

Dreamland

Her

Clouds of smoke escape from my lips, disintegrating into the crisp air. I come here often, just to think; when it's 3 A.M and coffee and poetry and sad music aren't the cure anymore. They used to tell me not to marinate in my sadness, but it's my comfortable company. My best friend. Because unlike everyone else, it never lets me down. It's always with me, breathing heavily on the back of my neck.

It happened two years ago. The accident. I killed Evan. My chest tightens and I lose my breath. This park is nice because the hustle and bustle of the city around it overshadows my loud cries. You know, the type that leaves you hunched over gasping for air until you find solace in your sadness again. It's another late night opera, I'm screaming at the top of my lungs. I wonder if the stars can hear me. I ask them out loud.

"Yes." Startled, I stand up and turn around vehemently wiping my tears away. It's a guy, the first late night wanderer I've ever encountered. "Sorry, I didn't mean to scare you. It's just that...are you okay?"

"I'm fine." I croak.

"Are you sure?" Instead of responding, I turn around and walk away. I can't even remember the last time I held a conversation with an actual person. The Wanderer is bold, taking off after me and grabbing my arm. I whip around and push him away.

Him

She's looking at me with such an incredulous look, I am second guessing my decision to console her. It's the first time I've come to the park this late, but the snowfall was so beautiful tonight, I had to take a walk. She reminds me of the snow, her skin is so white she could blend in. All you'd be able to see are her blue, chattering lips.

"*WHAT THE HELL!*" her eyes are blazing.

"Don't pretend." I tell her.

Her

Don't pretend he tells me, and I can feel tears starting to gather in my eyes. I know what he means. He means that I shouldn't pretend to be angry when really I'm just sad. My wall of icy isolation shatters when he pulls me into a tight hug, warming my shivering body. I didn't even realize how cold I was.

"I know a place." He says, and with that he takes my hand and in three blocks we are at a Thai restaurant on the corner.

"It's closed." I whisper, but he hears me anyway.

"It's okay, I own it." He says, pulling a set of keys out of his pocket. The restaurant is small and quaint. Cozy. The walls are painted a deep blue; kind of reminds me of the ocean. I feel myself dizzying and reach for something to hold me up. I know what's coming, but he doesn't. I look at him with pity as my flashback whirls me away.

"Em! Em, look!" Evan shouts, laughing wildly and pointing to the ditch he made in the sand. "It'll trap the water and then I'll make a wall to keep it in so we can swim in the ocean without worrying about sharks!" He's so excited I can't help but laugh.

"Genius!" I say, hiding a handful of sand behind my back. I thought I was slick, but apparently not because my shoulder has been attacked.

"Gotcha." He says, a sly smile spreading across his face.

Him

Out of the corner of my eye I see her grip a table and shoot me a look full of sadness and apologies. She sways once and right before she falls, I catch her. I'm fighting with my morals because I know I should call help but I don't think she would want it. Instead, I sit her up in a booth and run to the back to make two cups of hot tea and grab a moist wash cloth.

I lay the wash cloth over her forehead and put a mug of tea in front of her, then I slide in the seat across from her and sip my tea while I wait for her to come back to me. She jolts awake and starts sobbing so hard her shoulders shake. I want to wrap my arms around her, but don't dare.

Her

I'm choking on my tears, trying to force myself to calm down but I can't. I am in *so much pain*. My heart aches, folding into itself. Finally, I am calm enough to notice the steaming cup of tea sitting before me. Grateful, I take a sip and close my eyes, taking deep breaths. I forgot where I was. Quickly, I sit up and look at the guy sitting across from me.

"I'm sorry you had to see me like that." My voice is hoarse.

"Ah, she speaks!" There is no pity in his eyes when he looks at me, only a glimmer of excitement and curiosity. There's an awkward silence filling the air, so I decide I should explain myself.

"It's just that," my voice breaks, "I'm...I'm having a hard time dealing with...I killed my best friend." Just like that, my tears are back. But my heart feels lighter. He doesn't react, so I continue. "It was snowing. Evan and I used to take my car and go drifting because we could slide farther when it was icy. But this time we decided to go at night. As soon as I started to drift, a deer sprinted out into the middle of the road. When I tried to stop, I lost control of my car and we slid off the side of the road. My car flipped. He died instantly." I don't know if he can understand a single word I said because I hiccupped and cried throughout the whole story. He still doesn't react, just sips his tea.

Him

She sits across me, reminiscing about her accident with Evan. I'm getting the sense that she hasn't told anyone before because the more she talks the easier it becomes, like I can see the weight actually lifting off of her chest. When she finishes, I can tell she's searching for a reaction, a look of horror and disgust. But I stare back at her blankly because I want her to take my next words seriously. I give her direct eye contact and say, "It wasn't your fault." Tears well up in her eyes again, but something like relief flashes across her face. I don't think anyone has told her that before.

"Who are you?" she asks.

"Your conscience."

Her

The sun shines brilliantly through my morbid drapes. When did I open them? I sit up, groggy from my nap. I haven't had a dream since Evan died. Since Evan died...my chest didn't tighten at the thought. Tears of overwhelming joy dot my eyes. I feel light, like I can do anything I want. Excitedly, I jump out of bed and put on a sweat suit and sneakers.

The cold blast of air kisses my cheeks as I step outside. I barely remembered what outside looked like for the last two years. I take off in a wild sprint, dashing through allies and parks, front lawns, driveways, parking lots, *anywhere*. I feel infinite, all this energy flowing through me making me feel indestructible. In my mad dash across town, I trip and fall.

I don't even attempt to get up, I lay still, staring up at the blue sky. A man walking his dog rushes over to me.

"That was some fall! Are you okay?" he asks, leaning over me. I know this man.

"Hey," I say, "You look familiar."