One Night

There are few things I love more than seeing your face so it is no joke when I say it sucks to only see you twice a year. Living for dreams with you in them is a sad way to live, but they are all I have. So I do what I have to, I turn those dreams into daydreams.

Today is not like most days; today I’ll get to see you.

I keep my eyes closed even though I know I’m awake. I’m not quite ready to start the day. It takes so much effort to keep myself together when I know I’ll be seeing you. Every time is the same: I go, I sit, I look for you, I find you, I stay for why I’m there, and then I leave. I never talk you, but I always hope. I take a deep breath and slowly open my eyes to the sunlight peering in through the blinds. I toss the blankets back and sit up feeling the slight ache in my back from another restless night.

Picking up my phone, I check the time and see that I have no missed texts, phone calls, or important emails. I sigh and get up to get dressed. Knowing that it is supposed to be a nice day so that leaves more options open. I want to wear something nice, but I also don’t want to look like I’m trying too hard. That won’t get me any bonus points. Speaking of bonus points, I think I only remember getting some twice, maybe three times, but two for sure. Now I’m getting a bit distracted. Where was I? Oh yes, trying to decide what to wear. You wouldn’t think it would be that hard to pick something, but this happens every time. I decide to go simple with a black top and a pair of nice jeans. It’s still hours before I have to go anywhere so I put on a plain t-shirt for now.

After dressing I head to the kitchen for some breakfast and then back to my room because I know it’ll take those next few hours to get my head right and to play out a bunch of scenarios as to what will happen. None of which will likely happen, but I do it anyway.

Over the next few hours I spend my time watching videos on the internet and getting more and more anxious. By the time it’s time to get ready; I’m already trying to talk myself out of going. It is pointless going you see. There’s no real reason for me to go other than to see you. I’ll come up with other reasons, but none of them are fully true. Shaking my head, I pull myself together, change my shirt, and put on a light layer of make-up. Then I pop in a piece of gum, grab my phone, headphones, and head out the door. The music-filled walk up there allows me one last chance to calm my nerves.

Once I reach my destination, I enter through the doors and find my way to the seats and wait for the activities to begin. As I sit waiting patiently, I scan the room and locate you nearly as far away as you can be which is not so unusual. I watch you for a few moments before I turn my gaze away and try not to turn back to you. I fail more than a few times throughout the whole program though I don’t linger on you for more than a few seconds at a time.

After it’s over, I wait until after nearly everyone else has left before I try to find my way out. I’m moving slower than I normally do. As I finally make my way to the hall, I hear you call out to me. At first I don’t realize you’re talking to me, because it is not like you at all to make yourself known to me. I turn back around and find you have caught up to me and I almost run into you. Luckily I catch myself before that happens, but in the next moment you move your face a mere inch away from mine. It’s so unexpected that I find I’m holding my breath. Before I can say anything you begin to ask:

“What do you want from me? Is this what you want?”

I’m paralyzed and I have no quick answer. I can’t stop switching from staring at your eyes and your mouth. You’re so close and all I want to do of course is erase that inch. I want to say yes, this is what I want. I want you this close, always. Instead I close my eyes, take a small breath, and take a step back. I look into your eyes and slowly, carefully say, “Yes. I’m sorry,” and I turn and leave.

I don’t take the moment to register whatever your reaction is as I walk back out the doors into the sunlight. I start walking away and plug myself back into my music as I go, but I’m utterly distracted the entire way home. I only turned my head around once, when I got to the corner right before I’d lose sight of the building. I didn’t see you. I am not sure why I thought you might follow. It was enough out of your character to speak to me at all. I shake my head at my foolishness.

Once I’m home, I go back to my room and close my door. I don’t quite feel like dealing with the real world any more. I lay down to take a nap, but instead replay the entire scene over and over again, never growing tired of your face or the sound of your voice echoing in my head.

Too soon the realization that I have to move on hits me and I store the memory away. I get up and get on with the rest of my day, but I turn off my computer and then ignore anything that pops up on my phone aside from family for days. So when I finally decide to open my email it’s a total surprise to see one from you titled: I shouldn’t have sent that last email.

I’m sorry, I missed a first email? I don’t bother to read that one yet and scroll down through the enormous number of mostly junk emails. Okay, they aren’t all garbage. There are several newsletters and things of that nature, but everything but finding this first email is completely irrelevant. It takes several minutes to finally locate it, but there it is and I’m afraid to open it, this one titled: Apology coffee?

I sit back in my chair and stare at the screen in disbelief. I minimize the browser, put on some shoes, and go outside. I walk around the house and check on my roses. I distract myself for a few minutes until I cannot stand it any longer. I return to the computer and open the email:

“That was rude. I think we should have a little chat about what is going on here. You know how to reach me.”

