A Smile Like The Sun (Novella)

By : AemmaBella

(finished)Blayke Hanson struggles with memories of the past about his best friend Evaine Longing, the girl he had loves since the moment he met her. Their relationship had always been complicated, his parent's did not accept her as he had wished they would because she was diagnosed with being severely retarded, and her step mother hated her for it and hated Blayke still for the feelings he had for her. After two years have gone by since he's seen her he decides to hop on a plane and down to Florida where she now resides in a home for the mentally deprived. (For EmilieHail's Valentines Day contest)

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A Smile Like The Sun (Novella) : Chapter 1

ï¿½

Have you ever known someone for so long- believed that you were so close to them nothing could possibly separate you?

Have you known someone like that- in that way- and felt so . . . far away from them?

She did this to me.

I still don't -to this very day- understand why I let myself fall for someone like her the way I did, when it was clear!- obviously, painfully, pristinely clear that we were not meant to be.

But she was so beautiful: her eyes the color of the sunset, so warm- so inviting- yet so distant, yet curious; her very self was something to just . . . cherish. It was inevitable for me; like being dragged down deep under the never ending sea kicking and grasping- panicking- as you try so hard to get back to the surface for air.

She was my bottomless ocean and my surface.

She was no good for me, yet I needed her to live.

ï¿½

Her name was Evaine Longing.

Ironically, she had the name that basically told its own story, because I did exactly that: long for her.

She was my next door neighbor for fourteen years.

She was also my best friend.

I will tell you this now: it is always . . . always the best friend.

I've cursed them ever since- since. . .

She was my best friend that is all that matters for the moment.

ï¿½We were six when we first met.

It was winter time in New England- a very brutal winter which to this day I am surprised we ever met at all because our encounter involved the outdoors. Either way: we met, and still, like the idiot that I am, I do not regret meeting her.ï¿½

Chapter 2

Fourteen years ago

I remember freezing- freezing weather; the kind of weather that turned lips blue and toes numb. But still, like the goof that I was, I was outside playing in two feet of near solid snow attempting to make a snowman.

"Psst!" and a giggle, was what I heard coming from a bush across the street near a mailbox. Everything was covered in snow so badly that my father was allowed a week off from his office at the firm . . . which was conveniently replaced with at home work. The naked eye could not separate road from sidewalk and the palest of persons would be lost. The wind was so loud- howling and screaming, bending heavy trees till they whined a warning. I was completely deaf and blind to all of this . . . all I cared about was my snowman. The typical six-year-old's fantasy: a really- really big snowman.

"Psst!" and the giggle persist. I was really- really annoyed with being called away from my snowman and in return I answered the noise with a "What?".

A pale, thick head of brown waves, and big doe eyed hazel eyes popped out of the bushes with her nose in her cuffed hands.

"H-how do you do that?" she asked me. More than once because I had to ask her to repeat herself several times before she realized she was covering her mouth along with her nose.

She smiled a friendly smile at me, but her eye, the kept asking a question her voice seemed never to ask.

"It's very pwetty." She said, mesmerized. She was walking across the street towards me, and I couldn't help notice she didn't look left and right. "Can I help?"

"Uh. . ." I was quite the speaker then, wasn't I?

Still she tried to pick up some snow but where she was standing the snow was solid, yet still she persisted in trying to dig her fingers into it. I noticed she did not have on any gloves and that her hands were probably numb.

"What's your name?" I asked her. She acted like she didn't hear me. Or I thought she was acting, so I asked her again.

"E-Evaine ." She said, still scratching at solid snow with her numb fingers grunting now and then under her breath.

I looked at the sky and saw that it was a very dark grey and checked to see if the street light was on. It wasn't so I turned my attention back to my project, but when I turned I saw her staring at her hand- her fingers specifically, they were bleeding in the nails and almost black with cold.

"Geez Louise!" I shouted as I snatched at her hands before dragging her into my house. I tried to find band aids and became so in tuned with that task I forgot her finger were practically frozen and ran back to her, she was standing in the living room looking around, and forced her to hold her hands under warm water. "You can't go outside with no mittens on you'll lose your fingers."

She looked frightened when I said that. Which I took as a good sign that she wouldn't do it again because that was how my dad taught me not to do certain things again: with fear, or with a spanking.

"I- I don't wanna lose my fingers." She said, I could see her eyes watering like she was about to cry.

"Oh, don't cry, look," I said nodding at her hands, which were now starting to color, "you fingers are fine."

