

Evie inhaled deeply. She watched a squirrel climb around a tree trunk with a bag of Fritos in its mouth.

'Lucky day for the squirrel,' she thought as she finished her cigarette. She snubbed it out on the stoop and looked at the butt in her fingers. She wasn't one to litter and she didn't want grandma, or her mom for that matter, to know about her occasional bad habit.

'Only when she was stressed,' she repeated in her head. She was not addicted. And besides, smoking was ugly. For now, she hid the butt in grandma's geranium pot and went straight inside to the bathroom. She washed her hands, used mouthwash and lotion to cover the smell that soaked into her skin. A sad thought briefly crossed her mind that all these precautions probably didn't matter. Grandma most likely wouldn't remember to tell mom she caught Evie smoking. Alzheimer's was a bitch.

She walked out of the bathroom and stalled at the hallway of family photos. Her eyes wandered across years of her mom's childhood memories – candles on birthday cakes, Uncle Sam's first muscle car, Auntie June's wedding, Cousin Paul's baptism. Mom looked gorgeous holding baby Paul. She had the 1970's Charlie's Angel, femme fatal look down perfectly. Evie stepped backward into the bathroom again and stared in the mirror. She didn't see it. Her mom's friends said she looked "just like Patty!" She squinted her eyes and leaned into the mirror. She saw her dad. Her

stomach turned. Exactly the person she didn't want to think about right now. She flipped off the light and went to find grams.

There were three places she'd check. The big green chair in the sunroom where she would most likely be perusing her romance novel, at the kitchen table daydreaming over a cup of black coffee or on the living room couch watching drama unfold in the lives of *The Young and the Restless*. Green chair it is.

Grandma sat with Bootsie purring on her lap. The sun lit her white bob haircut up like a light. She almost glowed. Evie watched her arthritic hands run over Bootsie's tabby-cat fur. She couldn't get over how thin her skin was. It felt like tissue paper and could be damaged just as easily.

Grandma looked up and smiled at Evie.

"Hello, Chickie."

"Hi, Grandma."

Evie plopped down on the warm, sun-soaked chaise lounge. It was odd, sometimes her Alzheimer's seemed so faint and other times she thought Evie was a young Patty. The disease acted like a phantom that would come and go as it pleased.

"What do you want for dinner tonight?" Evie asked.

"Oh whatever you'd like, Dear."

"Ok ... how about mac-n-cheese?"

Evie felt bad suggesting a dish she subsisted on her entire freshman year, but she didn't feel like doing anything special tonight. She was in a mood.

"Sounds delicious," Grandma agreed.

They both continued to sit there quietly enjoying a late-afternoon laziness. Evie stewed on unwelcome thoughts of her parent's relationship. Grandma's voice broke the silence, "What'll we do for dinner tonight, Dear?"

Evie felt her cheeks flush and held back the urge to hastily explain that they'd just decided on mac-n-cheese. She took a deep breath and said, "How about mac-n-cheese? I'll get started right now."

Grandma smiled and nodded. Evie got up and Bootsie followed her hoping for a snack. She walked through the kitchen and straight to the back door. She needed to get out for a minute. She carefully kept Bootsie inside with her foot and quietly shut the door. Evie dug through the glove box in her rusty 1988 Volvo. Just one more cigarette.

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The recently cut grass pricked Evie's neck as she stared up through the branches of an old elm tree. She closed her eyes and listened to Lindsey and Maria as they chattered about the day. Evie's mom came into the city on weekends, so Evie had the

day off. She decided to spend her freedom lazing around Minneapolis with a few friends from the U of M. There's no better time in the Twin Cities than summer. Especially where they were today – the lakes.

The three girls sat there now, on the grassy banks of Lake of the Isles. The evening sun cast a serene light on all the city dwellers who were walking the loop. Evie, Lindsey and Maria sipped their favorite bubble tea shakes while they watched the variety of life that walked by. One of their favorite Isles characters was the Parrot Lady. She would stride confidently by with her long, white hair pulled back in a ponytail under a baseball hat. Her two parrots would stare at onlookers as they rode on the Parrot Lady's head or shoulder.

Soon Maria and Lindsey's conversation turned to other things and they got lost in a discussion about class disparities. Evie checked herself out politely and leaned back on the grass. Again, she closed her eyes to sort through her thoughts. Ever since she'd accidentally seen that fucking text message, she was in a perpetual bad mood. She had no desire to giggle about being 20-something or discuss social problems for that matter.

