowy, stressful month of final exams. Jack went home to Ireland for Christmas, and Ana went back to New Jersey. After winter break, their first day back on campus, they got Chinese takeout and watched almost an entire season of *Orange is the New Black*. And after that, it became unofficially official. Ana stopped being Ana, and Jack stopped being Jack. To Ana's floor mates and friends, she became Ana-and-Jack. To Jack's floor mates and friends, he became Jack-and-Ana.

Throughout the rest of freshman year, they continued to get coffee and eat food and watch movies and learn more about one another. It turned out that Jack's dimple wasn't actually a dimple—when he was five-years-old, he fell off the monkey bars and dented his left cheek, and that's why the dimple was bigger and higher up on his face than usual. It turned out that Jack didn't like biochemistry at all, and it turned out that Ana liked psychology quite a bit, and was good at it. There were times Ana made Jack laugh so hard that his face turned bright as a tomato and his sides hurt, mostly when she did impressions, accents, and animal noises. She was horrible at them. There were times Jack astounded Ana with his ability to speak fluently in movie quotes and useless facts. Whenever Ana wondered something aloud, Jack had the answer for her. He knew a little bit about everything.

"You say the same thing about your mum," Jack said one morning over homemade waffles. They sat in the small kitchen each floor had, Jack sitting in one of the hard wooden chairs with his perfect posture, as usual, and Ana leaning against the oven, eating more whipped cream and syrup than waffle.

"I say what about my mom?"

"You say your mum knows a little bit about everything."

"Yup, she does. You two should have a trivia contest sometime."

Jack laughed and pushed around a tiny square of waffle in a pool of syrup.

"Do you like that about your mum?"

“What do you mean?”

“You always say that you like that I’m a little pocket encyclopedia for you. If your mum is the same way, how come you only complain about her?”

Ana frowned at this and became transfixed on her plate, now coated with whipped cream.

“I don’t only complain about her.”

“You complain about her a lot.”

“We’re just...really different people. She gets on my nerves sometimes.”

“Yeah, I guess so.”

Ana put down her plate and crossed her arms.

“What does that mean?”

“I just...I feel like you should like her more.”

Ana barked out a laugh, but it was a sarcastic one, a harsh one. It wasn’t really a laugh at all.

“I’m sorry I don’t get along with my mom? I’m not quite sure what to say to that, Jack Attack.”

She only called him Jack Attack when she was happy with him or annoyed with him.

“Forget I said anything.”

“Oh, okay. We’re doing this again. Got it.”

“Doing what?”

“That thing, where you pick a fight, and then back off and act like I’m the irrational one when I get upset.”

“I didn’t want to pick a fight, it’s just that sometimes you complain a lot, and it can be frustrating.”

“Yeah, I’m the frustrating one.”

And, like any good friendship, they finished the fight with annoyance and bitterness and a stubborn belief that they were right and the other was wrong. And, like any good friendship, one bought the other one coffee the next day, and the other one showed a funny YouTube video they found earlier that day. That was Ana and Jack’s routine, at least. Their

fight were never big. There was never a need for an official apology. Jack got annoyed at Ana for being so pessimistic, which could sometimes be blunt and hilarious, but not always. And Ana got annoyed at Jack for his snarky, catty comments, which could sometimes be very clever, but also annoying. The little frustrating imperfections were nothing but bumps in the road of friendship. And at the end of the day, Ana and Jack were just happy that they had decided to go down that road in the first place.

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Before they knew it, freshman year was over. The night before Jack went back to Ireland and Ana went back to New Jersey, they both sat on the floor of Jack's dorm room, which was freshly vacuumed and free of all the little crumbs and scraps of paper that the school year brought. Ana asked Jack if he was going to stay in the US full time—if he was going to find a job there and start a family there. Jack said yes, of course, because ever since he was little he dreamed of living in America with his husband and lots of cats. Ana mocked him, of course, but she could picture it just as much as he could. Jack asked Ana if she was ever going to move back to New Jersey, but she said no, she needed to be far away from her parents—it was the only way they got along. It was one of those nights perfect for dramatic secrets and stories never before told. Ana sat with her legs stretched out in front of her, pajama shorts bunched up around her thighs, and her pointer finger drawing circles and loops on her bare skin as she talked. Jack leaned against his bedpost, grinning his gappy grin and picking at the carpet occasionally. The next morning, they ate dry cereal and hugged before Ana's cab arrived and Jack left for the airport.