She smiled unsurely at me and kept her hands under the water until I came back with an old pack of band aids. "here," I took her hand and wrapped a band aid around each finger, "there, now you're good as new."

She just stared at her hands sadly and then pointed her doey gaze at me. "I'm sorry," she said quietly, "sometimes I forgets- sometimes I forget."

She stared back at her hands.

I looked out the window and saw that the sky was black.

"Your mom's really cool if she doesn't mind you being out so late." I said.

She looked through the window and stared, confused, out the window. Her face scrunched up with something like fear and remembrance.

"That's not my mom, that's just a lady my daddy likes a lot." She said.

"What lady?"

She pointed to a frantic figure outside in the snow.

"That lady . . . she look like she looking for something." She said, staring at the lady who was, at that time, her stepmother. She was a tall lanky woman with frizzy blonde hair and dark eyes. She was a rabid smoker and an avid curser whom scared me to bits every time she pointed one of those boney fingers at me.

"Let's go help her." She said enthusiastically, completely forgetting about her fingers and how unhelpful they would be. But still I followed her.

"Hi! What are you looking for?" she said warmly, swinging her arms happily.

The woman glared at Evaine and spit out her current cigarette. I could smell its lung constricting scent from where I was standing, which was across the street.

"You stupid girl!" the woman shrieked. "What are you doing out here? Its freezing and- and look at your hands you fu-"

She stopped when she saw me.

Her glare didn't falter but she did shut up and instead stomped clumsily cross the street. She snatched Evaine's hand, purposefully tight.

"Owe!" Evaine cried, squirming around in her stepmother's grasp. "T-t-that hurts!" she was crying.

"You stay away from her!" she hissed at me, dragging Evaine away from me, ignoring her cries.

What surprised me most was that through all of this Evaine still turned to me, her body wobbling pathetically with her mom's direction, and she smiled and waved: "What's your name?" the lady snatched at her and hissed something at her that I couldn't hear, and she completely ignored.

"I-I'm Blayke!" I yelled out to her.

She smiled and said: "Oh!"

Her mother was a bitch.

And not in a way that makes me sound like some disrespectful douche. No, this woman was horrible. She was the wicked witch of the hood.

And I'm pretty sure she scared men away with her excessive wearing of short shorts. God! I do not miss her.

She treated Evaine terribly, and I wondered sometimes: "Where was her dad during all this?"

Her father was a good man, but ignorant. He was not at all a visual man; meaning he saw what he wanted to see. He had his moments when he would protect his daughter, but other than that it was almost like he wasn't there. He was a big man, in the gut (he was one of those four beers a day men), and he had a receding hairline. I noticed that when he was paying any sort of attention to his daughter he was a kind man to her. He loved her. He loved to make her happy, and sometimes his wife felt that he was spoiling her; which, she felt, would not help Evaine's "condition".

I told my parents about her during dinner and they just looked at me as if I were telling them about my drunken imaginary friends.

I told them I really liked her and hated her parents; which they then made me correct by changing the word "hate" with "dislike".

My mom stated that Evaine was a pretty girl.

That was all.

And my dad just looked at his plate.

I never brought her up again. I was embarrassed that she didn't mean anything to them like she meant to me. I was mad because I knew there was something they weren't telling me.

Chapter 3

Eleven years ago

Evaine had begun to ask me to read to her. I never thought much of it told her that I would.

She would smile at me every time I said yes and every time I said yes she would bring me either a very kiddish book or very hard adult book.

One day I asked her about her choice in literature.

"I can't read, I-I just pick em cus they're pwetty." She told me.

We were nine at the time.

I asked her why she couldn't read.

"I-it's just hard I guess." She said. "I can't- I don't know what those lines are- I can't read."

She looked at me as if for guidance, which confused me because she looked like she was expecting either praise or scolding.

"D-do you want me to teach you?" I asked her instead.

And I swear her eyes lit up. Her body lit up.

"Yeah! I love readin'- I mean, I love when you read." She said. Her light dimmed a little.

"Okay well do you know the alphabet?"

She shook her head.

And right then and there, I know we had a lot of work to do.

We would sneak out of the house every day after I let out of school, and walk to a field that was not too far out away from our neighborhood. I would tell my parents I was going to a friends' and she . . . well I think she would just leave.

One day I met her at the field and her arms were bruised.

I asked her about it:

"Ms. Ruby beat me for sneaking out." She said, "She don't know I go out so she hit me and tell me not to go no more. But I really wanna read so I go." She smiled.