Instead she pitied herself and thought about getting a tattoo. She wondered why people wanted to do destructive things when they were angry. Smoking was clearly a response to discovering her dad's affair and a tattoo seemed more appealing than ever now. She wanted it to say "Loyal" in simple black lettering. She knew she was a

loyal person; she fiercely stood by her friends and only kept a small circle of them around her. They were her tribe. If you crossed them, you crossed Evie. She knew this way of thinking was slightly irrational, but she couldn't help it. But now what? What the fuck was she supposed to do with this. Two people from her inner circle were involved. The two who brought her into this world.

She noticed herself thinking more and more in expletives these days. This secret was venom inside of her, slowly turning her usually happy demeanor into something acidic and offensive. Evie hated it. She didn't like this shift in her personality, but felt helpless to the changes. Who could she tell? The thought of confronting her dad seemed like a great idea in the heat of the moment, but as time moved on, Evie cooled and her rage was replaced with an angry sadness.

Her dad had suddenly become an equal and she was deep in the midst of judging his moral character. Could she do that? Did she know everything? Did mom know? She forced her mind away from the answerless questions and thought of her potential tattoo again. "Loyal." What does that even mean? In her 21 years of life, it meant sticking with someone through it all. Being honest and faithful and fair. Defending someone. Being their voice when they can't speak. She felt her cheeks flush red. Evie quickly sat up and finished the rest of her melting matcha shake.

"Who wants to get a tattoo?" Evie practically yelled over Lindsey and Maria's conversation. They both stopped and stared trying to judge the seriousness of her

question. A knowing smile slowly spread across Lindsey's freckled face. Maria laughed, "I'll go, but I'm not getting one. My dad would kill me!"

Exactly, Evie thought.

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The new ink that stained her skin stung as Evie prodded the bandage with her fingers. She stared at her mom's old bedroom window as the rain slid down the pane. Watching raindrops reminded her of being young and sitting in the backseat of her dad's Bronco. It was mesmerizing to watch one drop of water slide across the car window, gathering little droplets as it went. She even made up a story about the big drops being mother raindrops who were running and picking up their children raindrops before the villainous wiper blades could get them.

A boom of thunder snapped her back into the bedroom. She was startled again as Bootsie jumped up on her bed in the unexpected way that cats do. She was purring and looking for love. Evie gave in and scratched her neck for a while. What time was it? The dark summer storm threw off her perception of the passing day. It was only 2 pm. She sighed as wondered what she'd do with the rest of this rainy Monday.

Grandma was on the TV-room couch holding her book and watching the *Young and the Restless*. If the title was indicative of its content, Evie could most definitely relate to this show today.

“Hey Grams.”

“Oh hello, Sweetie.”

“What do...”

“Can you go downstairs for me, Dear and check on my wash?”

“Sure.”

Evie shuddered. She never enjoyed going into Grandma’s basement. This avoidance was most likely due to the torment of her older cousins. If she ever interrupted their Lego sessions or attempted to enter their “boys-only” fort, they’d run away, shut all the lights off and slam the door at the top of the stairs. Depending on their mood, they sometimes even held the door shut. After all of this, Evie still loved them.

Maybe they’d want to hang out later tonight, she thought as she descended the steps into the musty basement.

It wasn’t exactly a bad smell, just a little stale, but sweet in a strange way too. She walked to the washer in the back of the basement. Five more minutes left. She decided to wait and then switch it over to the dryer.

She peered around the half-lit room, some corners darker than others. Evie always loved the ingenious way her grandpa had made hanging shelves for their multi-colored, cube storage boxes. She browsed the labels, “Sam’s Room,” “Christmas,” “Kids Toys” and then one that made her pause. It just said, “Margaret.” She pulled

the dusty, mustard cube from the swaying shelf and wiped the top of the box off. She sneezed. Evie was mildly amused that dust could actually make you sneeze.

The box was full of loose paper. At first glance, it looked like the papers all had the same typing on them and some pages had dates. Was this a journal? Grandma's journal? Evie's curiosity grew. There was one sheet of paper, smaller than the others. It was blue and had handwriting on it.

"A Blessing

May you resist

all that confines you.

May you have the time

and wisdom and courage.

May you have the words

to light your way."

After she read it, Evie's fingers touched the words on the page. The moment felt more significant than a coincidence. 'May you have the words to light your way.' Evie wasn't sure what she believed yet, but something buzzed across the surface of her skin. Like someone or something had a plan for her.

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