

A Boy With a Cigarette

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A simple story of love and loss: and the way these things bring us together.



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Sweeping opportunities, like a weather beaten truck tearing down a dusty dirt road on a brand new summer morning. They speed by with a powerful force, radiating the stench of freedom, but as they pass, only begin to stir the dust back up again.

A young boy takes long strides across the gray asphalt. He makes his way to the forlorn concrete bench and sits down. He's holding a cigarette between his lips, tasting the bitterness of its paper filter. He runs his bony fingers through his long, unwashed hair, the hue as dark as the eve of a new moon. His clear blue eyes flicker as he scans the surrounding area, casually looking for anyone else among him. His eyes stop on the only other person in sight, a young girl wearing a dark gray coat, her blonde hair whipping about in the turbulent wind. Asphalt. The gray of the asphalt almost seems to be reflected in the crisp, stern sky. Seeing her there makes him feel more comfortable, at least he has someone to be alone with. The two do not speak, so both are still alone, but they were at least alone together. Not alone together, really, more like together alone. The boy pulls his jacket tighter about him, he is cold. Maybe he will light the cigarette and pull its small cloud of heat deep into his chest. Maybe he will light the cigarette and be on his way. But he never does, he just sits there, gnawing on the now soggy roll of paper.

The girl sitting across the way on the concrete bench much like the boy's steals a glance at him. As she watches him walk towards the bench, her brain automatically tells her that she is far superior to him. She watches his awkward, gawky limbs swing about, that wretched cigarette hanging from between his teeth. She watches him. He seems . . . out of touch. Something about his eyes, they're blue, as clear as a pool of bubbling spring water. As she continues watching him, she tries to analyze him. She's not better than he is, she knows she's not. She knows they are the same. But does she really know, or is this the way she has been programmed to think? She shrugs off the question and moves on to the next. *Is he ever going to light that cigarette?* She wonders to herself. She pulls her coat tighter around herself, she is cold.

A woman walks briskly towards the payphone, absentmindedly rummaging through her large handbag, mumbling something about her unreliable cell phone battery. She is wearing a long skirt with a loud flower pattern printed on it, matching pink high heels, and a long trench coat. Her boxy figure shuffles about on the gray asphalt and her hair, pulled into a tight bun, reaches into the gray sky. She manages to wrestle a coin from her bag and places it into the coin slot of the telephone, but not before spilling out a few more coins onto the ground. She doesn't bother to retrieve them. Its tattered cord stretches to her ear, and she begins to speak. As she relays her senseless information, she glances over to the boy sitting on the concrete bench.

He really should wash his hair.

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Is he ever going to light that cigarette?

She pulls her coat tighter around herself, she is cold.

The boy with the soggy roll of tobacco watches the woman at the telephone. The loud print of her skirt seems to brighten up the atmosphere a little bit, but her hurried demeanor is enough to bring it back down to the gray level it was at before. He is curious as to what she is doing here; she is just the type of human that makes a scene without even trying to make a scene. He sees her steal a glance at him. *She is probably wondering what I am doing here, too.* He thinks. *Or maybe sheâs not. After all, this isnât important.* Their eyes make contact, the piercing blue of his meeting the rich brown of hers for a brief moment in time. For that moment, their souls connect through the sparkling windows of the body. He is afraid of this connection and breaks away. He doesnât like it when people can see inside him.

The girl in the gray coat observes the woman wearing the loudly printed dress. She watches her struggle with her bag and watches her scolding the telephone, a glazed look in her eyes. She sees her look at the boy with the cigarette, and sees their eyes connect. For that moment, the glaze in the womanâs eyes disappears. *I wonder what sheâs thinking of.* The girl in the gray coat wonders.

She reminds me of my mother.

He reminds me of my son.

They remind me of the people I once knew.

