Off Season

Cannes in the Spring was like a movie studio between films. You could see the remnants of what had been, and could smell the anticipation for what was to come. The shops were closed, the restaurants were empty, but the waves! It might have been off season for the people, but nature was rearing to go. You could tell that it was out of practice, though. The days weren’t quite sunny enough, the water not quite warm enough.

Chrys, too, was out of practice. In high school she had been an expert in French. She had known conjugations like she had known the middle names of all the popular girls. Both vocabularies had been procured with great effort, and maintained with great reverence. But Chrys would never be popular no more than she would be French. All of her “Bonjour”s were met with “Hello”s.

Whenever Evelyn walked into a shop, she was greeted with French salutations Chrys could only vaguely remember from movies. The *patisseries*, the *boulangeries*, even the flower guy conversed with her as if she was one of them. Then after she turned back to Chrys and smiled. “*Tu as compris?”*

“*Un peu.* He said he had pretty flowers?”

Evelyn chuckled so hard she snorted, like she always did. “He said I was as pretty as a flower.” She put her hand on Chrys’s shoulder. “Isn’t that crazy?”

“Anything for a buck, right?” She tried to reciprocate the gesture, but didn’t know how far up her shoulder to put her hand. She decided to just punch her instead. Evelyn overexaggerated her wince, Chrys dropped her guard, and Evelyn punched her right back. Chrys’s wince wasn’t fake. “Jesus, Eve.”

“Sorry,” she rubbed the area where her blow had struck.

Chrys remembered how her mother would always kiss her whenever she got hurt. She shook her head free of her memories and suggested that they walk back home by the beach. Eve agreed and the pair of them walked along the coastlines, marveling at the boats they passed. Evelyn identified the boats that she remembered from her time in the Caribbean. Chrys listened enthusiastically, offering fantastic stories about imaginary pirates and their swashbuckling crews.

“Blackbeard, Redbeard, Bluebeard, none of them were as feared as the vicious Whitebeard!”

“Whitebeard? I believe that’s taken.”

“Yes! Whitebeard! He ran a tight ship of the most ghastly crew to ever sail the seven seas! His oarsmen were all halfmen, but each had double the strength of an ordinary man. His ship was made of wood from the special trees of the Winter Isles. His flag bore the same tree. His figurehead was in the form of an elk that he had found on the Isles. At night they blew fire from its nose to light the way. And when they boarded enemy ships--”

“They brought gifts and threw them down their chimneys.” Once she was done laughing, she pulled out her pack of cigarettes and hello kitty lighter. Chrys tried to block the wind as Evelyn lit a cigarette, but suspected that her hands did nothing more than make her feel useful. Evelyn thanked her anyway.

The two sat on a railing overlooking their whole fleet. Chrys was trying to decide whether or not the far away patch of land was a distant part of the same coast or a separate island. Evelyn had an international plan, so she was still able to cycle through all of her timewasting apps. Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, Tinder, repeat. Eventually the pair grew bored with being bored.

“Gee, Eve, what are we going to do today?” Chrys asked.

“The same think we do every day, Chrys,” Evelyn answered with a sigh. They both started walking towards the beach. When they were about halfway there, the paths split. Chrys started going down the usual path when Evelyn touched her back. “Let’s go this way,” she said, bobbing her head towards the other path. Chrys had no reason to object.

They came across more of the same of what they would have seen the other way. Sea smelling air, gelato trucks, fashionable French women. After walking for a little longer, they came across some faded cutouts of movie stars. Even if they were in pristine condition, the cutouts would have been obviously dated. Evelyn took a photo as Mace Windu, and Chrys took one as Lara Croft. Even with the body of an archaically clothed Sam Jackson, Evelyn looked gorgeous to Chrys. She wondered how much her face was a downgrade from Angelina Jolie’s.

“Hey who do you think would win in a fight, Darth Vader or Voldemort?” Evelyn asked.

Chrys scrunched up her face and pondered the question. “It’s gotta be Voldemort, right? Like sure, Darth Vader’s more than half robot at this point, but he’ll still die to Avada Kedavra, same as everyone else.”

“Yeah, but Vader could just Force Choke him from the Death Star,” Evelyn responded.

