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SUNSETS

I love sunsets. The colors around me feel serene and calming. Like reading words on a book with your finger ready to flip to the next page, but not quite yet, because you're waiting to know what's at the bottom. It's the anticipation of the coming end. The day's in-between; a bridge you take to the finale. Or maybe it's just this day. That's more likely. I'm overthinking again. Maybe I badly want this day to end that I'm romanticizing the simple setting sun.

Still, sitting on the edge of the roof with a cigarette between my lips, I can't help but love the sight. The yellows and oranges and purples in the sky promise an ending to today. That tomorrow is coming soon.

The wind whistles and chills run down my arm, making me huddle the thick blanket around my bare torso. A warm September day; those days where you wear a tank top in the sun and a sweater at night. A day that's not warm, not cold either. Alone on an empty rooftop with nothing but a pair of underwear and a purple comforter, I feel my body relaxing, my mind blanking. I hear cars speeding by somewhere in the distance; apart from that, it's quiet. It smells dusty and dry, like the ground is still recovering from the summer heat. It's a beautiful sunset. It feels like everyone also paused to watch it, stopped to feel the serenity of the coming night air. But I know I'm the only one. It's not that other people don't like sunsets. They're just so used to its beauty it's become forgettable.

The sunset, the night air, and the cigarette are taking me back to a night from lifetimes ago. I close my eyes and inhale the smoke as I remember a chilly November night, flashback of a memory that still gives me some kind of solace. Before I take the cigarette off my mouth and breathe out, his cold fingers brush on my lips.

I opened my eyes and the boy stood a few inches from me. He took the cigarette from my mouth and put it between his teeth, smiled like he breathed a secret I wasn't in on.

"Sorry, I ran out. You mind if I shotgun?" He asked like he didn't already smoke the cigarette.

"Yeah, sure," I stuttered.

"Bryan," holding out his hand.

"Jason."

I took his hand for a shake. Instead, he pulled me in for the half-shake half-hug guys did a lot.

"*¡Chingada!*" he exclaimed. I usually acted a lot cooler, but I'd been drinking shots after shots that I stumbled when he pulled me in. I fell on his chest, my cheek resting on his shoulder. "You good?"

He laughed when I nodded in his neck. His body kept me upright, and his arm held me steady. His skin smelled like allspice, masked by something sweet like maple or cinnamon.

I pulled away to save myself from further embarrassment. Soon as I stepped back, he grabbed my shoulders and kept me from swaying.

"You sure you're good?" Bryan repeated. He squinted at me, waiting for my answer.

"You smell like candy," I slurred, "it's yummy."

He finally let go as he threw his head back laughing. "It's the gel."

I kept my head up and tried to focus on Bryan. He wore a plain white tee tucked in a pair of high-waist blue jeans and held by a black leather belt. He also had a black leather jacket hoisted just on his right shoulder, in the process of putting it on until I stumbled on him. His combed hair jet black, slick and shiny from excessive gel. His laugh sounded as beautiful as he looked. His body moved with ease and comfort, even with the ridiculous outfit he had on.

"Let me guess," I said, "a Greaser?"

"That's right," he smirked.

"And you're ..." Bryan grabbed my face to study me. His eyes traveled on my body, making me feel warm inside as he looked over every inch. I studied his face also and he smiled at me, probably deciding what to do once I throw up. Perfect teeth, I thought, the kind that had braces growing up. He had skin like milk chocolate, and had a sharp jaw lined by a five o'clock shadow. And his eyes. They were strikingly brown, maybe hazel. The streetlight danced in them, like a universe lived in his eyes. "... a zombie nurse?"

"It's just nurse," cackling the ugliest laugh in my life. "You know what, though? Let's go with zombie nurse."

Reluctant about Christine's cousin's Halloween party, I agreed to go mostly because she strong handed me, and only after she mentioned the alcohol. I never enjoyed dressing up, even as a child when I went trick-or-treating. After salvaging through my closet, I went with my old nurse scrubs for a costume, and around the eighth or eighteenth shot, someone spilled their drink on me. I probably did it to myself. I thought the wet, tattered look made it seem like I pissed myself.

"I like zombie nurse better," Bryan replied. "Means you can bite me anytime."

Damn, he was good.

"Do you have another?" eyeing a cigarette on the ground. "It broke when you tackled me."

"Yeah, give me a sec."

The streetlight flickered as I pulled the half-empty pack and put a cigarette in my mouth. Bryan pulled his lighter out before I managed to fish for the matches in my pocket. He leaned forward and covered the flame from the wind with his hand, eyes on my mouth the whole time. Soon as the stick was lit, he reached up and grabbed it from my lips, goosebumps traveled from the spot where his fingers skimmed my mouth. I just looked at him as he blew smoke through his smirk.

I started to feel sober, or at least, think a bit clearer, even though I still needed to lean on the splintered porch to steady myself. Music blasted from the party inside the house as people went in and out the

backdoor. Half of them I've never met. It felt like being in a nightclub with banging bass, and a sea of dancing unfamiliar people.

