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Eternal Longing

I had wondered why you didn't call that day. I waited and waited but to no avail. Some part of me thought perhaps you'd even show up, but I suppose I was always a bit too naive. I see those violent eyes a lot now. Blood-red. Both full of life and devoid of it. The strangest of dichotomies, aren't you? But I forgive you. As arduous as the road to acceptance had been, I love you. I always did.

The girl with the prettiest eyes. Drops of hazel in pearly clouds. But those eyes spoke of something else; something more; something special. I couldn't tell what it was, but I had to find out. I put down my coffee, and walked towards you.

"Hello," I said, a hint of nervousness in my voice.

"Hey," you said, with a subtle smile. *Oh, that smile.*

"I'm Jack," I said.

"Jane," you responded, smiling still.

"I know this is coming out of nowhere, but would you like to get a cup of coffee sometime?"

"I-", she said, surprised.

You paused for a moment, my heart racing. *Who asks a stranger out like that?*

"I mean, we are in a cafe," you continued. "And I'm free now."

Things had never felt so easy before. We sat there and talked about everything under the sun. Music. Books. *Death*. It still fascinates me how you thought death wasn't the end of everything. That as your eyes fluttered close, you would face an inescapable judgment. Only if you pass do you get another chance in your precious human form. Interesting, isn't it, how the reward is another lifetime in these fallible bodies? Another lifetime of feeling all of it; sitting in the deepest, darkest pits of pain, in the prisons we make for ourselves, in the slowly ratcheting cycles of suffering and joy.

"But it's worth it," you said.

I couldn't understand how you saw beauty in that. I remember how you laughed when I said I thought we were all just a collection of molecules destined to scatter. You leaned forward, those hazel eyes sparkling with the hope with which they always glimmered.

"Maybe we are," you said. "But even scattered molecules have purpose, don't they? The universe is clever like that."

Hours passed by, and you kept talking. All I did was listen. I didn't know it then, but every word was etching itself into my memory. When the café dimmed its lights to signal closing time, you laughed and said, "Looks like the universe is telling us to go."

We stepped out into the brisk evening air, the city alive with its usual chaos—cars honking, people laughing, the distant hum of a street musician’s guitar. It was all background noise, though, compared to the way you pointed at the stars, coming up with stories about how they were fragments of lives once lived. I suppose we all become stories, sooner or later.

“Cygnus,” you said. “That’s my favorite constellation.”

“The Swan?,” I replied, amused.

“It’s so peaceful and freeing, you know?,” you said. “It’s comforting.”

We spent another hour just talking about the countless constellations that painted the night sky. It was getting late, so we decided to part ways for the night. We were about to exchange numbers, but you refused to give me yours.

“We’ll meet here a week from now,” you said. “And if it’s meant to be, it’ll be.”

I found it brave how you were willing to let it all go for fate. Even though a snow storm was stirring up that day, I saw you there a week later. It was just you, me, and the falling snow. Our eyes met, and that was it — the universe made its decision.

It had been a year since that snowstorm, and the city felt quieter, emptier. The snow fell, crueler this time, taunting me. It blanketed the streets like a veil, slowly suffocating it. My breath clouded the air as I stood there, waiting. Things were different—*you* were different.

The metal felt cold in my hand. Heavier than I expected.

“Fuck the universe,” I whispered to myself, as I saw a man - wearing a distinctive trench coat and a spotted fedora - cross the street. *It was him.* I saw him that fateful night, blood smeared on his hands. That’s all I remember — the blood, and his face. I saw his shadowy figure stretch long beneath the flickering streetlights, his movements deliberate but unhurried. He didn’t know I was watching. I tried my damnest to cover my tracks.

It had taken time to piece together scraps of information, whispers in alleyways, records hidden so deep that they’d never have seen the light of day. But fate—or whatever cruel thing ruled this world—had finally led me to him.

I swallowed hard and stepped forward, trying my best to avoid breaking the shards of ice that lay on the ground. He turned a corner, slipping into the dim glow of a neon-lit alleyway. A perfect place. A quiet place. The universe, it seemed, had a twisted sense of poetry.

As I sneaked my way into the alley, he suddenly stood right in front of me. He stood there, arms outstretched, as if he awaiting an execution. As if he knew something I didn’t. A sense of acceptance perhaps.

“What’s taking so long?” he said.

My finger teased the trigger, as I forced my hand steady. And then I saw them. Two shadows shifting in my periphery, barely more than silhouettes against the alley's neon haze. One on the right, broad-shouldered, standing by the rusted fire escape. Another on the left, half-concealed behind the outline of an overflowing dumpster. One stood behind me too. Even though he wasn't very close, I could still feel his icy whisper on my neck. I could feel the weight of their eyes, waiting, assessing, ready to pounce.