I didn't

"Evaine if your mom doesn't want you here you shouldn't come." Her smile was gone.

"But you said you was gonna teach me." Her eyes were wet.

She was wearing a brown dress with white polka dots and her hair was mess. Her feet were bare as she stood in the tall grass field staring at me. Her eyes were questioning me and pleading for me at the same time.

I never knew how she did that, but it always worked.

"Okay."

A tear slid down her dirty cheek, and I slid my thumb over it to wipe it away.

"Stop crying, you'll mess your face up."

We would read for hours each day; each day she would forget what we learned and we would have to start all over again. I never lost patience with her, but sometimes I would tire and read the book to her myself.

"You read nice." She told me while I read 'CAT' to her for the twentieth time.

I shrugged and told her it was nothing.

She scrunched up her face and lay down beside me. Our arms touched and I could feel the heat emanating from her body. She was such a pretty girl, I thought, she would be even prettier if she were fixed up.

"Why can't I read?" she asked me.

"I don't know. What does your dad say?"

"I don't think he knows I can't read, Ms. Ruby just yell at me when I cant."

When I got home I asked my mom what it meant when a kid my age couldn't read.

"It means they aren't as . . . bright as the average child." She told me.

"Bright?" I wanted her to elaborate.

My father walked in.

"The politically correct term is "retarded"." he clarified.

"Frank!" my mom hissed. "I don't like that word."

He shrugged: "Just a word, honey."

"It's so . . . it's like labeling. And it's ugly. What's wrong with "slow" or "underdeveloped"?"

"Underdeveloped? That sounds like someone born with no arms!"

I raised my hand before they could get into their argument.

"What's retarded?"

They both exhaled heavily told me to sit down.

"Baby, some kids are born with . . . deficiencies- do you know what that means?" my mom said.

I nodded.

"Deficiencies . . . some of them can't read or write or even take care of themselves in basic ways." She continued. "Take Evaine, for example: Evaine can't read, and I'll bet you that she can't write either. I've seen her wandering around outside, she looks so . . . lost."

I didn't want to hear anymore.

"She's not that!" I shouted at her.

My dad held his hands up forcing back into my seat.

"Look I know she's your friend, but, buddy, you've got to understand that not all kids are-"he stopped, but I knew where he was going. "Not as smart as you".

"She is smart . . . she's a genius!" I knew I was overdoing it but I was really upset.

"Blayke. . . just-"

"You don't know her!" I kept yelling.

"Just forget about it, you're just a kid you don't understand." My mother waved it away. With just the spasm of a hand movement, she waved the discussion away. But it remained in my head. I tried so hard to understand. I tried to tell myself they were wrong, but I knew Evaine was different; she was different not just in the way that made me like her so much, she was different.

The next day while I was reading one of the Dr. Seuss books to her under a cloudless, airy sky on a warm summer afternoon, I asked her if she could write.

"Nu-huh, I can't write." She lies on my shoulder, smiling at me.

"Why not?" I asked her, "Why can't you read, or write, or brush your hair!"

I was yelling at her. She wasn't smiling anymore.

"I-I-I, Blayke I don't know!" she sat up. "It's hard! I don't know! I can't I- I'm sorry."

Her eyes were so big and frightened, she was so unsure of what I was going to do next. Hell I didn't know what I was going to do. I was mad at her; mad at her for not being normal.

I was mad at myself for liking her so much.

But I was even more upset with myself for making her cry.

She cried waterfalls of clear liquid that seemed to be never ending. She was so hurt and so scared she couldn't move.

I was paralyzed with anger and fear.

Then something happened that changed our relationship, turned it around and put me in a place that forced me to grow up; get over myself and my selfish embarrassments.

She peed on herself.

She was so upset and so scared her bladder failed.

I didn't jump away and shout at her, or mock her and chastise her saying she was too old to piss on herself.

She was sitting there hiccupping with her hands lanky at her sides. She knew what happened and she turned red. She covered her face and kept crying; she kept muttering "I'm sorry".

I sat on my knees directly in front of her. I pulled her hands away from her face; gently shoved her hair back, away from her eyes. Her eyes were red and swollen with tears.

"It's okay." I told her.

And she breathed as if for the first time; as if nobody had ever told her it was okay.

I took her hands in mine and helped her up, and kept on holding it while I guided her to my house. My mom worked at a pharmacy and my dad would be in his study all day so I knew we wouldn't get caught there.