“Well if he’s on the Death Star he could just blow up whatever planet Voldemort is on, so I feel like that goes against the spirit of the question. Plus, the horcruxes.”

“Fair enough,” she said, as the pair walked by yet another empty private cabana. “Shame, people buy these and then don’t use them for most of the year.”

“How do you think they pay for them?”

“Still, you would think they would rent them out to someone.”

“Like who? Us?” Chrys spun around, with few strangers in the area to judge her. She had seen more people in line for a Kevin Abstract concert. Cannes was running with a skeleton crew, all of whom would be overlooked when the real officers came back on board. But for now, Evelyn and Chrys were still captains on the ship, deciding which island to explore next.

“Hey let’s go in here,” Chrys ventured, pointing at a fancy Chanel store. Evelyn shrugged and the two walked in. They looked around for a while, marveling at all the new fashions that had yet to cross the pond and pretending to be interested in buying when all of the clerks knew they weren’t. It reminded Chrys of prom with Jacob Krakowski.

“*Je vais aller à Prada, et après je vais retourner!*” Evelyn called out to the clerk as they left the building. They spent some time gallivanting in the hotel next door.

“Sixty dollars for breakfast! That’s insane.” Chrys put her hands to face and opened her mouth wide in her best Macaulay Culkin expression.

“Actually it’s sixty euro.” A young man had walked up behind them, with a plate of breakfast food. “They have already shut down, so if you wanted to try some you can have some of mine. “Because if they hadn’t closed, I know that super stars such as yourselves would have surely taken advantage of such an insane deal.” He winked at Chrys and she rolled her eyes. Evelyn broke a sausage in two and offered half to Chrys. She thought it tasted like sausage.

“This might be the best sausage I have ever tasted in my life,” Evelyn declared.

“Almost worth the price tag,” Chrys lied.

“I think it’s shit,” the new guy admitted.

“Oh, like you could do better,” Evelyn teased.

“Actually, yeah. And it would be at most half the price.”

“Prove it.” The words hung in the air as Chrys realized Evelyn was dragging her into another one of her escapades.

“Can’t. I’m a barbecue pit master, but even rooms at swanky hotel like this don’t come with grills.”

“Our Airbnb has a grill.”

“You can’t just use someone else’s grill.”

“Sure you can,” Chrys interjected. “If they didn’t want us using it, they wouldn’t have listed in as a benefit.” She figured she might as well speed this process up.

“Can’t argue there. I’m going to need to pick up some supplies first, but then I’m down. Do you guys want to come with?”

“No, we’ve got a couple of errands to run first,” Evelyn lied.

“Ok, well, I’m off.” He saluted both of them. “But before I go, let me get your number.” He handed the phone to Chrys who put in Evelyn’s phone number. When he got it back he pointed at Chrys. “Ah, so you’re Evelyn.”

“Nope, that’s me,” Evelyn said. “You can call me Eve.”

“Then you can call me Adam,” the boy responded.

“I’m Chrys,” Chrys said.

“You’re not fucking with me, are you? My name is Chris.”

“*Petite Monde*,” Evelyn commented.

“Call us when you’re done and we’ll give you our address,” Chrys instructed.

“Actually, we’ll probably be chilling in a park that’s closer to the grocery store, so we can meet up there and then walk over together,” Evelyn corrected.

“Just let me know. Shouldn’t take long.” Chris gave a half-assed salute and then left the hotel.

Evelyn punched Chrys in the shoulder. “Dude, what were you thinking? I don’t care if he’s cute, you can’t just tell people where you live.” Then, in a more serious tone, “You have to be more careful.” The dark look on her face melted away. “Besides, meeting in the park gives us time to get to know him a little before we decide if we can really trust him.”

“You know, you have never really been a good judge of character, Eve.”

Evelyn looked down at the immaculately crafted floral patterns on the floor. “Maybe. But you are.”

“If you wanted me to get a read on him, why didn’t we go with him to buy the food? Probably would have gone quicker with your French, too.”

“Because, silly, we need a game plan.” Evelyn looked Chrys deep in the eyes. “*Ma Cherie*, you’ve never been with a boy before, have you?” She put a motherly hand on Chrys’s cheek. “Warm, just as I suspected. You’re blushing, even if you can’t see it. Don’t say anything, I already know the answer.”