The man tilted his head slightly, studying me.

"How long must we play this game, Jack?" he said.

Something cold passed through me. He knew my name. I hadn't said my name. Before I could react, there was a flicker of motion—one of the guards stepping forward, and flicking the gun out my hand. My body moved before my mind could catch up. Outnumbered, I ran.

My boots slammed against the pavement, each step barely ahead of the shadows closing in behind me. The city blurred—a smear of neon and asphalt, of flickering streetlights and cold air burning in my lungs. Footsteps kept thumping behind me. I ran until I couldn't hear the footsteps anymore.

“Fuck this,” I muttered under my breath. “I’ll get him. The universe can’t do a fucking thing about it.”

I walked home, making sure I wasn’t followed, with the unshakeable burn still in my chest. It would just be a little longer, right? But that’s what I had been telling myself for months, but he was always surrounded by his henchmen, armed to the teeth. All I had to do was find a moment of weakness; a moment when he was unguarded. Just me and him. Maybe then he’d feel like you did. Helpless. Weak.

The only chance I had was at an auction a few weeks later. It was in the Kiramann ballroom. Do you remember when we went there? I can still hear the soft hum of the grand piano, the gentle clinking of glasses, the hushed murmurs of conversations. Everything was golden that night—the chandeliers dripping with light, the champagne shimmering in crystal flutes, and you.

Especially you.

You wore your favorite dress—the orchid-purple one, delicate white petals embroidered over it like snow caught mid-fall. I couldn’t take my eyes off you. The world had faded, leaving just us in the center of the floor. I held you close, our steps effortless as we moved in time with the music. It was our song.

“There’s no place in the world I’d rather be,” you whispered, lips just barely brushing my ear.

I had smiled, but even then, you must have seen something beneath it.

“Jack, I-,” you said, hesitatingly. “I need to tell you something.”

“It can wait,” I said. You paused for a moment, changing your mind.

“Yeah, you’re right,” you said. “Promise me something?”

“Anything,” I said.

“You have this amazing ability to not let the universe get you down, no matter what happens,”

you said. “You just keep on going. So, don’t stop running, okay?”

“Nothing can get me down when I’m with you,” I said, smiling.

You smiled back, but it wasn’t your smile.

I should have asked you back then. I should have pressed further, but I didn’t. I just kissed you, and we kept dancing, oblivious to the fact that this night would become nothing more than a ghost I would be doomed to chase in vain.

The chandeliers still dripped with gold, but its reflection was blinding. The grand piano felt dissonant, the clinking of glasses disturbing. I adjusted the cuff of my jacket, shifting uncomfortably under the dim lighting. I made sure to keep my gun concealed in a hidden compartment. I couldn’t afford another close call. Not now. Not when I was finally this close.

I moved carefully through the room, weaving past women in silk gowns and men in tailored suits. And then—I saw him. The man in the trench coat. Except he wasn’t wearing a trench coat this time. Just a sleek black suit, blending into the crowd like he belonged there. Like he wasn’t

the reason you were bleeding on the floor. He made his way through the crowd towards an isolated hallway.

“This is my chance,” I whispered to myself.

I followed him, feigning nonchalance, trying to pretend that my heart wasn’t beating out of my chest. He entered a room in the hallway. I looked around, and couldn’t see a soul. I took a deep breath, and opened the door.

And there he was. He stood in the corner of the room, leaning on the wall. He took a sip of the scotch he held in his hand and put it down on the table beside him.

“I almost didn’t recognize you this time,” he said.

The man was waiting for me. He wasn’t tense or afraid. He just looked into my eyes as if he pitied me. Fucking pity? After how he hurt you? He made my blood boil, the thumping in my head quickening.

“I-,” I said, trailing off. I wasn’t able to say anything the last time I saw him, and words failed me yet again.

"Why do you keep running, Jack?," he said. "It's over."

The pounding in my skull grew louder. *Don't stop running* — you told me that.

“Why would I run?” I respond. “It’s just us now, your guards can’t stop me.”

He looked slightly flustered.

“What guards, Jack?” he said.

“Nice try,” I said, slightly annoyed. *What kind of mind games was he playing?*

“Anyways,” he said, shrugging it off. “Say what you have to, I’ll listen.”

His calmness confused me, the starkest contrast to the chaos that ruled me.

“You-,” I stammered. “Of course you’ll listen! You hurt her, and things are never going to be the same again.”

He looked down at the floor, and picked up the glass on the table.

“Leave the fucking drink!” I said, trembling.

“Do you remember what happened?” he said.

I clenched my fists. *What kind of question was that?*

“Of course I remember,” I said. “I remember everything.”

He exhaled sharply, almost like a sigh.