I close out of the email and then open it back up. That is all there is. I refresh the page to get back to the top of the emails and the second email. I pause momentarily and then open that one also:

“I should not have sent that. I do not know why I did. You should delete it.”

I took too long to respond. Is it too late? Before I can think too much about it, I hit the reply button and start typing a response:

“I’m sorry it took so long to get back to you. I needed some time to process my actions and didn’t receive your emails until today. If the offer to chat still stands, I would like to take you up on it. If not, I expect you’ll never respond and will ignore this as you’ve done in the past. I don’t blame you for that. Well, I’ll wait here impatiently for something or maybe nothing.”

Sitting back, I read it over and then close out of the browser without sending it. I give myself a few more minutes to talk myself out of sending it altogether, but open the email again, find the draft and hit send. What’s the worst that could happen?

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For the next week, I check my email at least once an hour waiting for a response I’m not I’ll ever get. Then finally nine days, four hours, and eighteen minutes later there’s a new email in my inbox from you. I am almost too terrified to open it. I put the cursor over the email, pause, and then click:

“My place, tomorrow around 6?”

For someone who took that long to respond, that does seem like awfully short notice. I mean what if I’m busy? Not that I wouldn’t cancel all of my plans, but that’s not the point. What if it took me as long to get this email as it did the first time? Oh goodness, I would have missed it. I would probably go jump off a building for missing it.\* I quickly type an “okay” reply and send it. I don’t want there to be a chance that you wouldn’t get it for some reason.

Then I move away from the computer and stand in front of my closet. I have no idea where to even begin. Do I dress casually, do I dress up, or do I maybe go for something in-between? I start pulling anything with real potential out and toss it on my bed. Then I check the weather forecast on my phone and see there’s a chance of rain and it’ll be slightly chillier than the last few days. Then I weed out most of the options and I’m left with not a lot.

I go with a mostly black sweater and a lightweight t-shirt just in case it’s unusually hot in the house. I match that with a decent pair of jeans. Now I simply have to wait until tomorrow evening. It’s going to seem like forever. I decide to distract myself by getting back to work on my painting that I started a few days ago. It’s slow going, but it’s all in the details. As I paint I find myself getting more frustrated with the turnout and I don’t think it actually has to do with the painting at all. Perhaps I should find something else to do. Maybe I’ll go to bed early and at least get to tomorrow.

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After tossing and turning all night, it’s time to finally get out of bed. Despite the fact that I should be too nervous to eat I am hungry so I find some frozen waffles and fill myself full of sugar. Then it’s time to shower and I guess I should shave. I don’t think I’ve done that in… Well it’s been long enough, let’s put it that way. I’m not sure I should go tonight. This is probably a trap. You wouldn’t do that, would you? Of course you would. Torturing people is one of your favorite pastimes.

I check the clock and I still have far too much time on my hands, but I start getting ready anyway. I’ll save my hair for last so I pull it back to keep it out of the way and put my face on. Okay, I never wear much anyway, but I need it to look decent because this is important. I put a slight curl in my hair and pray that it’ll last for more than 5 minutes, but I won’t try to hope too much. I spend the rest of my waiting time watching painting time-lapse videos. I might as well be trying to learn something while I wait.

A quarter after 5 I get in my car and head towards your place. I have music playing, but for once I’m not singing along. All I can think about is you and what could possibly happen and I’m starting to do that panic thing again. I almost turn around and forget the whole thing, but I’ve been waiting for this for so long. I’m so torn between being ready and not waiting it to happen and be over.

As I get closer I realize I’m going to be too early so I drive to the gas station and go wander around a little looking at snacks and candy. I don’t need to buy anything, but I purchase a bag of chips to justify why I’m there at all. Around 5 ‘til I head to your house and park on the street. I sit in the car and stare at your door willing myself to get out. After a few short moments, I finally walk up the sidewalk and knock on the door. It takes a moment before you come to the door. I hold my breath and wait for you to tell me to leave, but you don’t.

You open the door and invite me in. I hesitate, still fearing a trap, but then cross the threshold into your world. It is nothing like what I had envisioned in my head. I expected disorganization and dark lighting. I imagined all hardwood floors and an entire living room of book shelves. Instead I find plush carpets, neat stacks of paperwork, bright lights, and a lone small shelf of books. You ask me to take my shoes off and ask if I need anything to drink to which I say no. You gesture to the couch and we sit on opposite ends, turned slightly to face each other and we sit there for several awkward minutes.

You get up and go to another room. I sit and wait until you return. When you re-enter the room I can see that you’re holding several items including a painting, a few pieces of paper, and some alcohol. I assume that’s to help ease the tension. You go back for glasses and then pour us each a sizeable serving. From there you go on with presenting me with the items you had brought out. As you show me each item, you explain why you still have them, why you haven’t bothered to throw them away. The only one I care about is the painting. For ages, I had assumed the worst. I figured it was rotting in a garbage heap somewhere.