Actually Chrys had been with a boy before, but she didn’t like to remember it, much less talk about it. “Eh, he’s just not my type.” But Chrys knew he was Evelyn’s. Not too tall, skinny, sandy blond hair and blue eyes. She was surprised her friend wouldn’t just take him for herself, and she wished she would. This boy wasn’t any different from every boy Chrys had ever met.

“Oh please, how could he not be? He has the type of beauty that transcends types.”

“Not all of them.”

“What are you really worried about?”

Chrys changed tactics. “We hardly know him.”

“Stop kink shaming yourself.”

“That’s not what I meant.”

“Did you know that kids are massively more likely to be molested by a family member than a stranger?”

“That’s pretty fucking grim, Eve.”

“I’m just saying even if he’s a bad guy, he’ll probably be honest about it. We already know what he wants.”

“You,” both girls said at the same time.

“Me?” Chrys asked incredulously.

“It wasn’t me he handed the phone.”

Chrys checked her own phone and sighed. “We should probably get going. I actually want to swing on those swings.”

Evelyn booped her nose. “So you admit I’m right about Chris?” Chrys didn’t respond, but just started walking. “Why so glum, sugar plum? Nervous?”

Chrys shook her head. I just wish we could have one conversation that passed the Bechdel Test.

The two passed Evelyn’s old house on the way over to the park, and discussed the difference between American and French school systems. When they arrived at the park, there was still a family crowding around the swings, but Evelyn went over and wooed them with her French so that Chrys could swing. As she swung, breathing in the Oceanside air and, unfortunately, the Tobacco smoke that visiting France and hanging out with Evelyn necessitated, she looked up at the clouds. She never saw the animals other people saw, but they were interesting nonetheless. To Chrys, they were landmasses, each one’s geography affecting the people who lived on them. How the prevalence of coasts would affect each nation, village, person. When you do nothing with your day in the middle of nowhere, all you want to do is escape. When you do the same on the coast, you never want to leave.

“*Chris est venu,*” Evelyn announced. He gave them an enthusiastic salute and held up his grocery bag triumphantly. The girls ran to meet him.

“How did you know we were here?” Chrys asked him.

“Only a couple of parks around here, and I know this place like the back of Ariana Grande’s hand.” He handed Chrys the bag to look through. She handed it to Evelyn. “Although, I will admit, this was not the first park I charged into with a mad grin on my face.”

“So how long have you been grilling?” Chrys asked.

“Since high school. I was the typical latch key kid, taking care of my two younger brothers and my…forgetful grandma. Barbecue Pit Masters was about the only thing we could agree to watch.”

“And you really learned how to grill that way?”

“Grill, season, rub, smoke, you name it.”

“If you’re that good, you should apply to be on the show,” Chrys suggested.

Chris licked his lips and looked at a kid struggling to swing on his own.

“I’m sorry. I’m sure audiences would have loved you.”

He pulled out a cigarette and offered Chrys one, who declined. Evelyn, however, accepted, and lit both of their cigarettes.

She looked inside the bag. “Think you got enough supplies in here?’

“Oh I didn’t tell you?” Chris replied. “We’re going back to the island, again. And I’m the smoke monster.” He leaned in close and blew smoke in Evelyn’s face.

“Oh, so you’re a *Lost* fan, too?’

“How could I not be? J.J. Abrams is really good when he’s not obsessed with Lens Flare. You’ve seen 10 Cloverfield Lane, right?”

“No,” Evelyn replied. “That’s a scary movie, right? I’m not really into those.” She grabbed Chris’s shoulders. “But I am obsessed with *Lost*.”

“Same. It’s still my favorite of his works. What did you think about the ending?”

“I didn’t really get it.”

“Yeah, it took me a couple of rewatches before I really appreciated it. And it’s symbolic that it all ends in a church. You guys aren’t religious are you?”

Evelyn shook her head, Chrys pretended not to hear.

“Good,” Chris continued. “Well the whole thing about the church is that it just makes sense for the rest of the series. The island seems pretty supernatural with this evil smoke monster, but it turns out that it’s all a product of some shadier company. Nothing’s as it seems, hell, even the smoke monster isn’t as bad as he seems, everyone’s just being manipulated.” He took a puff of his cigarette. “It’s real life.”