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Sophomore year, Ana and Jack generally lived together. They lived on the same dorm floor in rooms right across the hall from one another. Half of Jack's DVDs were in Ana's room, as he wanted her to improve her knowledge of movies, and half of Ana's food supply was in Jack's room, which she put there to try and stop herself from eating whenever she got bored. And when Ana's roommate brought a new guy to spend the night (which was quite often), Ana slept in Jack's old red bean bag, which she had come to love during freshman year almost as much as she loved Jack. They fell into their old routine easily during their first week of school. On a hot day in early September, they took a trip to the bookstore together, saying hello to every old acquaintance they passed—Jack-and-Ana, Ana-and-Jack once again. Ana had officially picked psychology as her major, a major that said, "I know for a fact that I have no idea what I want to do in my life." She flipped through her psychology books for the semester while Jack picked up his biology books, as he had recently switched majors from organic chemistry to biochemistry. After they bought their textbooks, they got coffee from their usual kiosk, and Ana enthusiastically high-fived her favorite dreadlocked coffee worker. There was a new boy working there who looked to be about their age, who Ana talked about all the way back to the dorms.

"He was cute," Ana said.

"Why didn't you ask for his number, then?"

“If I was a gay male, I would. More specifically, if I was a gay Irish male, I would.”

“What? He wasn’t gay.”

“Are you kidding? He couldn’t stop staring at you.”

And there was that gappy smile Ana hadn’t seen for three months.

“He was not staring at me.”

“He was. He was also fantasizing about bending you over that coffee kiosk.”

“Ana!”

“I told you, I have a sixth sense! I know these things!”

Jack laughed. It was nice to hear Ana say these things again. His parents didn’t have a problem with his sexuality, but they were always slightly uncomfortable with it. They didn’t like talking about it, and they never asked Jack if he met anyone at school. Ana was the complete opposite. Any time the two of them passed an attractive man about their age, Jack prepared himself for a smack on the arm. When a cashier or deliveryman smiled at Jack, he knew that within seconds, Ana would be pressing into his side and whisper “*Do it,*” or, “*Give him them digits, son,*” or anything else equally embarrassing. And to Jack, the best part of it was that Ana didn’t do this because Jack was gay and she was poking fun at him. No, she was just being Ana. She was never good with guys. She didn’t understand how to flirt. Her flailing increased by about 30% whenever she was with a guy. But she loved them—and that was the worst part. She never stopped talking about boys—whether it was a cute guy in her class or an up-and-coming movie star, Ana would talk about him for what seemed like years while Jack nodded along, busily typing away on his laptop. And she couldn’t even speak to one without accidentally spitting out her gum.

As it turns out, the new guy at the coffee kiosk was gay, and he did think Jack was cute. The coffee guy—Ryan—wrote his number on Jack’s coffee cup before he gave it to him. Jack grinned throughout class and all the way back to the dorms. The first door he opened was not the one to his room, but to Ana’s. He strode across the room and dropped his empty coffee cup with the number on it in her lap, raising his arms and jogging small circles around her room. Ana laughed and called him a loser. Jack collapsed on the floor and Ana rolled the cup back to him. Jack tossed the cup from hand to hand as he babbled, laughing at his own jokes, like he usually did when he got excited. He was so intent on telling Ana all about it that he completely forgot to even think of texting Ryan until a few hours later.

Ana had no idea that joking about the coffee kiosk guy would turn into reality. After a few dates, Jack fell head over heels, and so did Ryan. Ana didn’t complain, because she got free coffee from this relationship. Ryan was funny and outgoing and intelligent in so many ways. Not in the same ways Jack was—Ryan skipped classes way more often and did his

homework only when absolutely necessary. But in Ana's opinion, that was good for Jack. It loosened him up.

"You never nag *him* about not studying," Ana said one day while Ryan was sleeping on the floor and Jack was writing an essay. "I'll gladly have sex with you if that's what it takes for you to stop your Jack-nags." Jack just put on his headphones and flipped her off. Yeah, Ryan was good for him.