“No,” he said softly. “You don’t.”

His words slithered into my ears like poison. I did remember. I had played that night in my head every single fucking day. You. The bedroom. The blood on his hands. Your breath slowing, your body still warm against mine.

“You hurt her,” I said, voice sharp as glass. “You stood there and watched her bleed.”

He let out a dry chuckle. I felt a hot wave of rage shoot through me. He sighed, shaking his head, setting the glass back down on the table with a soft clink.

“Then tell me, Jack,” he said, his voice impossibly calm. “What were her last words?”

The pounding in my skull grew louder.

My lips parted—I knew this. I knew what you said. I was a broken record, living the same haunted day over and over again.

But when I tried to conjure the words, nothing came.

A tremor passed through me. My fingers twitched. *Why couldn't I remember?*

"She said something to you before she started bleeding, didn't she?" he pressed. "Something you'd never forget."

I swallowed hard. The room suddenly felt smaller.

A memory flickered—the argument, the betrayal, the bedroom.

"You're overreacting!," you had shouted.

"You think you can do whatever the fuck you want and I won't care?" I had hissed, chest rising and falling too fast, my fingers curling into fists at my sides.

"Jack, stop," you said. "You're scaring me."

I blinked hard and I was back in the room with him. That wasn't real. You didn't say that, did you? It couldn't have been. He was lying—playing a twisted game.

"You don't remember what she said, Jack, because you never let her finish," he said, watching me carefully. "She never had the chance."

"No," I whispered. "You were there," I said. "With her. Your hands were on her. Your lips entangled. She was laughing at something you said."

"I'm sorry," he said, looking into my eyes apologetically. "You didn't deserve that, and that haunts me to this day. But she loved you. Don't you remember?"

Perhaps, a part of me did remember.

I remembered how my blood boiled.

I remembered grabbing your wrist, pulling you away.

I remembered your voice rising, pleading with me.

I remembered giving you everything.

I remembered storming out, slamming the door so hard that it broke off its hinges.

“I should have let them deal with you,” he said. “The way her body twisted. The way her skull cracked against the edge of the table. The sound—God, the sound. I should have let you rot in a cell for what you did,” he continued, shaking his head. “But I understood your rage, she told me everything you gave up for her.”

I clutched my head, the world tilting beneath my feet.

"No," I said. "No, no, no."

“You didn’t even stay, Jack,” he said, and I thought his voice almost sounded sad. “You ran. You left her there.”

“You’re lying,” I said. “It wasn’t me who hurt her, and...” I was trembling now.

“You left her to die!” he said.

"She—she wasn’t dead,” I said.

He looked at me, and for the first time, I felt his eyes were like daggers into my soul. They burned with horror.

“She died in that room,” he said, raising his voice.

“No,” I said. “I—I held her. I still—I still—”

My hands shook violently. My nails dug into my palms.

“The cops said a body was dug out of the graveyard but...” he trailed off, a far cry from the calmer demeanor I had grown accustomed to. “It was her?”

I remember the nightmares I had while trying to sleep. I heard you calling out for me, begging for us to be together again, begging for forgiveness. I couldn’t in good conscience leave you there; not when our story was unfinished; not when I knew you were still in there. The universe would never have ended things in such a dastardly manner.

“I saved her,” I said. He was afraid, I could tell.

The nights I spent with you beside me. The way I kept your hair brushed. You liked it, didn’t you? I kept you looking beautiful. I knew you were hurt, really badly. I knew what he did to you. But it was still you in there—that person I fell in love with. Hazel eyes. Ashen hair. How could I let you be on your own, my love? How could I not give you the chance to apologize?

A silence ensued. I couldn’t decipher him anymore, yet I could sense his acceptance waning off.

“I thought, perhaps I deserved the consequences of what I had done,” he said. “You loved her, and I ruined that. I thought maybe you blamed me for tearing things apart, but it was so much more than that, wasn’t it?”

“You blamed me for killing her,” he said. “You aren’t who I thought you were—I was wrong.”

He took a few calculated steps toward me, determined.

“You couldn’t live with yourself, could you?,” he said.

“Don’t come any closer,” I said, pointing the gun towards him.

“You just couldn’t handle losing her,” he said.

“Stop it!,” I said. I wasn’t going to play his games anymore.

He took one last step and stopped. He let out a little grin.

“She never loved you,” he said.

And that was enough. Enough to unleash everything. Every feeling to which I had been a slave.

Every thought that had consumed me. Every bit of anger that had made me its home. In that moment, I did what I wanted to—what I had to. For me. For you. I was without shame, without hesitation, not an ounce of guilt inhabiting me.

I pulled the trigger. And I was free.

So, don’t worry, my love. He can’t hurt us anymore.