“Wait, that actually makes sense,” Chrys admitted.

Evelyn smiled. “It would explain a lot.” She took his sausage out of the bag. “Alright, I think I’m about ready for these. Shall we go back to our place?”

Chris gave her a theatrical thumbs up, and the trio headed back to the Airbnb.

“Wow, this place is amazing,” Chris remarked when they walked in. And it was. The kitchen was small, but elegant, with matching appliances and designed to make the most of its small space. From there, you could look out onto the street below. But that view did not even begin to compare to the one on the other side. You got to see the whole beach, and it seemed like the whole ocean. The off season brought more winds than people, so you got to see the gods of the sky fighting with the gods of the sea through the waves they would create. Even as far as the horizon, you could still see boats, though. Mortals caught in the crossfire between two deities.

Around Chrys, Evelyn and her male counterpart had brought back the argument about whether Vader or Voldemort would win in a fight.

“Nope, you’re wrong. Chrys and I already discussed this. Voldemort can’t be killed because he has horcruxes, and plus he can just kill Vader with Avada Kedavra.”

“Yeah, if the self-proclaimed Dark Lord could hit him. In the Clone Wars, Anakin has to constantly deflect barrages of laser fire that is faster than bullets from every direction. In the books, Ron blocks Avada Kedavra with a book. Ron fucking Weasley.”

“You’re forgetting that Ron was a great Quidditch goalie. I’m sure he has jedi-like reflexes.”

Chris threw his head back and let out a mighty roar. “You’re kidding, right? Wizards don’t have any supernatural physical feats. They are, at best, peak human. Anakin was in races so dangerous Qui Gon says that any other human would have died in them as a child.”

“Chrys, I think I need your help.”

“How does Vader find the horcruxes?” Chrys obliged.

“He doesn’t. He needs the horcruxes to kill Voldemort, not chop up into little pieces,” Chris replied.

“Chrys?” Evelyn tried.

“I got nothing, Eve,” Chrys responded.

“Well, sir, I guess you win the argument,” Evelyn proclaimed. “As your prize, you get to make dinner.”

“Yes ma’am,” Chris replied, his hand grazing Evelyn’s lower back as he slid past her and into the kitchen.

“He likes you,” Chrys told Evelyn when he was out of ear shot.

“That? He just needed to get by me, Chrys.”

“Cut the bullshit, Eve. You know he’s into you. And you’re into him. So why don’t you guys fuck already?”

“Chrys, he’s a dude, he’s into every girl he sees. And he *was* into you,” Evelyn reassured her. “You just weren’t showing any interest.” She punched Chrys playfully.

“That’s because I’m not interested!” Chrys punched back, hard.

“Ouch, Chrys!” Evelyn rubbed her arm. “If you’re not interested in him, then why are you so jealous?”

Chrys opened her mouth, but her throat was too tight to release her stress, let alone her words. She closed it again and stepped towards Evelyn. She thought if she started talking, everything would just pour out. All her thoughts since she had met Evelyn, since Tammy Carmichael had stuck her hand down her skirt in tenth grade, since everyone had started changing together for gym in middle school, since Angelica Watts had dared her to give her a kiss in third grade, since she first saw Hilary Duff and thought she was, like, really pretty and wondered what she looked like naked—not because she wanted to see it, but just because she was *curious.*

But instead, she just stepped back. “I don’t know,” Chrys finally answered. “I guess it’s just because you always seem to find the perfect boys for you, and I never can,” she said more convincingly. She felt more at ease lying to Evelyn again. “I’m going to go lie down for a bit, come get me when the sausages are ready.” She went into her room and closed the door.

It was not long before Evelyn came knocking, and laughing. “Shhhh,” she commanded Chris. “She might be sleeping.” She knocked again. “Chrys, dinner’s ready. Are you awake in there?”

Chrys grumbled something intended to be intelligible, put away her phone, and shambled her way over to the door. “I’ll be right there,” she said, opening up the door with a yawn.

“You alright in there?” Chris asked her.

“Yeah, I’m just watching some old *Lizzie MacGuire* clips. I’ll be out in a second.” By the time Chrys rejoined them, the table was already set. Chris had made potatoes to go with his sausage, and the salad on the table was Evelyn’s signature handiwork. “Wow, this looks really good,” Chrys said as she sat down.