Before they knew it, Ana, Jack, and Ryan were trudging through a foot of snow, hats and scarves covering everything but their eyes, to the convenience store. Fall had flown by, the leaves falling off the trees in a day, and the first flakes falling from the sky the next. There was so much falling involved from the transition from fall to winter. While Ana and Jack bickered over what kind of ice cream they wanted, Ryan dragged his feet around the store, waiting for them to finish. He returned to them holding a flyer for a Christmas party that was going to be held on campus. Neither Ana nor Jack was enthused about it, but after about an hour and a half of Ryan whining about wanting to go, Jack agreed. Ana said she would only go if there was a tall, dark, and handsome stranger to go with her. Ryan laughed, but Jack met her fake cheeriness with a sympathetic look. He knew she had been feeling a bit lonely in the past few months. Of course he didn't abandon her for Ryan—he would never dream of it. But still, Ana watched as he went out on dates, got surprised with takeout Chinese food from Ryan, and other couple-y things that happened more than Jack ever thought they would with him. Jack was in love, but Ana was lonely, and apparently Jack-and-Ana wasn't as good when it was like that.

They all went to the party, though, and Ana put on a happy face and a nice skirt. Ten minutes after they got there, a boy approached Ana and started talking to her. Ana shooed Jack and Ryan away as subtly as she could so she could keep talking to the boy. They talked for the entire night, and whenever Jack looked at Ana from across the room, she was laughing and playing with one of her curls. When it was time to leave, Ana said goodbye to Jack and Ryan, and this new boy promised to walk Ana home. Jack was excited for his friend, already envisioning the double dates that they could all go on. But later that night, Jack was awoken by a knock on his door, and opened the door to find Ana there, still in her pretty skirt and her black boots. The boy had walked her home, but expected something more than a kiss at the front door of the building. He got too rough with Ana and she fell down on the steps leading up to the dorm, and he ran. Ana turned around to show Jack where she fell, and there was a big, wet, muddy spot on the back of her brand new skirt that she was so excited about. She started to cry and Jack told Ryan to leave for the rest of the night, and Ryan did, and then it was just Jack-and-Ana. Ana could never get the skirt to look the same as it did.

After that, Ana went home for Christmas break a week early. She took her two final exams early, unable to wait, needing her mom. Jack felt guilty throughout vacation, knowing that he shouldn't have let a stranger walk Ana home. Ana assured Jack that he didn't need to feel guilty, but he did. They didn't talk much at all during the two weeks they were separated. 4000 miles apart from one another, they both looked at their Christmas trees—Jack's was



decorated with tiny gold blinking lights, and Ana's with muted purple lights—and beat themselves up for things that weren't their fault.

When they came back to school in January, Ana sat in Jack's red bean bag chair and Jack sat at his desk and they talked about nothing and everything, and from then on, it was better. The spring was rather uneventful. Their classes got more difficult, and Ana got a job as a waitress at a local pizza place. During the week, they studied together, taking the small comfort they could get from being in the same room. When the weekends came around, they were both exhausted, and although they tried to go out and have fun, they usually ended up falling asleep before midnight with the TV on and empty bowls of cereal on the coffee table. Spring was over in the blink of an eye, and suddenly Ana was saying goodbye to Jack at the curb outside their building, waiting for his cab to take him to the airport. Ryan had made plans to visit Jack in Dublin during the summer, and Ana tried her best to hide her jealousy. She didn't have the money, and neither did her parents, to go to Ireland. She worried that Jack would forget all about her as he took Ryan to pubs and they walked along grassy hills, too perfect together to need anyone else.

Jack hugged Ana extra tightly as the cab approached, and when he pulled away, his eyes were wet, and neither of them really knew why.

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It would be nine full months before Ana and Jack saw one another again. They'd both applied and been accepted to study abroad programs—Jack would be spending the year in Haiti, and Ana in London.

“Do your British accent one more time,” Ana said to Jack, holding the phone between her ear and shoulder as she folded shirts and jeans to pack. It was late August. Her flight left the next day, and Jack's left the next week.

“No, you're just going to laugh at me.”

“I'm going to laugh *with* you.”

“No.”

