Paper Walls

‘*Let’s burn a hole so we can climb out of these paper walls in this empty house. Don’t listen too close, their words are like guns with bullets that fly and kill what you’ve won. Some love to hate and some tell you lies. So let’s make a toast and kiss them goodbye.*’

**Mackenzie Anson**

When he stumbled his way through Mackenzie Anson’s bedroom window at 04:51 am on a Sunday morning reciting the tale of how he managed to crack his glasses and injure his right arm in the 36-hour period since she had last seen him, Keith Buchant was certain to mention two points. Firstly: the woman involved, and there was always a woman involved, was mind-blowingly beautiful with a set of, and she was quoting him directly here, “sparkling blue eyes that [he] could get lost in for days” and secondly: he hadn’t actually managed to get her number.

Mackenzie’s first instinct was grab her hockey stick and bludgeon whatever was at her window that had just woken her from her slumber. Keith was lucky that she had realized it was him before she had the chance to do anything or he’d have a bashed-in face to go with that arm.

Mackenzie’s second instinct was bludgeon Keith anyway for scaring her half to death. Seriously, who the bleeding-heck breaks into their friend’s house at 5am to tell them about their escapades with some girl?

‘Whatever, Keith, You have a girlfriend. Welcome to the rest of your life! I don’t need to know about it at 5am in the goddamn morning.’ Mack had wanted to scream in his face, except:

1. He didn’t even get her number (which would repulse her if they did actually have sex – that level of exploitation was something she thought Keith above, though Harry may be rubbing off on him.)
2. This was Keith Buchant she was talking to. A girl only had to bat her eyelashes at him before he began composing poetry about her which Mackenzie would have to suffer through (seriously, Keith’s prose was horrid).
3. Screaming would wake the neighbors and Mackenzie really didn’t want to deal with a pissed off Mrs. Jacobson before she had, at least, ingested some coffee.

Despite herself, Mack told him to wait while she made them both something to drink before she would take a look at his wounds. When she regained a degree of functionality, Mackenzie found herself relatively impressed that he’d managed to have a full conversation with a woman other than herself for any extended period of time without tripping over his words, much less spending the 8 hours he claimed to have spent with his blue-eyed doll.

She put one spoon of sugar in her coffee and two in his tea – the way he’d been drinking it since they were teenagers - before heading back to her room, trying to remember why it was so critical that he came over right this instant.

Now, it was not that Keith Buchant was unwelcome in her house, on the contrary, he was one of her best friends. It was not that this was the first time she’d caught him sneaking into her window like he had no sense of her personal space – because he didn’t. It was that it was 5am in the bloody morning and could he not have at least waited two hours for when he knew she would be getting up? So why exactly was it so urgent that he get to her right this instant?

Her question was answered when she returned to find Keith sat cross legged on her floor, trying – but failing - to get his woolen top off using his good arm. Mack set down the beverages before going to assist him.

“Okay, what the hell did you to yourself?” she asked, helping him to pull the damned thing off.

“Parkour?” He replied, having dropped down to a single layer.

“You don’t do parkour.”

“Exactly.”

“Are you going to tell me what happened?” she asked, crossing the room to fetch her gloves and the first aid kit.

“Of course. Are you going to check my arm out?”

“Is that even a question?” Mack responded, pulling on a pair of white gloves.

“Well it really starts a couple of days ago.” Keith began.

**Skylar Clarke**

*’ All I can think about is you and me driving with a Saves-The-Day record on. We kept singing till voices were gone and I was falling hard, you were barely hanging on. Now I just want to chase forever down with you around.’*

Taking in the situation before her, Skylar Clarke decided to focus on the positives. In this case the bright side was that her date had managed to escape being clubbed to death by an angry middle-aged woman. Of course he still was being chased by mall security for invading the women’s rest room but Skye was a glass half-full kind of girl. Her optimism being noted, she wasn’t particularly ecstatic about the situation she’d had to put herself into to ensure Keith’s escape.