"How do you know Candy?" Bryan asked, passing the cigarette to me.

"Her cousin, Christine, is my best friend so I'm pretty close with her family." I tried hard not to slur again, downplayed the over intoxication. "How about you?"

"I went to school with her," he answered. "I just got back in New York, so it's nice to see old friends."

"Where are you from?"

"Florida, but I grew up here."

Bryan's answers were brief, and I sensed more to the story. As the cigarette stick went back and forth between our mouths, I noticed he felt out of place from the party, too. Maybe it was why he stepped out, to get away from it. I didn't push. Only God knew I had untold stories myself.

"I wasn't sure about coming here since I didn't know anybody," he added.

"I thought you grew up here?"

"Upstate, in Poughkeepsie." I was surprised by how far he traveled for a party with people he didn't know. "I live here now, though, in Brooklyn. I have a place up in Cobble Hill."

"Yeah, I didn't peg you for the suburbs kind of guy."

"Well, I didn't peg you for the shy, hot guy, either. Yet, here we are."

Damn, he was smooth, too.

"Wait for me here?" Bryan said after a few seconds. He turned my face to look at his, making sure I listened. He knew I heard him, I could tell from his smirk. He just wanted to touch me, and he wanted me to know that.

"I'll be back," he added before going inside the house.

I should have kissed him. I blew it, the alcohol fucked with my head too much. The perfect moment passed and I missed it.

No. Who was I kidding? Not like I had any game, drunk or sober. Get a grip.

The cigarette burned out by the time Bryan came back, and he had shots and beers with him. "I wasn't sure what you drink, so I got

some Jell-O shots." He set the beer bottles down on the porch, and I reached for the plastic shot glass in his hand. Instead, the Greaser held on to the cup and dipped his finger around the edge, prying the jelly off. He looked at me, probably to check if I paid attention, then proceeded to suck the flavor from his finger.

"You're not very subtle, huh," I said.

He chuckled like the lame joke didn't make me cringe on the inside. "Wow," repeating the process with the other shot glass, "guess I lost my game."

"Oh, you're very good," I smirked. "You going to ask me to dance, too?"

"Not even my mother wants to see me dance," he laughed through his blushing face.

"So, are we going to take that or what?" nodding at the shots.

"Here."

I reached for the cup again. Instead, Bryan's arm shot up, grabbing my face, tilting it. He took the shot glass to my mouth, rim rested on my lips. I stood frozen, not knowing what to do inside his touch. He pressed on my jaw to open it and gently tapped the bottom of the cup, releasing the jelly in my mouth like I took communion. His gaze intense. I closed my mouth and chewed, tasting the tangy flavor, as his hand traveled to my neck. He cradled my head, thumb anchored below my jawline as he took his own shot. His jaw clenched, his muscles tightened, his warmth stayed on my face. Even the way he chewed was mesmerizing. He stared with so much intent as he swallowed, throat bobbing up and down. The whole experience was sensually divine. I never imagined Jell-O being remotely sexy.

Damn, fucking beautiful.

The beautiful boy lowered his hand and reached over to grab the beers, opening one before handing it to me. He smiled again like a secret hid inside his lips.

After a large gulp, I reached into my pocket to grab another cigarette.

"You smoke a lot?" Bryan asked, fishing for his lighter again.

"I don't smoke at all, actually. Except when I drink."

"Whose cigarette is that then?" He eyed the pack in my hands.

"Candy's."

“Wow. There’s nothing to corrupt then, you thief,” he laughed as he lit the cigarette one more time.

I inhaled the smoke and looked over at his direction. Bryan watched me. Gears turned in his head, like he had a thought trying to take over his body.

He reached up to my face again, his cold thumb brushing against my cheek. I closed my eyes as his fingers took the cigarette off my mouth. He kept it right by my face; smoke crawled over my skin as warm as his touch. Slight pressure from his hand as he pulled me in, replacing the cigarette with his lips. Before any realization dawned, he pulled away. A short kiss, a peck. The whole event lasted for maybe two seconds, so quick I had to convince myself I didn’t imagine it.

When I opened my eyes, he had dragged his hand back, cigarette nestled in his fingers. Chills ran from where his thumb was, and my lips felt colder without his.

“So, Jason,” smiled again as he inhaled the smoke.

I liked how he said my name, how it sounded leaving his mouth, as if the syllables were made for his low, raspy sound. As if the name was music. As if it existed for him to say.

“How’s your night going?”

Bryan handed me back the cigarette and I closed my eyes as I took a drag. When I opened them, gone was the sun and the darkness had settled. Gone were the music and his smell of allspice. Gone were the drunkenness and the feel of warmth. Only keeping me company now is the dusty California air.

Pushing the memory out my mind, I get up unsteadily to stand in the chill, huddling the comforter closer. The once calm and soothing sunset now feels cold and suffocating. It feels lonely. Like everything else.

The day is finally over. Thank God.