“Please? I need to get acclimated to this accent. I'll be around it for nine months. When I come back, I'll be just as foreign as you.”

Jack laughed, like he always did when Ana called him a foreigner. Sometimes she absently slipped into his Irish accent when she talked to him. Jack never pointed it out.

Jack talked to Ana for a couple hours before saying goodbye and wishing her a good flight. It was easy to say goodbye, this time. They were so used to it by now, and they would be able to keep in touch easily throughout the year. Goodbyes were never so bad as long as they weren't final. Jack would be saying goodbye to Ryan next week, and they'd decided to

stay together even while Jack was abroad. Ana had expressed her doubt at that, which led to a small fight and a week of passive-aggressive text messages, but Jack wasn't ready to let Ryan go yet. It would only be nine months, after all.

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In early December, Ana got a phone call during a class, and excused herself so she could take it. She never usually answered calls or texts during classes, but somehow she knew to answer this one. She sat on a bench just outside and heard Jack's voice for the first time in three months.

"We broke up," He was saying, and his voice was tight and his words were quick—like he was trying to get everything out before he started to cry.

"Oh, no," Ana said, because what else can you say when your best friend breaks up with his boyfriend of a year and three months? She'd never had a relationship like that, and she wondered if Ryan and Jack would break up while Jack was in Haiti, but she knew enough to be sad for him. And she was. They were still Jack-and-Ana, so when Jack was sad, Ana was sad. The call ended up costing about 200 dollars. All sadness aside, both Jack and Ana agreed that it was nice to hear each other's voices again. Ana struggled through her best Christopher Walken impression, and Jack laughed so hard that he went completely silent, so they both knew that everything was going to be okay. Throughout the next five months, whenever they missed one another, they thought about Christopher Walken.

Although, most of the time, they were much too busy to realize that they missed each other.

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Senior year of college, they lived in an apartment together, with one other boy and one other girl who they'd met during the second semester of their sophomore year. When others asked if it would be awkward, or there would be too much drama living with two boys and two girls, all four of them laughed. Jack was gay, and so was the other girl in the apartment, and the other boy was much more interested in getting into medical school than in any girl who crossed his path. They lived in as much peace as an apartment made for four people could provide.

Their senior year was filled with as much confusion and frustration as their freshman year. In some ways, they were kings and queens, and in other ways, they were nothings. Jack wondered what he was going to do with the biochemistry major that he hated. Ana wondered why the world didn't seem to need psychologists. Jack tried to reassure her and failed when he said that the world needs psychologists, but the world doesn't really need twenty-two-year-old psychologists. Ana stopped worrying just long enough to laugh, Jack's ever-failing reassurances making her feel light for the first time in weeks.

They spent that Christmas together, at Ana's house. By now, Jack had gotten to know Ana's parents well, since whenever they visited Ana at school, that meant that they visited Jack. Ana saved enough money so that during spring break, she accompanied Jack back to

Ireland. They became children again in an instant, forgetting to worry about the future and the stress that comes with it. That week in Ireland was the best week of both of their lives. At school, they got coffee together every day at their kiosk, and sat on their balcony, no matter how cold it got. Jack didn't date anyone that year, but Ana, surprisingly, found herself to be going on dates every other week. Nothing changed about her, but maybe now because she was about to graduate, the guys realized that they needed to take their chance while they could. Jack liked seeing Ana go on dates, but couldn't help feeling jealous, remembering how good it was when he had Ryan.

Still, though, Ana was primarily Jack's, and Jack was Ana's. As the weather got warmer, Jack-and-Ana sat on the hill that overlooked the campus. They always took their laptops, a blanket to sit on, and a jar of mixed nuts. They looked for jobs and internships as the pressure of graduation drew closer. Two weeks before graduating, Jack got a call from his mother—her best friend was looking to hire a new intern at the office she worked in, and it paid enough, but would give Jack enough time to look for a permanent job. Ana listened to the conversation as Jack talked, lazily smoothing the blankets on his bed as he paced, phone pressed to his ear. He hung up and Ana asked about it, not trying to hide the fact that she'd already heard everything.

"Are you going to take it?"

"It's back at home," Jack said, thinking. "I mean, it would be nice to spend some time with my parents again. And I can't pay for living on my own yet, you know?"