The house was silent other than the faint typing deep within the house. I lead her upstairs to my bathroom and slid off her dress, all the while stared at me, sniffling now and then.

I ran some warm water in my shower and told her to take off her underwear and get in. She did, awkwardly, and handed them to me before stepping under the pressing water.

"Can you wash yourself?" I asked her.

She nodded carefully, as if remembering when I demanded answers to her negligence.

I told her to stay there while I went to get a washcloth and tossed her clothes in the drier with a little soap and fabric softener.

I came back and she was rubbing the soap over her skin with one hand and washing herself with the other. She smiled at me.

"See?"

I smiled back at her and nodded. I put the cloth down and let her wash herself with her hands.

Her hair was a lot longer when it was wet and when she was about to wash it with the body soap I stopped her and got my shampoo.

"I'll do it."

She watched me skirt the shampoo in her hair, her eyes never leaving mine, while combed through her hair like I would with my own long bright hair.

She smiled that warming smile at me and ran her thumb over my cheek, mimicking my gesture when I wiped her tears away.

When I finished I told her to close her eyes tightly so the shampoo wouldn't burn her.

She did and I rinsed it out of her hair, it tried to make sure I got it all out. It was a lot harder getting it out than it was putting in because her hair was so thick.

When I finished I turned off the water and told her to wait, I'd forgotten to get a towel.

The drier was still on so I wasn't in much of a rush, but I expected her to be cold so I hurried anyway.

When I came back she was out of the shower, dripping wet on the little blue shower rug, smiling.

It had never entered my mind that she was naked until that moment.

I almost looked away completely.

But I didn't.

She was beautiful.

Her hair wrapped around her like a dark wet blanket and her skin was quivering with chill, her eyes were on mine- so bright and happy- so unsure. She was smiling at me as if it were the most natural thing in the world, me staring at her nakedness, bathing her, washing her hair. She was a very skinny girl too, I wondered if her parents fed her regularly.

"C-cold." She giggled.

I snapped out of my staring and wrapped the blanket around her.

I smiled at her, but when she smiled back I felt ashamed. She didn't know I was not supposed to look.

Somewhere deep down I felt as if I had done something horrible.

I couldn't bring myself to smile at her again that day.

When her clothes dried I gave them to her and told her to put them on in my room. I closed the door behind her and slid down weightlessly with the door against my back.

She swung the door open sending me backwards. She giggled.

"Okay?" she was talking about her dress. She wanted to know if she did it right, "Ms. Ruby dress me, she don't like when I do it."

I got to my feet and observed her: the dress was on backwards.

"It's on backwards." I told her.

She looked confused.

"Look," I held the dress while she tucked her arms inside and showed her the tag, "the tag goes in the back." And I turned it around for her, careful in making sure that I didn't peek.

"Sorry."

I shook my head: "its okay," I told her, "it's just a tag."

I sit here remembering all of this- all fourteen years of this and it hurts. It makes me miss her more. I miss her smile, her eyes . . . her hugs.

I haven't seen her in over two years now.

I'll be twenty in tomorrow and I haven't once given it a single thought until recently when a friend of mine brought it up.

He asked me what I wanted to do and even went so far as to suggest a club. A gentleman's club.

I told him no and he shrugged me off and said "whatever".

Why in the hell would I want to watch a stripper when I wanted Evaine?

That didn't make sense to me.

I'm not a complete idiot, though. I wasn't planning on staying home; I thought about going to see her. It was my plan to hop on a plane to Florida and see her.

But would she remember?

Has that place already erased all the years we shared together?

Chapter 4

Three years ago

"Have you ever been to Sal's?" I asked her. We were walking down the sidewalk in our neighborhood, heading for the library from some books I thought she might like to hear. No she still couldn't read, by that time I had given up on her and one day asked Ruby if she could find a professional to teach her.

"What is she gonna do with a book? She can't marry it, she can't make babies with it, and it sure as hell isn't gonna take care of her." Was what she told me.

"She loves books, though. Why not teach her? There's more to fiction in literature than you might care to think Mrs. Longing, but she loves and she could actually learn from them." I was getting upset with her and told her this a much nosier fashion than I had planned on doing.

"She's not your daughter!" she shrieked at me. "If you spent half as much time "teaching" her than you do traversing around town doing God knows what you would know it isn't easy! She's too stupid to get anything in that damn head of her!"

I lost it.

"She's not stupid!" I shoved my finger at her. "She is a smart, beautiful, caring person, and if you spent half as much time just being around her for crying out loud you might know this!"