I take the time to describe the reasoning and process behind the piece. It was the first painting I was ever completely proud of and every time I looked at it, all I could see was you. My heart feels a little lighter knowing it is safe here with you. We talk more about what’s going on with our lives and what recent adventures we’ve been on or are planning. For the next few hours we drink, chat, and ever so slowly inch closer to each other. At first it’s barely noticeable, but when our knees finally end up touching we cannot ignore the dwindling space anymore.

Minutes pass though it feels like hours as we stare at each other. Each of us daring the other to do something, anything, but there we sit. In the end, it’s your phone that breaks the silence. At first, you pretend to not hear it, but when it starts ringing a second time, you finally give in and answer it. You stand and walk towards another room and I hear a door close. Scooching back to lean back against the couch, I strain my ears to try to hear what you’re saying, but it’s all muffled. Soon, I hear the door open and you return to the couch. You apologize for the phone call but I wave it off.

We go back to not saying anything until I notice the time and realize it’s getting late. As I stand and begin to say I should go, you ask me to stay. You tell me that I should not drink and drive. I reply that I didn’t know you cared that much and laugh quietly to myself. You make a face at me and as I try to walk to the door, I recognize that you might have a valid point. Then I try and fail to remember exactly how much I had. Turning slowly back around I admit to you that it might be safer to stay and you’re already gathering blankets.

As I lower myself to the couch you take my hand and pull me up and back towards the other end of the house. As we enter another room, your room, I pause. You shake your head and tell me that you’ll be sleeping on the couch. Planning to argue, I open my mouth to object, but you put a finger to my mouth to silence me. The longest few seconds pass before I lose all sense and press my lips to yours. Just as quickly I break the kiss and turn away, but you take my hand forcing me to turn back. Slowly, I raise my head to meet your eyes and start to apologize, but this time you close the gap before I can utter a whole syllable.

Minutes pass before we pull apart and stand there with our foreheads together just breathing heavily. Eventually and too soon we separate and you start to leave, but softly I ask you to stay. Hesitantly, you nod and I take your hand and lead you to the bed. Then we crawl under the blankets and fall asleep holding hands. There was never a time I felt more safe, whole, or slept more peacefully. At some point our hands went their separate ways and that’s when I woke up, the loss of your touch too much.

I smile as I open my eyes and look to see you laying there. Reaching out, I almost touch you but don’t want to wake you. I notice a nearby alarm clock reading that it’s just after 4 in the morning. Deciding that I should probably go, I quietly get out of bed and start to head for the door. As I glance back to watch you sleep, I can hear that it is now raining outside. Sneaking by the bed, I notice there’s another door leading out of your room out into a sunroom of sorts and I see no harm in taking a couple extra minutes to enjoy the rain in peace. I gently turn the handle to see if it’s locked and the door opens and I pray it doesn’t make any noise as I make my way out.

Carefully, I move towards the side of the room that opens to the outside and I can tell it’s a screen because I can feel the water as I put my hand up to it, but it’s not leaking inward which is surprising. I stand there listening to the rain falling while I recall as much as I can about what has happened in the past few hours. Thanks to the alcohol some of it is a bit blurry, but I remember the most important parts and I find myself blushing.

I’m startled by a noise and look towards the door and notice you peeking your head out of the doorway. I apologize for waking you up and you move to the opposite side of the room and start fumbling around with some objects on the table. We stand there in our separate areas in silence just listening to the music of the outside world. Then you tentatively say that I shouldn’t make a habit of driving in the dark. I can’t decide if you actually mean that I don’t have to vanish before the sunlight, that you don’t care if other people know I’m there, that you want me to stay, and I don’t know what to say or do.\*

A moment later I walk over and take your hand and lean my head on your shoulder. We stay that way for a little while longer before I turn to you, place my other hand on your chest, and kiss you one last time. Then I let go and walk away. I slowly walk down the hall, put on my shoes, and walk out the front door. As I sit in my car, I recall every memory I can and lock them away for safe keeping. Driving away I can feel tears forming in my eyes, but I don’t look back, if I do then I’ll lose it completely.

Further down the road as the sunlight begins to creep up on the horizon, I let the tears fall and tell myself that it was real. That’s why I left before the sun. You could go back to sleep and forget I was ever there by the time you are actually ready to get up. For me, I can use the memory of this night to pull me through the rest of my life. If daylight had broken before I left, I would always be hoping for another night. This way, I can cherish each second and live in it as a dream, a fantasy. No one can ever take it away.

Once I finally make it home, I crawl into my own bed already missing your body close to mine and fall into a dreamless sleep for no dream could ever compare. When I wake up, I smile and know it happened, but I never hear from you again. While I know that’s what I had expected, I smile anyway because at least I had you; for one night, you were mine and nothing will ever bring me down from that.