"Yeah," Ana said absent-mindedly, flopping back down on Jack's bed. "And at least you get paid. My friend Vanessa—I told you about her, right? The one from my French class?"

"Yeah, with the red hair?"

"Yeah. She just got an internship, and it's full-time, and it doesn't even pay. And Ross has one of those, too."

"So does my lab partner. It sucks."

"Yeah."

They were quiet for a moment, with only the sound of the TV filling the silence. They were watching the movie *Fargo*—the only movie that they both were always in the mood for. When they fought over movies, or when they weren't in the mood for anything, they'd watch *Fargo*. Jack resumed his spot next to Ana on the bed and they watched the screen for a few minutes. Ana woke up three hours later, unaware she was even tired, and Jack was sleeping next to her. Ana-and-Jack must have been exhausted.

"Are you ready to go back home?" Jack asked a week later, and Ana shrugged with her whole body. They sat on top of the hill, their laptops cast aside. There were jobs to apply for, but the near future was figured out, and that's all that really matters in the life of a 22-

year-old. Ana could look for jobs later, in the kitchen of her home, while her parents chatted in the family room. That seemed like a good enough future for now.

“Like you said, I’m excited to see my parents again. Re-live my childhood, and all that jazz. And it won’t be too long, you know? Just until I find a job.”

“You’ll find one,” Jack said. “I am 60% sure that you will find a job by the time you’re at *least* forty.”

“Maybe,” Ana laughed. “Or maybe I’ll just live in my parents’ basement for the rest of my life.”

“Nah, your mum would kick you out far before that ever happens.”

“Hey, asshole, she loves me now! She has matured over the years and has learned to love me.”

“Yeah, I’m sure it’s her. Not like her little brat matured or anything.”

“Right.”

Ana and Jack laughed harder than they needed to. Ana leaned back on her elbows and wiggled her toes, which Jack had recently painted pink. “*For being so pretty and gay, you’re so terrible at this,*” Ana had once said, and Jack was shaking with laughter as he accidentally painted her entire little toe instead of just the nail. She let him paint them again over the weekend, just because. Jack lay down next to Ana. It was finally warm outside, but the grass was cool to the touch. It reminded Jack of one spring evening he and Ana got ice cream at an old-fashioned shop, and she got a little bit too excited by all the flavors, ate everything, and then threw up an hour later. Jack felt bad for laughing so hard, but then again, it wasn’t the first time that happened.

“We should pack,” Ana finally said, after an hour. Her head was resting on Jack’s chest, and she was lining his stomach with almonds and walnuts, her two least favorite nuts, from the jar. Jack hummed in agreement, thinking of all he had to pack for Ireland. He’d taken the job reluctantly, but knew that it was his best option. There would always be other jobs—one, even, that he was looking at in the US, only a few hours away from Ana. He didn’t like thinking about leaving Ana. Jack was always the sentimental one—something Ana constantly teased him about. He cried at the drop of the hat, and graduation week was not easy for him. He doubted it was easy for Ana, either, but she was better at masking it. Besides, they both figured that if they could make it through four years of exhaustion and stress together, they could make it through anything.

“What the hell,” Jack giggled, hoisting himself onto his elbows. Ana had just begun stuffing handfuls of almonds into his pockets. She was laughing. Jack sat up, and nuts tumbled off his chest and stomach.

“It’s fine. You like almonds, anyways.”

“No, I don’t.”

“What?”

“We’ve literally had this conversation eight times before.”

“Oh, yeah.”

Jack grinned and brushed himself off. Ana held Jack’s hand and Jack held both their hands in his giant pocket, and they talked about Game of Thrones on their way home. Ana made Jack promise that he finished at least half his packing before they watched only one episode that night.

He finished a quarter of his packing, and they watched five episodes.

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Graduation was surprisingly mundane. A guest speaker came and talked for a long time. The faces in the graduating class were blank, for the most part. Parents struggled to pick their kids out of the crowd. Little brothers and sisters whined about how cramped it was. All in all, it wasn’t much of an event.