Evaine was sitting in the next room watching us, panicking, hoping we weren't going to hit each other.

"M-Ms. Ruby?"

"What! For God's sake what do you want?"

She shrunk away and I went to her- tried to go to her. Mrs. Longing grabbed at my arm and pulled me back.

"Look at her! She a coward! What beauty is that?" she spat at me.

I yanked my arm out of her hand, nearly causing her to fall, and went to Evaine, took her hand gently and lead her out of the house. I stopped at the door: "I have looked at her, I always look at her!" I said, "I've seen more of HER and you have in your entire life! And she deserves more than you, and that man who claims to love her only when he's two quirts deep in beer!" I looked at her; she looked at me confused and scared, and beautiful. I could feel Mrs. Longing's gaze burn into while I stared at her daughter. I didn't care. I don't know what I was looking for while I was staring at her: maybe a flaw? - A defect? -Some resonance of ugliness?

We left the house.

When the door closed I had to try something. I don't know why I tried because I knew it would scare her. I needed to try this.

I kissed her.

I pressed my lips to hers, slowly. I was so careful- so scared that I might frighten her away. I didn't want her to run away from me.

She was shocked, from what I could tell from the shift in her breathing, but she didn't pull away. My eyes were closed, I didn't want to see her face while I did this, it wasn't forced but I couldn't bear to see her face if she were scared or confused. Confused, I could handle, but not fear.

When she didn't pull away I placed my hand on her cheek, deepened the kiss, and pulled her, slowly- ever so slightly, closer to me.

I could feel her hands moving, I think she was trying to do what I was doing. Either that or she was struggling with getting me off of her.

My heart was pounding in my ears, I couldn't hear anything, and I couldn't see anything. I only felt her lips and her body close to mine. And I wanted to go further.

God, I really wanted to go further. . .

I wanted to show her what this kind of love is, what she is to me. I wanted to tell her I love her. I wanted to love her.

But I pulled away.

When I opened my eyes, just before I pulled away, I saw that her eyes were closes so tight I could see the veins in her cheeks.

Her hands were on my arms and when I finally did pull away, I rubbed my thumb under her eye. And she looked at me.

Her eyes begged for praise; she wanted to be told she had done it right.

"D-d- did I . . . do it right?" she reluctantly asked.

I wouldn't have cared if she didn't; I was only happy because she didn't run away.

I smiled at her.

"You did it beautifully."

I kissed her forehead and she smiled back at me. There were no questions, no fear, no confusion . . . only happiness.

I open my eyes . . .

I can't wait anymore.

I need to see her.

I'm shaking with the urge to touch her again.

I'm currently at school, University of Maine, for law. I could skip today's classes . . . tomorrow is Saturday. No classes.

I've made up my mind; I'm going to see her, tonight.

Chapter 5

Hours After the Kiss

"Those make me feel bad." She was saying to me. We were at the diner Sal's having lunch. She was referring to the hamburgers, this was the moment we established that she was a vegetarian.

I laughed.

"Those," I pointed to her burger, "make my mouth water." I joked with her.

She smiled, the confusion was back in her eyes but I didn't worry about it.

She ate around the burger and gulped down the French fries and her milkshake.

She giggled.

And I saw why, the basket was clean and only the meat patty was left. She had eaten everything except the patty.

"Oh my God you're so picky." I exaggerated.

She laughed heartily.

And I couldn't help it; I placed my hand over hers.

Her smile faltered.

I was about to pull away but she told me not to.

"No. . . I- I like your hands." And I tried so hard not to turn that phrase into a whole other sentence. I simply placed my hand back.

"Thanks." I smiled lightly.

She grinned.

The bell over the door chimed and three guys I know from school, one of them being a friend of mine, walked in.

The neighborhood we lived in was small, everybody knew each other; there were no secrets here.

Those guys knew I had strong feelings for Evaine, everybody knew. When she and I walked in people smiled and waved and nodded greetings at us. The guy, Bert, running the counter smiled at us and pointed out a booth. Bert was a small man pro Americas extremist with a very French mustache. His eyes seemed to pop out of his head without literally falling out and his voice was unusually deep for such a small guy.

Evaine and I were regulars. On certain occasions he would give us free milkshakes or free fry refills. He was really a cool guy; he could hold his own and still respect you in the end.

Alex, Shane, and George walked up to us; Alex and Shane with smug looks, George, my friend, hanging back with a nervous look on his face.

