

Misery Loves Company

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It was supposed to be a special day. Her perfect, sunny day filled with love. It ended at sunset with her absentee love, ignored sympathies, and she alone, still adorned in her angelic dress, sat unceremoniously on the edge of the park fountain in the area reserved for her reception, pastel streamers and white trellises all orphaned with her. Her veil floated a few feet away, abandoned in the water and she was halfway through a small bottle of rum.

A boy passed by, tall and lanky and glancing her way, uncomfortable-looking jeans and overly large headphones around his neck playing his music far too loudly. It brought a somewhat condescending smirk to her face. Though who was she to assume he was just a boy? He looked to be around her age, after all. Besides, from what she learned from her experience today, she was still just a girl. A 24-year-old little girl. But now that boy was heading her way.

Much to her surprise, he didn't mock her, or laugh, or tell her to leave; he simply sat beside her, turning his music off and looking her way. The extent of her acknowledgement was a nod in his direction and another sip from her bottle of rum. He kept the silence that was somehow becoming increasingly comfortable, opting to pull a rather crumpled pack of cigarettes and lighter from his jeans pocket—how he managed to fit them in there, she couldn't fathom—and lit one, slowly taking a drag while listening to the cicadas. He held the pack out to her in offering, but she shook her head, haphazardly swirling her bottle while somewhat regretting the head movement.

"Rough day, huh?" He broke the silence, yet the comfort stayed. She drank from her bottle in lieu of a response, but he got the message all the same. He took another long drag, pointedly releasing the smoke above and away from her. She would have thought him courteous if she wasn't so focused on keeping herself upright.

"You're lucky the park's empty over here. The cops could arrest you if they wanted to, you know. Though I suppose maybe they'd take one look at you and cut you some slack."

She let out a derisive snort. "You sure know how to flatter a lady."

"She speaks!" Her answer of choice was another snort. He shrugged and took a drag, and the silence reigned again.

"You've got pretty eyes though, even if they're a little unfocused. Whoever it was that left you will be kicking himself in the ass soon enough, I bet."

"Oh, sure he will. Right. I don't matter."

"Yes you do."

"Not to him."

"Well no, not to him—"

"You know just the right thing to say."

"—but you matter to me, and I just met you. Everybody matters! Now what does

that say?"

"That says you're crazy."

He sighed and shook his head, taking another long drag from his cigarette and letting it out with all the deliberation of splattered paint. "Maybe I am. Doesn't make me a liar, though."

She frowned, swirling her bottle again and watching the amber liquid churn inside. "That makes one of us."

He looked at her, curious now. "What's that supposed to mean? A lovely lady like yourself couldn't tell a lie."

"Pretty things are the greatest liars, kid." She took a sip of her rum, unhappy with how her vision was beginning to focus again as her tolerance level worked against her drunken goal. He let out a short, humorless chuckle.

"Kid, huh? You don't look like you're much older than I am, you know. Besides, I think that's the booze talking. You can't really think that, can you?" He sounded genuinely sad, she noted.

"Pretty weather, pretty dresses, pretty rings, pretty flowers, pretty ex-fiancés... Everything was pretty this morning. Beautiful, even. Perfect, even. Every one of those pretty things lied to me, though. I lied to myself. Never had the chance to say 'I do.' Though I guess that would've been a lie as well, had I known this would happen. But it doesn't matter. I don't matter, and love sure as hell doesn't matter."

He stayed silent, eyes downcast and jaw set. He put out his cigarette and she put down her bottle. The wind blew, a cricket chirped a short serenade, and neither of them moved. Suddenly, he tossed himself backwards into the fountain, landing with a resounding splash. Startled, she twisted around to see him.

"What the—"

He sat back up with a mischievous grin, grabbed her wrist, and yanked her down into the water with him. She gave a short shriek before hitting the water face first, reorienting herself as gracefully as possible and sputtering indignantly. He, meanwhile, laughed brightly.

"What was that for!?" she spat, wet hair cracking like an old whip as she tossed it out of her face. He started laughing harder. She stared at him incredulously.

As his chuckles calmed down, he leaned back, attempting to float in the maybe-three-feet of water surrounding them. "It got pretty somber there. We needed something to spice things up."

She wanted to be angry. She wanted to shout at him, insult him, tell him to just leave her alone and stop trying to make her feel better because she had a right to be upset! But she couldn't. So, she just laughed. She laughed and laughed, one hand clutching at her side while the other attempted to tame the skirt of her dress which was billowing under the water.

He smiled as he watched her laugh, eyes alight with mirth. "Hold still," he said, floundering his way over to her, "and close your eyes, too." A few giggles still escaped her mouth, but she complied. Her eyes shot open when she felt something wet being stuck

onto her head, a confused frown tugging at her lips. She lifted her hand and felt the veil he had placed back on her. He scooted back a few feet and flashed her a thumbs up.

“All right! Good as—well, not new, but better than before!” She raised an eyebrow. He swept a hand through his bangs, teeth showing through his smile, and slid forward to tap her forehead once. “You must’ve looked really pretty this morning, and that’s not a lie. All that glitters isn’t gold, sure, but everyone treasures the gold that they have. And you look really pretty right now. I thought you should know that.”

He stood and stretched, shaking the water out of his hair, limbs flailing and dropping with a contented sigh, and held out his hand. “Come on. Let’s call you a cab and get you home. What’s your address? Matter of fact, you got a name?”

A smile bloomed on her face, the first sincere one since that morning, as she accepted his hand. “Yeah,” she said, “I do.”