Hopelessly Devoted

Crazy, chaotic dancing.

But refined. Maybe hip hop trained. A short stocky girl in blue jeans and a green splattered top dancing with a tall, skinny dude with a ponytail, dark jeans and a grey . . .pirate shirt is maybe the best way to describe it.

They were dancing to no music, just out front of the Walgreens jamming to their own vibe. Free. Imputable to the outside world. Marching to the beat of their own making.

Hip twist, flat hand push down.

Spin on a heel.

James walked by them cautiously. Neither one making eye contact with him, just moving and shaking. James looked for headphones on them, but nope. Just grooving with no tuneage.

Carefree.

Unrestricted.

They were dancing in front of each other, but not with each other. Their moves didn't coincide with each other, just complemented each other with the same frenetic energy.

Finger point.

Half pirouette.

Elbow down hip thrust.

INT: Walgreens Pharmacy – DAY

Sliding doors. Front registers. Candy bars. Cough & Cold.

Red hair girl behind the counter greets him.

Name. Address. Bag. Reward phone number. Credit Card. Receipt. Stapler.

He reached out for the bag sheepishly, as always.

"Hey I like your tattoo."

Really? He does not want to talk to her.

James looked down at his forearm, "thank you."

"You like old cars?"

"It's from Grease. My girlfriend and I kind of started our relationship with Grease."

"My dad's from Greece. That's great."

Cue deadpan stare. A lot scrambles through his head, but he settles on,

“Ok. Thank you.”

Cough & Cold. Candy bars. Front registers. Shopping baskets. Sliding doors.

Shoulder roll down with a flat hand facing up.

These guys . . . still?

Twist while looking up to the sky.

Clap and point at the street.

They were close, but not in his way, so to speak. Just encroaching on his personal space. James walked past and they didn’t move. Well, they moved. They just didn’t back off. Air fist pump and fast side turn.

Ponytail dude wiggles down to a squatting position and raises his hands up and then slowly reverts to a standing position.

Ugh.

Now the car. Now Kelly. Three months together. Three amazing months.

Time to burn it all down.

The distraction of the dancers wore off and James’ heartbeat skyrocketed. He kind of wanted to throw up. But it has to happen.

He thinks of Kelly, unaware of the impending conversation, the impending revelation. He thinks “I’m penning a relation revolution.” He thinks, she lives a soft life, unaware of the future exclamamtion. Unaware of the dancers. Unaware. She was just unaware. Or was she?

They had been dating for three months. It was going great. He loved her. He knew it was love. She said she loved him. Best. Text. Ever. That night two weeks ago. It was only getting better. She was just the perfect girl for him.

Time to light a match to it all and then sort through the ashes.

He looked over his shoulder back at the dancers. The Woman in green flapped her arms like wings while gyrating her hips.

The other one stood still, staring at him flatly.

James looked away quickly and then got in the passenger side of the car.

James got in the car and handed the Walgreen’s bag of his prescriptions to Kelly, trembling.

“Is this legal? We selling these?” She joked. “Look, you want to quit Hooly’s, that’s fine, but if we are gonna start selling drugs on the street, we should probably . . . talk about it . . . “ she trailed off. She could feel the tension.

“You need to know. It’s time.” James said, eyes closed.

His seriousness rattled her.

He was trying to gauge her sympathy level. He wasn’t making it easy probably. As much as James loves stories and telling jokes and writing, some words don’t want to come out.

“So I should be in, I should look in this pharmacy bag, I should go through this?”

“Leave the yellow and white box for last. Please.”

Kelly breathed in deep and said, “You’re the one that I want.”

He echoed, “You’re the one that I want.”

Kelly tensed, realizing the gravity of the situation. She pulled out the first bottle of meds, she looked at him as she said its name.

“Klonopin.”

“Sleeplessness. Anxiety. I don’t really drink a lot of Red Bulls. I know I said I’m an energy drink fiend. But, really, I just don’t sleep well. It’s pretty bad and it can really mess with me if I don’t sleep.”

“Yeah, I never actually saw you drink one. And shit, we have spent the entire day and night together and you never drank one and still seem like you are up all night.”

“It’s harder when I’m not at my own place.”

“Like, familiar surroundings and stuff.”

“Yeah, well, also and my pills are there.”

“Right. Right,” She reaches back in the bag, “next, Lexapro.”

“Depression. I didn’t quit Hooly’s. I wasn’t sick for those days. They fired me cause I didn’t show up. Again.”