I never liked Alex, he was dick, clearly. No need for elaboration. He is just your average dick.

Shane didn't have a mind of his own so I paid no attention to him.

And George, God, I just never understood why he hung out with them.

"Sup Blayky?" Alex chimed. "Mademoiselle?" he said to Evaine.

"Hi, Alex." I returned.

Evaine only smiled.

He helped himself to one of Evaine's refilled fries and sat himself down next to her.

I bristled.

"What are you two up to on a day as fine as this?" he grinned.

I noticed George sit in an empty booth . . . far away from us, with his back to me.

Shane was just leaning on my booth with a stupid grin on his face and his fat arms crossed.

"Lunch!" Evaine smiled at him, holding up her fry, oblivious to the fact that he was eating them without asking.

He feigned surprise: "Really!?"

She nodded.

I bristled again.

Every time he ate one of her fries was my every hint of patience I had for him, gone.

"You know, Vainy, this is really an awesome place for lunch. Do you like dessert too?" he winked at me.

I felt the blood rushing to my head.

"I like the milkshakes." She happily told him.

"So cool!" he laughed, "Chocolate or Vanilla?" he winked again.

"Both!" she chimed, bouncing around in her seat, happy to have someone to talk to. She loved to talk. Conversation made her happy; it made her feel like she belonged. She didn't have to tell me this, it was just the look in her eyes; she felt accepted, like someone whom people actually wanted to talk to her. She knew she was different, and she knew some people would not even bother to strike up a conversation with her.

"Oh, so that's how you roll?" he grinned.

She looked at him, still smiling, she was confused.

"Alex," I said, quietly. "What do you want?"

He smiled and leaned over the table: "I want what you're having."

I slammed my fist on the table and shoved Shane out of my way as I jumped up and yanked Alex out of the booth. I punched him in the jaw and Shane pulled me away from him.

"Hey!" boomed a faint voice.

I shrugged myself out of his grasp, knocking him to the floor. I grabbed at Alex again and punched him, I don't know how many more times. And I didn't care; I was in a flow, no one else there but him and me.

"Blayke?" someone said my name.

I was yanked away from Alex and shoved further away.

I tried to go at him again but the arm shoved me back.

"Blayke?"

"What!" I shouted.

I looked at everyone in the diner watching me: fear, anger; shaking heads, covered mouths, averted gazes; whispers, grumble, utters, hisses . . .

I looked at what I did to Alex: his face was a bloody, swollen mess. He looked disoriented.

I felt no pity for him. He had been after me and Evaine for years and I never did anything to him. He knew I would defend her so why did he test me? Was he that stupid?

"Bastard!" I spat at him. I still wasn't clear headed yet.

"Blayke?

I glared at the source of the voice, it was Evaine. She pushed herself tightly into the corner of the booth, she was shaking. She looked at me as if I were going to hit her.

"Evaine, no." I shook my head and held my hand out to her. She coward but took it anyway. Her hand was shaking so badly I was worried she might lose it. "I'm okay, Evaine." I whispered close to her ear so that only she could hear.

I helped her out of the booth and I was heading to the door when Bert yanked at me arm and I reflexively shrugged him off and pushed him back.

"Hey!" he bellowed, pointing his finger at me. "You'd best leave her here."

"I'm fine!" I exclaimed, leading Evaine out of the diner.

"Evaine!" he called after her.

She turned back to him, and waved: "He's fine!"

I felt like I was a hundred miles away from her.

We were so close yet I couldn't bring myself any closer.

I wanted to ask her if she was okay, but I could bring myself to do so.

We walked alongside each other in silence for a long time before the silence was broken.

"I'm sorry, Blayke." she said.

I felt my heart break for her; breaking because I did not want her to think this was her fault. She didn't know; she couldn't help that she didn't know.

I stopped our walk and turned to her.

"No, Evaine, it's not your fault," I held her face in my hands, shaking my head, "it's not your fault . . ."

"Yes it is." She stated as if it were a fact that could not be argued. "I did something bad."

I kissed her forehead, her doe eyes staring so deeply in to me I wouldn't be surprised if it turned out she knew me better than I knew myself.

"It was Alex, the boy talking to you," I told her, "he did something bad."

"I'm sorry, I didn't know."

I stared back into to those big sunset eyes, wishing I could just explain this to her in a way that she would understand, but I couldn't find the words.

"Do you want to read?" I asked her instead.

She smiled and nodded.

