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19 & Above

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Title: Over Coffee

As I pushed the café door open and heard the little hanging doorbell ring I felt the rush of the unknown. The café was so much hotter than I remembered even with the air-conditioner running but it was a welcome change from the bitter cold I had just escaped from. The smell of coffee being ground by the machine and steaming fresh cups tightly held by patrons moving back and forth in the bustle of Monday madness wafted its way into my nostrils and settled comfortably. As I looked past the patrons to find somewhere to sit I noticed the décor had changed. It looked much more modern this way. There was a bar area with high stools and all the seats were a light brown leather to prevent staining but to also brought a sense of cosiness, much preferred to the red and white scotch pattern that made this café feel outdated. The walls were this light wooden vinyl that brightened up the space with ceiling to floor windows on the east and west facing walls ensuring sunlight at all hours of the day. How beautiful the sunrises and sunsets in this place would be. I would have to come back for one or the other. As I stood in the line, music softly floated into my ears and I could not help but think of the ambience it created in this already serene place with climbers trailing up the wall around the archway to the bathroom and porch. After a short wait I finally made it to the front of the line and I placed my order, a cappuccino, nothing too special and gave my name as I found myself a seat on a stool by the bar area.

“Alec!” the barista shouted and I looked up from my book in surprise. There he was, collecting the same oat milk Americano he always got when we came here. My eyes shot right back down to my book. Too late, he’d already seen me.

I cast my eyes on my book but all I could see were letters strung together, jumbled up in a mess I couldn’t understand. How could I? All I could focus on were the neat and rhythmic footsteps slowly approaching me as if they were perched on a hesitant but curious body. Cautious but adventurous, I thought.

I heard a little knock on the table and I was forced to look up at who was knocking. Alec was standing there staring at me with those ocean blue eyes. I loved him for years, watching him from afar and then finally we started dating and for a couple of years we got along well and all of a sudden things ended. He left for college and I was left behind. We broke it off and parted ways as long distance did not seem to be a viable option. Before I knew it, it had been years since we had last seen each other and all those feelings came rushing back.

He pointed at the chair and I gestured for him to sit. What could I say to him? I had always imagined seeing him again but now that it has happened I was speechless. As I was about to speak the barista brought over my coffee and wanting to avoid conversation I hurriedly sipped it forgetting it was piping hot. My tongue was burnt. As a tear ran down from my eye,

Alec reached out and wiped it away while handing me a water bottle previously stowed away in his bag.

As I set aside the coffee to chill I pulled out my phone from my pocket, gently pulled off my phone case and extracted a polaroid picture from inside. It was a polaroid of the day Alec asked me to be his girlfriend. I always took polaroid pictures, as the saying goes “Take a picture, it’ll last longer.” He looked at it in awe as if he may have believed I did not care for him as much as he cared for me. If only he’d known, I thought. Picking up my cup, I took a sip of my coffee and stared at him and he stared at me, as if saying if we spoke it would ruin the moment. As if speaking would taint how we’d remember this moment after we parted ways once again. His eyes suddenly shifted and I realised he was looking at my book. He picked it up and mouthed the cover *Like Water for Chocolate*. I had just started it after a recommendation from a friend but I liked the recipes in it. I’d always wanted to cook with Alec but we never got the chance.

As our coffee cups were emptied but our subconscious sips we knew time was up. I stood up and his eyes followed me round the table and next to him. I opened my purse and pulled out my polaroid camera. Lifting my hand to snap a picture, Alec grabbed it from me and stretched out his hand in front of me.

“*Smile,*” he whispered, causing me to look at him immediately and FLASH the camera went and the picture began to print. Grabbing it off the camera, I shook it. Looking at it we were captured as two lovers out for a cup of coffee. If only it were true. Handing Alec the polaroid previously behind my phone camera, I placed the new one in its place and stood up and grabbed my purse.

Opening the door to leave I looked behind me at Alec as he was watching me walk away and I thought how nothing was uttered but so much was said over coffee. As I took my final look at him I simply said, “Don’t be a stranger.”

Just like that I left, and so did the light in my eyes.