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He has to ask her, he knows he has to, but he isn't sure how. He glances at her, then back at his dirty shoes resting against the gray asphalt. He places the soggy cigarette in his pocket and slowly rises from the bench, walking toward the woman at the telephone booth, keeping his head down. He bends down and begins to pick up the coins scattered along the ground. He hands them to the woman at the pay phone, who has just placed the phone back on the hook. She takes them from his hand slowly, and then clutches them to her chest as her eyes meet his. He sees something in those eyes that he doesn't understand. The deep brown eyes are now beginning to sparkle with tears.

"Thank you," she says, the tears now beginning to pour silently down her cheeks. "I'm sorry, it's just that . . . you remind me of someone," she says, feeling silly, now wiping her eyes with her arm.

"It's okay," he says, "You actually remind me of someone too. My mother." He turns away from her, smiling weakly. He brushes his foot back and forth across the pavement. "I feel stupid, but I wanted to talk to you because of that very reason."

He was always seeing her though. Everywhere. Everywhere and nowhere. He held on to her memory and began to feel his own tears sting. She placed the coins she was holding into her purse and took the boy's hands in her own. He was hurting, she could see it through his eyes, she caught a glimpse of the soul, but he quickly turned away. He did not like it when people could see inside him.

She reminds me of my mother

He reminds me of my son

They remind me of the people I once knew.

"You remind me of someone too. My son," the woman chokes out. She releases her grip on his hands, and they move to the concrete benches. They sit down upon the cool concrete, the shock of its bitter coldness radiating through their bones.

"I don't know where he is," she says through the quiet stream of droplets rolling down her slightly weathered face.

He reminds me of my son.

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I don't know where he is.

He left; I guess it's been almost a year now. He just got up in the middle of the night, and I haven't seen him since. And I wonder all the time where he might be, if he's even still alive. It's just, you remind me of him . . .

She was always seeing him though. Everywhere. Everywhere and nowhere.

The boy does not know how to react, he is angry with himself for letting this woman see this part of his soul. He is crying. Crying in front of a complete stranger. He is angry with himself, he is angry with the sky, he is angry with her for causing him to remember.

Remember . . .

Remember . . .

Forget.

If only he could forget. But how could he forget? He loved her. Loved her so much.

My mother. You remind me of my mother. She . . .

He turned his face away from her.

She wasn't . . . happy. And I tried, I tried so damn hard. He whispered through clenched teeth, almost angry now. But she just wasn't happy anymore. I mean, we used to be happy, but then she died. She died and she didn't even know she was dead. Her face sunk in and her eyes grew tired and old. She wasn't the person I knew anymore. She was a corpse. A walking, breathing, living corpse. Well, corpses attract buzzards, you know, and she was no exception. They used to come by our house a lot; buzzards. And they picked at her and picked at her until there was nothing left but a hazy memory of the life we once had. Then she ended it. Blew out her brains with a rusty rifle she kept behind the door. But it didn't matter, right? Because she was already dead.

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She reminds me of my mother.

She was already dead.

â I wonder all the time what I did wrong, and if I would have just . . .â he stopped speaking, his voice now beginning to quiver, and he started to sob. He covered his face with his hands, whimpering and shaking.

The girl in the gray coat could not help but overhear, because voices carry in the wind. She listened to the stories of the two she saw in front of her and could not help but think

They remind me of the people I used to know.

The people she used to know. Or are these people the people she knew first, and are the people she used to know the people who remind her of the people she used to know? After all, time is just a scattered line smudged across the universe with a sickly green paintbrush, splattered with specks of gold, leaving you to pick a beginning and end. Tears begin to fall from her own eyes for the people. The people she used to know, whether they be these people or others she will meet along the way. Tears began to fall from the sky for the people. Touching.

All of these people are touching each other. And all of these people continue touching each other. Theyâ re touching each other but not touching each other.

Voices carry in the wind.

The boy pulls the soggy cigarette from his pocket.

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The woman takes a lighter from her purse.

She lights the cigarette.

He slowly pulls its cloud of heat deep inside his chest. Strangely, it seems to make the other two feel warmer inside too.

And so they keep touching but not touching each other underneath the same wild and wintry sky.

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