**A Million Years Ago**

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I held the phone so tightly, waiting for a call to tell me where to meet the beautiful boy with his floppy brown hair and dazzling smile. I loved a boy with eyes the color of the ocean on a clear day. I see us there, frozen in time, through the thick steam of summers past, a million years ago.

He held my hand as we sat in the bleachers, the squeak of sneakers on the waxed wood floors below. The chants of a pep rally ringing in my ears, watching girls thrown in the air like pizza dough, pleated skirts flouncing up and down, falling into baskets of arms, pointed toes and pretty ponytails. He first kissed me at the pool, and I spilled my fruit punch and vodka on my bikini, red and yellow with flowers sprawled across my chest. It shocked, like an electric spark as if you accidentally stuck something in the socket. I remember warnings not to put bobby pins in the outlets when you’re little. It seemed so incredibly dangerous back then, so beyond comprehension. But then I think of that boy and my mouth tastes like copper and I remember.

I remember. How all the reasons and all the rationale can fly away, sucked out a window, carried on the whipping wind of a tornado. A tornado like the one that touched down not even three miles from my house, ripping through cars and demolishing stores. I’ve never seen one, only heard about the ones that came close to us. We worried more about the lightning. I had a swim coach who would wait and wait until the thunder was practically upon us before letting us out of the pool. We would scramble to safety, watching the water boil under the force of the downpour in the weight room that smelled like sweat and steel. Now they wouldn’t allow it. But back then, it didn’t matter what we wanted. Our voices silenced by those who didn’t care. And we were to get in line, follow in suit. Don’t speak. Obey. But what happens to a heart hardened with fear? The trembling bodies, heads covered with caps, eyes hidden by goggles, pounding the wet water with our hands choking on the chlorine, only to get in those few extra laps while the sky opens up above us with deadly, white light.

The summer was hot, and I remember the taste of cold beer, the feel of long uninterrupted kisses on my mouth, dates at Olive Garden, eating salad and breadsticks, splitting fettuccini alfredo, followed by movies at the mall. We jumped in shopping carts, abandoned behind ROSS, *dress for less*. He pushed me around and around the parking lot in my red gingham mini skirt. I remember those long, lingering evenings when the sun was a sinking, crimson ball on the horizon. We had so much time. We had forever.

I remember. Before likes and posts and videos and online personas. Before we thought about curating our lives, tailoring our existence to appear happy and better. A place where we never knew who might call, or what message the answering machine might play. The freedom of the humid night and flashing stars recorded only by our memories and the disposable cameras we bought over and over again. Waiting, anticipating the images that would appear a week later of the people we used to be.

We break up. At a party, standing by sliding glass doors, the spaghetti strap on my tank top cutting across my tan lines. He gave no reason. I’d already bought a dress for homecoming—black with fur trim on the neckline. A dress I would never wear, hanging in my closet as a reminder of what will never be. I remember the way the light reflected off the pool water at nighttime. The wavering tie-dye, the illuminating lights of blue, black and yellow. He slips away from me, and I do not see him for years and years.

But one morning, I see him again. I am waiting for the bus holding a hot coffee, the cardboard singeing my fingertips. It is unexpected, knocking me off my feet, away from the present into the past. Our eyes meet. My beautiful boy smiles, the same smile he gave to me all those years ago in an elevator that crushed my soul into pieces. And it was just the two of us again. It was summer. I am swimming back through time. To a million years ago.