We went to my house and I let her pick out the book.

"I- I don't think Persuasion is good one." I told her. For one: because I could barely understand the woman myself; second: I can't stand Jane Austen.

She bit her lip and searched through my bookshelf again.

She was wearing knee-high socks and a skirt with Mary Jane's and a baggy sweater. Her hair was back in a braid, out of her eyes the way I liked it though she did not know this of me.

"This one?" she picked up A Tale of Two Cities.

I shook my head. I was lying in my bed watching her scour my shelf, and suppressing a smile.

"T-this is hard." She put the book down and sat on her heels, defeated.

I smiled at her.

"You see that red one there?" I asked her.

She looked and put her finger on it.

"This one?"

"Yeah."

She picked it up and brought it to me.

"I am the cheese." I read.

She giggled.

"What is so funny?" I feigned insult.

She shook her head and covered her face with my covers.

I sighed exaggeratedly and went under the covers with her.

She laughed.

"What is so funny?"

"If you're cheese, then what am I?" she chuckled.

My smile faltered.

I slid the book to the floor and sat up on my elbow.

"You're the love of my life." I simply told her.

She looked at me, confused.

"I'm love?" she asked, more to herself than to me.

I lie back down, watching her as she twiddled with her fingers.

It was quiet in my room; dark under the covers, which were now becoming hot with our bodies and breathe. When we came in the house was empty, my mother was away at a conference, and my dad was probably out drinking with his coworkers if he wasn't home by now. The sky was still bright with daylight; birds chirped happily and flew passed my window.

"That means something." She suddenly said.

I looked at her and she looked at me.

There was no smiling now.

"That means everything." I told her.

She sat back looking straight up through the blanket towards the ceiling.

I couldn't stop staring at her.

She was daylight to me; the stars at night to me.

I removed the cover from over our heads.

She was watching me now. I leaned toward her and kissed her lip- just a slow peck before I pulled away. She was still watching me; her expression was simply there, there was no fear, no confusion.

I leaned in again and pressed my lips to her, this time keeping my eyes opened. She closed her eyes - gently this time, not clenched shut.

I let my legs on either side of her so that it was my elbows that kept me from crushing her, all while I kept my lips on hers. She breathed with me, exhaled with me. I shifted so that I could bring us closer. I put my leg in between her.

Why did I do that?

This couldn't go there.

I couldn't do that to her when she's not in the position to consent.

But I wanted to be closer and this wasn't close enough.

I slid up her sweater. . .

And she bit me.

I gasped.

"I'm sorry!" she sat up quickly bumping my head with hers. "Owe!"

I sat up with her and rubbed at my head while sucking at my lip.

"It's okay." I murmured through sucking.

"I didn't mean to."

"I know, I know. It's my fault."

She looked at me and then at herself.

"What's happening?"

"What?" I was still shocked from the bite.

"What happening?" she asked me again, looking at the knee that was in between her legs.

"Ah, shit." I uttered, "I'm sorry, this- this . . . I don't know what this is."

I got off of her.

"I didn't mean to do that." I apologized to her.

"Do what? You didn't hurt me. Did you do something bad?"

I looked at her: her skirt was off and her sweater was hiked up over her tee shirt . . . a very thin, transparent tee shirt-

"Yes I-I think I did something bad." I looked away. I hated myself for doing what I was about to do! I wanted to scream. "God - I'm so sorry!"

Evaine looked at me, oblivious that her tee shirt was exposing everything.

"Blayke, I'm okay." She said quietly, she put her hand on my cheek and slid away a tear I hadn't realized was there.

"Thank you." I whispered. "You have no idea what I almost did, Evaine."

"What were you going to do?" she brought herself closer to me and wrapped her arms around me. I could feel the heat coming off of her skin, touching mine. I felt her chest rise and fall; her breath, warm in my ear.

"Evaine- it's complicated." I wanted to tell her what I wanted. But I knew that if I did she would say yes because she wanted to make me happy. I couldn't make myself believe it was right when she didn't even know what was happening. "I'm sorry." I told her instead.

"I understand." She let her head rest on my shoulder.

I pulled her sweater back down and let her comfort me the way she could.

She picked up the book and gave it to me, and held my hand while I read to her.

I feel like I'm invading her space. Being on the plane, heading towards her- no phone call, no email; what am I doing?

This three hour flight feels like it would take forever and when I do get to her, what am I going to do- what am I going to say?

It has been two years, does she even remember me?

Does she want to remember me?

