

Envelope

I held an envelope between my thumb and the index finger as if it were a piece of evidence, and the rest of the fingers might mess it up with unwanted fingerprints. I flipped the flap, and licked twice along the triangle shiny-strips. It left my tongue tingling with a sour-sweet sensation. I pressed the white corner flat, sealed the envelope running the thumb along the edges, and put a pen to its white face. When done, it read “Kristof” in blue-ink cursive. The letter K was meticulously overdrawn finishing the resting leg with a hook.

Slinging a sack bag on my shoulder, I handed the envelope to Mother. “Would you give it to Kris when he comes, he said he might come after work,” I said. A concern mixed with disbelief flashed in Mother’s eyes. I knew she did not approve of Kris. And it gave me a kick to challenge her bias that way. “Sure,” she said, lowering her eyes, her glasses low at the tip of her nose. She snatched the envelope a little too fast, I thought.

Kris was a smoker. And his bedside manners left much to wish for. He came from a complicated household of an alcoholic father and an attractive-in-a-bad-way mother. His ambitions were dashed early, or were never nurtured. One or the other. School was not high on his priority list, while a raw urge for survival was. This was what made me largely attracted to Kris. This and his genuine goodness. An unlikely combination. Because of this and against all odds, I fell in love with Kris, and he became my first boyfriend. If they like it or not – I thought.

He was also a big pal of grandma who smoked like a steamboat, but had to do it under cover at her daughter's house, for Mother would confiscate her cigarettes." It is for your good," she would say. So, grandma looked out for Kris. And when he showed up, a sharp ring at the door, she lit up like a pack of Marlboro. They were partners in crime. Two trespassers trading the smokes at the threshold trying to make it with their illicit practices in this house of incredulous non-smokers. They also bonded over something else: Kris was a frowned-upon boyfriend, grandma was an out-of-town visiting mother-in-law. At least in my father's eyes. They were the outsiders in the house no matter the approval rate with some family members. It created enormous bond between the two, and a pack of smokes dubbed "Sports" just sealed their deal.

I blurted out "bye" in haste, and stepped out of the building. The streets were cushioned with maple and oak leaves that rustled under my feet as I walked in my city slick boots to the nearest bus stop, a mile away. The pavement was shiny wet. Stepping into a puddle was still a big pleasure for me as it connected me with that inner girl from days gone by not too long ago. Bluish lights were seeping through the curtains of blackened city flats. I was glad I left the letter.

It was a week later when Mother came out of the kitchen with the envelope,

"I forgot to tell you Kris never came, after you left," she said triumphantly and put the letter on my desk." I was studying for finals, and pretended to brush it off.

"Thanks," I said without taking eyes off the page.

But down deep, I felt the sting. He didn't come, after all. Or else Mother dismissed my request. And then, I caught a glimpse of the name on the envelope. The "K" leaned to the right in a funny way. It wasn't the kind of "K" I was familiar with. It looked forced. The letters tried to be what they were not. They were dancing like they couldn't decide which way to go. It wasn't my handwriting. The name was painstakingly faked.

"The letter was opened," flashed through my mind. But, I didn't want to go there now. Not now, after all the lessons about the sanctity of privacy. I wasn't ready, not with this one person. And, it somehow lost importance, almost instantly, what was in that letter. All that mattered now was: how stupid Mother must have thought I am to fake the lettering so poorly and not even care to come up with a story. Not even a make-believe. I felt betrayed. The trust tumbled down right before my eyes like a Lego tower. I felt rage growing in my throat. With the surge of adrenaline my focus sharpened and it dawned on me: they are as clueless as I am. I don't have to believe in anything they say anymore. All of a sudden, I felt liberated from the burden of parental authority like never before.

I pushed a chair away and went toward an open window. The wave of cold autumn air ran through my face. I was trying to remember why I left the letter in the first place, when the shrieking sound of the doorbell jerked my streaming thought.