Ana, Jack, Ana’s parents, and Jack’s parents all ate dinner together afterwards. It was fun, but uneventful. Jack and Ana stuffed themselves with sushi and listened to their families talk for a long time before going outside for some fresh air. Ana reminded Jack not to be emotional, because it wasn’t the last time they’d be seeing each other yet—that would come next Saturday, when Ana drove Jack to the airport. Jack agreed not to be emotional, and it was, for the most part, easy. He was too worn-out to be emotional. Everyone was.

Everyone was too, too tired.

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“You got everything you need?” Ana asked, knowing that yes, Jack had everything he needed, and then some. He definitely didn’t need an inflatable Lorax, but Ana bought it for him, so of course, it was packed in his most important suitcase (Ana did some of the packing). Jack nodded, heaving his backpack higher onto his shoulders. The airport wasn’t particularly crowded today, but every international airport had its constant flow of people, coming and going, beginning an adventure, and ending one. Jack wore jeans and a plain, dark green T-shirt. Ana wore a red skirt and a white blouse.

“Good to go,” Jack said. Ana nodded. Jack nodded. Announcements were made. People squealing at one another in different languages passed by. Jack-and-Ana just nodded.

“I can’t think of anything to say,” Ana finally burst into a watery smile, surprising both of them. They thought that Jack would be the first to go. “I feel like I should say something really poetic here, but...you know...nothing.”

“Yeah,” Jack agreed, feeling his own eyes sting. Ana laughed at that.

“Yeah. You’re a man of words.”

“Yeah.”

“Yeah.”

Ana-and-Jack laughed, because they needed to. It was Jack who looked at his phone and finally said, “Well, I think I’ve got to go.”

“Well then, go. Go! Can’t you see that nobody wants you, you stupid animal?” Ana angrily pointed up the escalator. Jack smiled.

“That’s from Spongebob.”

“I didn’t think you’d get that,” Ana grinned.

“Of course I would! That episode with Debbie the seahorse!”

“You’ve made me proud.”

“Konichiwa, Ana-san,” Jack said, bowing, with his hands pressed together.

“Konichiwa means hello, you ignorant racist.”

“Oh, yeah.”

They paused, but not long enough for it to get sad again. Ana stood on her toes and wrapped her arms around Jack’s neck, and he in turn squeezed her tightly around her waist. Ana wondered if he could breathe, buried in all her curly hair.

“Text me when you land,” Ana said before burying her mouth in the collar of Jack’s T-shirt.

“Will do. Have a safe drive home.”

“Yep.” The word was muffled. There was nothing, nothing in the world, better than a Jack-and-Ana hug. It was the perfect pressure, the perfect length, the perfect comfort level. It was hard to think that this would be the last one for a while—until Jack got enough money to visit the US, or Ana got enough to visit Ireland. The uncertainty of their plans was the worst part of it all.

They both let go at the same time, and Ana felt the wet spot on her shoulder before seeing Jack, and how his blue eyes were glassy, and tears were spilling out of them.

“Hah! I told you that you’d be the first to cry!” Ana wiped her own eyes, smearing her makeup.

“Whatever,” Jack laughed, dragging one hand over his face. He picked up his bag and heaved it over his shoulder. “I’ll text you.”

“I’ll text *you*.”

“Love you big time.”

“Miss you always.”

And Jack laughed again, at a nonexistent joke, and turned for the escalator. Ana watched until he made it to the top, waved again, and disappeared around the corner. She felt empty now, surrounded by people with family and friends and bags and bags of clothing and souvenirs. She just had her purse, hanging loosely at her side. Her mother called almost as soon as Jack left, wanting to know if Ana would be starting the drive home soon. She also let Ana know that she had pizza, salad, and wine waiting at home—Ana’s favorite meal. Ana could barely contain her excitement as she got back in her car, and asked her mother if the family could all go to a movie tomorrow. Ana just realized it had been ages since she’d been to the movies. After she hung up with her mother, Ana wiped her eyes and checked her mascara to make sure it hadn’t smudged too much. When she pulled out of the airport garage, she saw a plane taking off, and said goodbye to it. It wasn’t Jack’s, and she knew that, but still.

Jack’s flight was uneventful, as was Ana’s drive home. They listened to music. They took breaks to pee. They drank coffee. They both had a million things on their minds, but in that chaotic space, they both thought about how Ana-and-Jack met in freshman year of college.