“It tastes even better,” Evelyn assured her. When Chrys gave her a judging look she responded with, “What? So we ate a little while we were cooking.”

“And a little kissing,” Chris chimed in, leaning into give Evelyn a quick peck on the lips. When he tried to pull away she pulled him closer and started intensely making out with him before remembering Chrys was in the room.

“Sorry about that,” Evelyn offered.

“We also did a little drinking,” Chrys said, changing the topic and thrusting a nearly empty bottle of wine into the air before chugging the rest. Chrys shot him back a look of horror. “Don’t worry, we have another one,” he said, bringing it forth like a magician would bring back a dead dove.

Chrys rolled her eyes and sat down. The trio began eating, making short work of both their meals and the second bottle of wine. The sausages were better than Chrys liked to admit, so she didn’t say anything about them. The other two didn’t seem to mind; they kept flirting and Chrys kept on pouring herself glasses of wine.

When he had finished eating, Chris walked behind Evelyn and started giving her a shoulder massage. She put down her utensils to fully enjoy it. Chris leaned in and whispered, “I have one more sausage waiting for you in the bedroom.”

Evelyn snorted but got up to follow him anyway. “Hey, Chrys, I think we’re going to retire for the night, but if you need us just knock!” Chris slapped her on the butt and the two disappeared into the darkness of the Master Bedroom.

Chrys was definitely drunk at this point, and retreated to the cold recesses of her room until her sobriety and acceptance of loneliness returned to her. She started reading through all of her texts with Evelyn, from the beginning. They were the only texts she had bothered to backup phone after phone. She was only halfway through freshmen summer when she heard a knock on her door. She burrowed further into her covers. Evelyn breached her sanctuary anyway.

“Chrys, you’re in here right?” Evelyn probed.

“Done already? Fucking men,” Chrys responded.

“No, we’re just getting started, but Chris made a request.” She went and sat on the bed next to Chrys. “You.”

“Ew. Not interested.”

“But he’s interested in you, Chrys! I told you so. And yes, I do get tired of being right all the time.” She started peeling away Chrys’s cocoon. “I know you want this, Chrys. So what’s stopping you?” She found her way to her friend’s face. “There is one caveat though.”

“What’s that?”

“He wants both of us, at the same time.”

Evelyn always got a little bi when she drank. Or at least she thought she did. Every party with dudes to impress that she couldn’t impress on her own, she told Chrys to kiss her. One time she actually did. Evelyn opened up her mouth, but her tongue stayed firmly in her own mouth. When Chrys maneuvered her tongue into Evelyn’s mouth, she pulled away and gave Chrys a funny look. “It doesn’t have to be real, Chrys. No need to be weird about it.” The guys all cheered them on, but that didn’t stop them from calling her a dyke when she cut her hair short.

Chrys attempted to roll over, but Evelyn was on top of her and pinning her down good. “I’m not going to make out with you just so some boy can enjoy it.”

Evelyn’s face grew more somber. “It’s not just for him, you know. I need you in there.” Chrys pinched her thigh to make sure she wasn’t dreaming. “My brain thinks he’s a good guy, my gut trusts him, my pussy’s all about it. But my nerves are still on edge. I need someone in there that I’m comfortable with. Until I’m back on top of my game.”

“Eve,” Chrys managed to force out.

“Besides, kissing a girl can’t be that bad, can it?” She leaned in and kissed Chrys, with conviction. Their tongues danced together, like that time they danced in a tango competition. Like they did on the soccer field. Like they did when they played off of one another in conversation. Chrys desperately struggled to free her arms, to pull Evelyn closer and hold her there, forever. It was harmony, it was completion, it was perfection—it was over.

Evelyn pulled away. Come on, let’s get in there. Chrys wordlessly obliged, too stunned to put up a fight. She took Evelyn’s hand and followed her into the dark cave where Chris was waiting for them, casually stroking his penis to keep it hard. “Glad you can join us,” he snarked to Chrys, but after seeing how tightly she was gripping Evelyn’s hand, he didn’t say anything for the remainder of the encounter. Chrys kept trying to spend more time with the strangely receptive Evelyn, who was trying to get Chris to pay more attention to her friend, while Chris’s seemingly simple motives drove him to encourage the girls to engage with each other as much as possible. It was a messy affair with mixed motivations that started out pleasant enough, but dragged on until everybody eventually realized that Chris was no longer up to the task of pleasing the two women, and had perhaps never been. He got up from the bed.