“Like, you overslept?”

“Like, there are days. There are days I just can’t get out of bed. I just don’t feel like I can. I just can’t. Last week was one of those times.”

“You didn’t even call them to call off?”

“Oh, I’m a mess. No, I did not.”

“And you lied to me and told me you were sick for those days?”

“I’ve lied a lot. Trying to come clean now.”

She nodded looking out the window.

“Were you really asleep when I was calling?”

“Sometimes.”

“But sometimes not.”

“Sometimes not.”

He noticed her rubbing her tattoo of the car from Grease. Not sure if that was a good sign for him or a bad sign. Then she reached back in the bag.

“Not the yellow-

“-and white one, I know. Okay. Lithobid.”

“It’s a mood stabilizer. It helps with bipolar disorders. I was on a high when we first met. That’s me at my best. It’s like I’m fearless and locked in and just saying everything right. I love those runs. I wish that was always me. But it’s not. My lows, my lows are tough. I didn’t reach through a broken window two years ago.”

She ran her hand gently over his scarred arm. Tears build in their eyes.

“I never believed that. The scars are really straight. Almost a pattern. I figured you did that to yourself. Someday, love, I was going to ask you. I guess someday is today.”

“When I’m running low, or even running high I guess, I don’t process my emotions correctly. I go to extremes. Dangerous extremes.”

“You have a doctor you see?”

“I do, Dr Mark Robinch. I’ve been with him six years now. He’s a good dude.”

He stops her hand before it goes in the bag for the last med, they’re both shaking. “I love you. I want a good life for you. I’ve lived with me my whole life,” he manufactures a smile, “It’s not easy. It’s ok. I’ll never hate you if you leave because-“

“I love you, too. Fuck off. I’m not going anywhere.”

She pulls the white and yellow box.

“Risperdal.”

“An anti-psychotic. For cluttered thoughts . . . and hallucinations.”

“Hallucinations?”

Both the dancers are leaning against the wall, smoking. They’ve taken their break it seems. He looks as a little girl is walking up the sidewalk holding her mother’s hand. The mother is on her phone, texting or something with one hand. The little girl is talking to her mom, who is not listening. The little girl has fire engine red shoes. And a backwards baseball cap with a unicorn on it.

“Schizophrenia.” He says carefully.

Kelly feels her heart sink. “Shit.” Slips out. “I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to say that.”

“Out loud you mean? Cause I’ve been saying ‘shit’ in my head the last ten minutes.”

Kelly smiles weakly and says, “I knew you weren’t on the phone that night. When you woke me up and you were arguing with someone. In the morning you said you were on the phone, but your phone was still by the bed. I thought maybe you were sleep walking or something. You were talking to-?”

“-voices. Just voices I hear.”

She’s trying not to cry, but tears slip out anyway and trace the outline of her cheek. She looks back and James is crying, too.

“The voices, what do they say?”

“You mean then? Or right now?”

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“Wow. Ok.” Kelly straightens up in her seat. “I guess now maybe? You hear them now?”

“Kind of. It’s like if the voices were daylight and the sun just set, the voices are like, just beyond the horizon. I can hear them if I think about them. But if I don’t I can usually tune them out.”

“And when you can’t?”

“It’s fucking hard. It’s fucking hard.”

“Do you ever . . . see things that may not be there?”

“Not often. But there are days. There are days I do.”

“When was the last time? Don’t lie to me. Don’t fuckin lie to me anymore either. I love you, but truth from right now and on.”

“Okay.”

“Promise?”

“Yes, yes I do.”

“When was the last time?”

“Well, how would I know?”

She thought a moment.

“That’s a good fucking answer. Wow. Right. How would you know? They’re that real?”

“Yeah. I mean sometimes I can figure it out by context. One day I served a guy in my station a glass of eyeballs, and he didn’t say anything. So I’m going not real on that one. But other times, I don’t know. Kel, I’m fucked up. I’ve known for years, I can’t be in a relationship. I’ve got serious fucking issues. I’m sorry we got tattoos, we shouldn’t have done that.”

Kelly is crying again, “shut up, just shut the fuck up and let me process this, I don’t know. Let me-and don’t regret the tattoos. Ever.”

They sit in the car for a few minutes in silences, except for the sniffles of the tears.

Finally she shakes her head at him, “Fuck.”

“I’m sorry.”

Kelly says, “You’re-“

“I know, crazy? Broken? Damaged? ”

“the one that I want.”

She squeezes his hand.