“You listen here, girlie. I don’t know what you and your boyfriend were planning but it is DISGUSTING!”

“Ma’am we didn’t plan anything, he didn’t have his glasses on so he couldn’t see properly, that’s all”

“Don’t lie to me! I know about girls like you.”

It had started out innocently enough. Skylar had used the bathroom and then looked at herself in the mirror. Make-up? Fine. Hair? It’ll do. Teeth? Nothing stuck in them but they looked a little yellow, she should have them whitened. “Okay, I’m fine.” She said to no one in particular before she was alerted to the door opening to her right.

When he walked through the door Skylar Clarke decided that she was in love – well, not quite in love as she knew it now but she was certainly interested, in-like maybe? It was not that he was particularly handsome or tall or exceptional in any of the superficial ways that Skylar had been attracted to then. It was that Keith Buchant had a quiet intellect to him. Occasionally she could see the steam escaping from him his brain when he thought too hard but that was the point: Keith thought. He was a thinker. So different to anyone that Skylar had met, let alone dated, before that she had almost wanted to see him frequently purely for novelty of the experience. At least normally he was.

Right now, unfortunately, she was becoming privy to his less than graceful nature. When it came to matters that existed outside of abstract terms (i.e. the physical world), Keith was preternaturally unlucky and just a little bit goofy – it was usually quite cute but not in this case. Following her initial reaction, Skye decided that she was bemused. Keith wasn’t the lets-slip-into-the-bathroom kind of guy so what was he doing here, without his glasses to boot? **Need to have a reason for his glasses being gone**

They had scarcely had the opportunity to converse when a scream erupted behind her. A little girl, around 5 years old, came out of a stall with her mother to find Keith standing in the doorway looking like a deer caught in the headlights. Skye watched in terror as Keith’s expression shifted, his mistake realized, before he spun on his heel to exit the room as quickly as he could. As he did so his shirt sleeve caught on the door handle which the mother took as an opportunity to rush forwards and give him a piece of her mind. The words ‘pervert’ and ‘sicko’ were tossed around before the woman took off her shoe and tried to give him what she described as ”5 of the best”.

“Ma’am, please stop!” she screamed, placing herself between Keith and the mother.

“I WILL NOT! This thing needs to be taught some manners!”

“Ma’am, it’s an honest mistake, he doesn’t have glasses with him. I’m pretty sure that he just mixed up the signs.”

“I DON’T GIVE A DAMN!” she said before attempting to move towards him again.

If there was one attribute of her P.O.I. that Skylar was grateful to learn, it was that he was deceptively quick. Skylar had moved to shoot him a sympathy glance, but he had already dislodged himself and was in the process of getting the hell out of dodge when, once again, Keith’s bad luck reared its ugly head. Mall security announce themselves three seconds later and his speed was really tested.

That brought Skylar back to the beginning. In a room with an angry mother-daughter pairing who, for all intents and purposes, wanted her blood now that Keith had escaped.

**Skylar has come out smarter and nicer than I originally envisaged. She’s more intrigued by Keith than anything else at this point and she’ll have a good laugh about this story when they meet up later. She has to talk her way out of this situation as she’s not a runner like Keith. Mackenzie, however, has come out angrier than originally intended which is fine. She has to learn to accept others for who they are. At the end of the funeral she must have done so. She should hug Skylar while Harry sings be the young in the background.**

No person is replaceable and there will never be another Keith Buchant but I will always treasure the Keith I knew and my connection with him. And I will always treasure the connections that he gave me. Goodbye friend. Goodbye brother.

**Mackenzie Anson**

When Keith stopped talking to take a sip from his rapidly cooling tea, Mackenzie quickly debated the value in punching him really hard in the shoulder. No, that would result in him spilling tea all over her carpet and she had just vacuumed it this – yesterday- afternoon. Mack would wait until he put the drink down.