“I’m going to go use the bathroom,” Chris said, hand on the handle to the hallway.

“You can use the one in here,” Evelyn assured him.

“Eh, I’m not really trying to use a bathroom connected to the bedroom. I’m going to be a while, if you know what I mean.” He grabbed his clothes and left.

“Yes,” Evelyn sighed. “I know what you mean.”

“I hope they don’t charge us a cleaning fee for whatever havoc he’s about to wreak on our toilet,” Chrys joked. Evelyn smiled wistfully. “You alright, Eve?”

Evelyn nodded her head weakly. She extended her fingers and beckoned Chrys over. “Come lie with me.” Chrys came, lying in front of Evelyn. They were still naked, so Chrys tried to figure out what an appropriate distance to keep between them would be. She could still feel some warmth emanating from Evelyn’s cave of wonders. “No, Chrys,” Evelyn whispered. “Behind me.”

Chrys slowly got up and walked to the other side of the bed as normally as she could. The room was dark, but she still felt *watched*. She slid in behind Chrys, with her hands uncomfortably at her side. Evelyn reached back and grabbed Chrys’s hand. She interlaced their fingers together as she brought it back to her front.

“What about him?” Chrys managed to squeak out.

Evelyn chuckled but did not snort. “He’s gone, Chrys. It’s just you and me now.”

The pair breathed in sync.

Slowly, but not surely, Chrys maneuvered her hand beneath Evelyn’s breast with a sense of discovery strangely absent the hour before. Evelyn nuzzled her bottom more snugly into Chrys.

Chrys released the breath she didn’t realize she was holding.

The pair breathed in silence.

Mercifully to Chrys, Evelyn broke in. “Thanks for doing this, Chrys.”

“It’s just spooning.” She grit her teeth. “What are friends for?”

“That’s not what I meant. It’s just that I’m afraid to be alone with men, after what happened, you know?”

Chrys did not know, but now definitely wasn’t the time to ask. Her curves wrapped around Evelyn’s, and she understood the desire to be with her, no matter what. But she could not understand who could dare harm such a delicate creature. She released Evelyn’s hand and traced the outline of God. Chrys realized that her other arm had begun to grow comfortably numb. She would feel the consequences in the morning, but she wouldn’t regret them. Nothing could cause her to retract her arm away.

“Hey, Chrys, would you mind moving your arm?” Evelyn asked. “If I sleep on in I think I’ll have a crick in my neck in the morning.” Chrys did as she was told. When she was sure Evelyn was asleep, she put on her panties and Evelyn’s shirt and left the room.

Chrys walked out to the balcony to stare at the waves, but to her surprise, Chris was already out there sitting on the couch.

“Come, sit down.” He gestured her over, but she stood standing in the doorway hesitantly. “Don’t worry, I’m not going to kiss you or anything. I’m not as oblivious as your friend,” he assured her.

Chrys’s body temperature flared. “What do you mean?”

He smirked, slightly, the way cute boys could always do so much better than her. “Don’t worry, you’re not the only one being… less than honest with her. I haven’t even seen a single episode of *Lost*.” He patted the seat next to him.

Chrys went over to go sit down. “Well you should know, the smoke monster isn’t necessarily a good guy.”

“I’d need to hear his side, first.” He pulled out a cigarette from his pack and started smoking it. He put the pack down without a second thought, until he looked over and saw Chrys still looking at it. He picked the pack back up and silently offered her one. She nodded and took one and put it in her mouth.

“Like this?” Chrys’s eyes asked.

“Exactly,” Chris’s smile answered. He lit her cigarette for her and then went over to the balcony. “You know, I almost believe I could live here,” he exhaled. “When the city’s empty like this, devoid of movie stars and wannabe auteurs, you could almost believe that it was made for you.”

Chrys went to join him after stifling a cough. “You can believe, if you try hard enough.”

“Yes, I suppose you could.” Chris flicked the ash off from the butt of his cigarette. The pile of trash it landed on would be gone by morning; the dirt that was ingrained in the sidewalks by season.