They've probably turned her against me by now.

Evaine, do you miss me?

Chapter 6

The sun is in my eyes, burning my lids slightly.

"Sir?" says a woman. "Sir, the plane has landed."

I thank her and unbuckle my seatbelt, and follow the rest of my flight mates out to the terminal.

Florida is such a warm, breezy place. I breathed in deeply, and held it; not wanting to forget how sweet the air is here. Sweet like Evaine, and bright like her sunshine.

I'm afraid, honestly. I'm afraid she will not remember me, or that those . . . people will have told her awful things about me, making her hate me.

"Please remember me." I utter to myself.

The cab driver looks at me as if I'm senile and then ignores me completely when I ask him where the Sunset Home for the Mentally Deprived was.

"Sir?" I try to get his attention.

He clears his throat and eyes me in the rearview mirror.

"I- uh- I heard ya, son." He assures me.

We are off down flat lanes; passing palm tree after palm tree. Endless Ocean stretches out before us. I want to touch the water; feel the cool silk on my skin in the heat.

We pass slums, and mini malls; ghettos and beautiful suburbs, it was like were in a world where nothing was rejected. Everything and everyone were close; no one cared if you were retarded, poor, or a snob.

"Alright, boy, I hope this suits you well enough." The driver tells me.

I pay my fare. "Thank you, sir," and I add, "I'm visiting a friend." for no apparent reason.

I'm not ashamed of this place. I'm not ashamed of Evaine being in this place. I just want to see her.

"Whatever." Is all the man says to me and he drives off, tires screaming, down what looks like an endless lane.

I take my small overnight bag and carry it with me up freshly painted wooden stairs and railing. There were rocking chairs on this bright white porch and a ceiling fan twirling away. There are a few people scattered about the lawn playing games or talking, or holding someone's hand just standing and watching. A woman wearing a nurse's uniform greets me and smiles at me warmly.

"May I help you she says?" she says.

"I'm visiting a friend." I tell her. My heart is beating so hard I pray to God she does not see it. I'm sure I'm perspiring, but I can blame that on the heat. "Her name is Evaine Longing." I say her name as if it were forbidden to me. And maybe it is; I'm not even supposed to see her.

She nods.

"And what is your relation to Ms. Longing?"

I panic.

"I'm her brother," I say quickly and awkwardly, "her half-brother." I add still.

She narrows her gaze at me but does not ask any more questions. She gestures for me to follow her and so I do.

The house is not so big as it seemed from the outside. It looks more like warm home than an institution. Everything screamed Home except for the fact that everything was white. Absolutely no color is in the room. Furniture is plastic and hard looking, rugs are non, appliances are stainless.

"She is quite the girl here, Mr. Longing, such a sweet thing. We've enjoyed having her here."

When she said Mr. Longing I cringed.

No wonder Ms. Taylor called me a pervert, I was pretending to be her brother!

"She hasn't changed a bit then." I found myself saying.

The nurse smiles at me and stops at a closed door; the door is blank except for the tacky little writing scribbled on the door reading Evaine.

I smile.

"Would you like me to take your bag, sir?" she asks me. I barely hear her and almost drop the bag on her head.

"Thanks." I say dreamily, as if I were far away.

She walks away and I wait until she is gone before I open the door.

I carefully place my hand on the knob, twist it, and push every so slight on the white wood.

I see a woman sitting on a bed with a children's book in her hands.

This woman is beautiful with very long waist-length hair and eyes so large you could lose yourself and so bright you could blind your own. She is biting her lip with focus; she is reading.

I see that the book is CAT and I smile at her just for that.

She does not know I am in the room and I don't know what to do.

"Will you remember me?" I think to myself, "Will you run and scream for help?"

Her breathing is slow and automatic. I can see her eyes going over each word in the book, slowly. She is so focused and I feel warmth in me. I'm proud of her.

I'm visibly shaking - so hard in fact I can hear my own bones knocking against one another. My hands are sweaty - I don't know what to do.

But, while I stand here, Evaine lifts her eyes from the book.

I'm frozen.

She puts the book down and sets herself up from the bed.

She walks toward me with a white floor-length nightgown; I watch her toes, painted a bright pink, as they rise and fall back under the gown and out again with each step.

She stops in front of me and she takes me chin - raising it up so that she can see my eyes. Her expression is questioning but not afraid.

And then she does something that surprises me.

She cups my cheek and raises her thumb, brushing away a tear I did not even realize was there . . .

And she smiles at me.

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