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A single, beautiful reason

New York, February 5th, 1978

“Ms. Grant!”, a teenage boy shouts in excitement as he comes running towards Elise.

“Can you sign my book, please? I’ve been following your work for years.”

Elise looks at the boy and takes off her sunglasses. It is probably not the most appropriate place for such a request, but she could never refuse an admirer of her work. She smiles at the boy.

“Of course,” she says, taking the book from him. “I always love to meet a young reader.”

She reaches into her purse to grab a pen and opens the book to its first page.

“What’s your name, dear?” she asks the boy.

“Lynton,” he replies.

She writes a short note at the bottom of the page, along with her signature, and hands the book back.

“Thank you so much, Ms. Grant,” the boy says, somewhat apologetically. Perhaps his excitement had gotten the better of him.

“Have an amazing day, my love”, Elise says affectionately.

The boy stares at the note and walks away with a newfound shyness, yet he is smiling.

Elise puts her sunglasses back on and continues on her way.

Her smile slowly fades away as she walks towards the gravestone. She's very close now. She stops for a moment and takes off her sunglasses. She stares at the words etched into stone, disbelievingly, still not having processed his fate. Isn't this what a part of her always wanted? Wasn't this karmic retribution for all he had done? Yet not a single part of her felt even the slightest relief. As dastardly as his acts had been, he was still the person she cared for the most. She still loved him, without caution, without inhibitions, without hesitation.

All the anger she had held onto feels like a thing of the past now. She has no choice but to confront the deepest part of herself; no choice but to grapple with the truth from which she had been trying her hardest to run. She still loved him, without caution, without inhibitions, without hesitation. She feared that she always would.

"I hated you", she says stoically.

She takes a deep breath.

"I really did. I wanted you to suffer just like you made me suffer." Her voice slowly rises in intensity, as she closes her eyes. A tear forces its way out of those strong eyes that have held so much back.

"I- How could you do that to me? How does anyone treat another human being like that? I hoped someone would see everything that happened, but no one ever did." She looks down at the gravestone, her eyes fixated on his name once again. "Then again...how could I ever explain that to anyone else? How could anyone else understand how much you meant to me?"

She closes her eyes once more. She lets out a slight chuckle.

“Yet...when I heard about what happened, it didn’t feel like what I thought I would feel.

It felt just like that day you shattered my heart. I just can’t get myself to stop loving you.”

She smiles as tears fall from her eyes, without caution, without inhibitions, without hesitation.

She kneels to the ground, so very close to him yet still so frustratingly far. The stone is all that remains of him. She places a bouquet of flowers beside him and places her head on his frigid and rough surface.

“I wanted you to stay,” she whispers softly.

She stays beside him for a few minutes, with her head pressed tightly against him. Even though it feels like hours, it’s still not enough. It never would be.

She finally stands up and begins to slowly walk away. She looks back for a moment.

“I hope you find peace,” she says, with a hint of a smile on her face.

Elise walks away, and she doesn’t look back.

New York, February 5th, 1998

Columbia University’s esteemed Low Library is seldom open to the public, but today is an exception. People from all over the country have gathered to watch the highly awaited awards ceremony. Reporters, budding authors, and university officials swarm the storied hall.

The winner of the Pulitzer Prize for fiction excitedly walks up on the stage. This is the moment he’s been waiting for all his life. The crowd cheers for him, their voices rising above the customary claps. It all seems so surreal. He is handed the certificate, and he approaches the podium.

“Ironically, words cannot express how grateful I am to receive one of the greatest accolades in fiction,” he says. “And I couldn’t have done this on my own – I would like to thank my wonderful wife, Amy, and my two kids, Danny and Elise. You’ve truly given my life meaning, and I love all of you so much. I would also like to thank my mother who always believed in me and my stories.”

He pauses for a second and smiles.

“And I’d like to thank Elise Grant. I was fortunate enough to meet Ms. Grant just a few days before her passing. It was a complete chance encounter. Every day after my mother had passed, I visited her gravestone to say a few prayers. On one such occasion, I happened to run into Ms. Grant.”

“I was probably a bit too excited, considering the circumstances,” he says, letting out a slight chuckle. “But as inconsiderate as I was, she still signed my copy of her latest book, and even wrote a little note on the first page. Those words have stuck by me ever since, and I would surely not be where I am today without her and her truly masterful writing.”

“What was the note?” a random voice from the audience shouts out. An expectant silence ensues.

Lynton smiles once again. He looks around the audience, knowing that he’s going to share with them one of the deepest parts of himself. He utters those words that have become etched deep into his heart. Those words are him.

“If you ever find yourself lost, remember that we are here for a single, beautiful reason – *To Love; without caution, without inhibitions, without hesitation.*”