“So you just left her there? You ran away and left her there?” she asked trying be patient

“She’s a smart girl.” he said in response

“I’m going to break your arm myself.” she blurted out before swatting him on the back of the head. Not quite as venomous as she wanted it be but it got the message across.

“Ouch! If you would just wait, you’ll find that the night was only really beginning at that point.”

“Just give me the cliff notes” she responded with a sigh.

“No. Your turn first.”

“Fine. There’s a bit of swelling but no discoloration, bleeding, deformity or bone protruding from anything so I don’t think it’s broken. An x-ray will be able to tell us more but for now I’m wondering what the hell you did to yourself.” Mack responded, letting her time in first aid shine through briefly.

“Patience grasshopper”

“I am going to eject you from my room.”

“I love you too.”

“Just get on with it” she muttered under her breath

**Mackenzie Anson**

‘*Accidents out on the highway to somewhere, they tell us about when we’re young. Rescuers working to clean up the crashes before she can see what they’ve done. Nobody told her she’d lose in the first round, the last fight was fixed from the start.*’

It was a Thursday night when Mackenzie realized that Hell had well and truly frozen over. She checked her watch immediately; it was 8pm. She looked up to find Skylar Clarke shivering at her door. The girl stood on the Anson family greeting mat that read ‘Friends welcome. Relatives by appointment.’ (A rather beautiful holder from the last visit that Mack’s extended family had paid to her place.) This girl, however, was neither to Mackenzie so what the hell was she doing here, sopping wet no less?

“Hi.” Skylar said

“Hi.” Mackenzie responded before silence descended upon them.

“I’m not sure if we met. I’m Skye.” she said after 20 seconds

“Mackenzie.”

After an awkward handshake, Skylar paused as if she was unsure how to proceed. They hadn’t met formally but Mackenzie knew the girl’s type well enough: a blonde haired, blue-eyed manikin with perfect skin, perfect make-up, perfect hair and a smile that disappeared from her face the second it arrived. She was the exact kind of daddy’s-little-plastic-princess that had terrorized Mackenzie throughout high school. Whether it was for her pale complexion or her lack of interest in boys, girls like Skylar Clarke were there at every corner to torment her. Mackenzie didn’t even have to know anything about the girl to know who she associated with and to know that she, herself, definitely did not fit within that circle.

The question of why a girl like her was at Mackenzie’s door was something Mackenzie, herself, didn’t care to know the answer to. In fact the only reason that she didn’t slam the door in the bitch’s face was out of loyalty to the unfortunate and naïve twit that was Skylar’s boyfriend. When it came to women, Keith was terrible judge of character (save Mack of course). He fell deep for easy smiles and pretty faces, never bothering to look for a monster beneath the mask. And there was always a monster beneath the mask of the women he liked. Whether it was Kelly Siren or Rebecca Holloman or now Skylar Clarke, they all were monsters in short skirts. Though credit where it was due: this was the first monster that had actually come face-to-face with Mackenzie Anson and not run away.

While Mackenzie really would have been perfectly happy to stand there and stare at the girl while she froze her skinny little ass off, Mack had to get her inside before her visiting mother (by appointment) caught wind of the situation. The older woman would probably spend the next hour fussing over the girl while simultaneously berating her daughter for a lack of empathy. If something like that happened, Mackenzie may actually throw up or something. The mere thought of it sent waves of anger down her spine to the point where she simply said: “Come inside.”

“Thank you. It’s raining cats-and-dogs out here” Skylar responded, a look of gratitude crossing her face for a three Nanoseconds. That was two nanoseconds longer than Mackenzie would have expected.

“Well lucky you’re coming inside then.” Mackenzie replied, her voice as flat as it could go.

*I know we’ll forever be the young. Where I was broken I am healed. I learned to fight, I learned to feel and I can’t believe my eyes. You are still here next to me, you’re all I need and you’re all I see, in this life we hoped to find.*