

'Ugh,' Carlos says as he returns, cup of punch in hand, in a way that means you're about to be subjected to conversation.

'What?' It's pointless to ask, you're sure Carlos will tell you anyway.

'I just met– Fuck, I don't remember her name.' Carlos hands the punch over, shifting his shoulders in a way that reads deeply uncomfortable. His thin eyebrows are pursed and his lips are drawn. You sort of wants to kiss him, but if there's any conversation you wanted to have less with any of your old high school teachers, you can't think of one. You settles for reaching out and tugging Carlos' collar straight, trying to ignore how warm he is, even under the fabric. 'Some old girlfriend,' Carlos continues, sipping his punch bitterly. 'You know... Dana? Uh...no, it's...'

'You don't remember her name?'

'What, it was ten years ago!' Carlos protests. 'I don't remember anything before the hetero-homo changeover. I'm Gay Carlos now, I can't be held responsible for the actions of my abominably straight former self.'

'Which one?' you ask, as if you're planning to rub it in Carlos' face, and not as if you feel gripped with a sudden and irrational jealousy, which would be absurd.

'I think I only had the one abominably straight former self.'

'No, asshole, which one did you forget the name of?'

Carlos jerks his head towards the punch bowl, where a group of girls stand around chatting amicably, dressed conservatively and well. You recognize Aly Carver, pale as a cigarette standing among tubes of lipstick. Mariana Estevan is facing you, deeply

invested in a conversation with Lupe Gomez and Ruby Brown, who look as good as you expected.

But you know exactly who he's nodding to - you recognize her instantly, long brown legs and a slight wave in her hair just behind her left ear, so that her black bangs curve affectionately around her face. You stare and Carlos blushes, and you feel like there are claws in your chest. It's as bad as it was the first time, except worse, because she looks even better now than she did then.

'You see her?' Carlos hisses.

'Oh yeah,' you say, throat tight. 'I see her.'

'What was her name? Fuck, we went out for almost two months. I met her family.'

'Yeah, clearly they made an impression on you.'

'Do you remember, or not?'

'I remember,' you say. 'And I'm not telling you what it is.'

'What?!'

You shrug, feeling like a (very smug) jerk. Carlos has always had a terrible memory, and it's nasty of you to poke fun, especially when you've harped him plenty of times over forgotten anniversaries and birthdays.

You're surprised he can't remember her name. There was a time when you actually prayed for him to forget it, and you'd rather he never remembered. But there's some stupid part of you that just really loves to see his face when he tries to wheedle knowledge out

of you, the way his brow screws up and his chin comes forward and his eyes bore into yours and his pupils dilate just a little.

'If you don't remember, it's not my fault.'

'What? Come on, at least give me a hint! It starts with a D, right?'

You shrug, hands in your pockets, trying not to grin and feeling loathsome.

'K?' he tries.

You try to sip your punch all cool and collected, but end up grimacing; it tastes like rusty tap water with sugar syrup. Carlos laughs outright.

'Right? Oh man, they really need to...'

He gives you the look that means he's winding up for a pun, and you try valiantly to stop him with the force of your gaze.

'...punch up the flavor, huh? Huh?'

You groan loudly, feeling like you really might be allergic to him.

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You run into your old English teacher, Mr. Mackey, near the DJ Station. He's older than you remember, all salt and pepper on top and all lines down his face, like he's spent most of the last ten years frowning and aging. It makes you feel uncomfortable to look at.

'Hey, Mr. Mackey,' you raise a hand in greeting. He peers at you uncomprehendingly, and you extend the hand instead. 'Tim Young,' you say, 'I was in your AP English class in senior year.'

'Tim,' Mr. Mackey nods seriously, clasping your hand and shaking it. 'You've really grown.'

You cough out a laugh, which doesn't sound any less forced than it is. 'Thanks,' you say, unable to think of what else to say. 'It's been a long time.'

Your old teacher nods, 'It sure has. You've been well?'

'Yeah. Yeah, I've been good. Graduated from Cornell a few years ago, and now I'm working upstate, so...'

'Where do you work?'

'Uh, I work for a local paper.'

Mr. Mackey nods with a grin, showing worn, small teeth. 'You must like that.'

'Yeah,' you nod, 'Yeah, it's a great job, I really love it.'

'Love what?' Carlos says, clapping a hand on your lower back and spooking you terribly. 'Bow ties? Corn nuts? That one water filter commercial starring Zach Braff?'

'All of the above, I presume,' says Mr. Mackey, extending his hand again. 'Carlos, how are you?'

'Doin' good, doin' good. Livin' the life, you know.'

'Are you still with Virgin?'

'Nah,' Carlos says, shaking his head. 'I left about a year ago, I'm working for a non-profit now, actually. I mean, I loved it, but working for airlines these days...'

'I can imagine,' Mr. Mackey says. 'I'm surprised you managed to hang onto that position for so long.'

Carlos shrugs. 'Well, you know what they say about me, Mr. M, the sky's my natural habitat, I'm...' He looks around mischievously for the wind-up. '...fly as hell.'

Mr. Mackey looks perplexed, still nodding steadily as though Carlos has said something actually worth responding to. 'Of course,' he says, and you'd gag at his bewilderment if Carlos' hand weren't still on your back, burning through your shirt, making little goosebumps trip up and down your arms.

A muscle-clad man with unsteady hands emerges from the crowd to your right, looking more meat than human. 'Mr. M,' he interrupts, but politely. 'Hi, it's me. Riley?'

'Riley Canton,' Mr. M says with evident delight.

'Excuse us,' you say, making a hasty retreat.

'I can't believe that,' Carlos hisses, 'that one was so good.'

'No, Carlos. It was bad. They're all bad.'

'That's what makes them funny,' Carlos says, rolling his eyes.

'Don't you mean punny,' you say flatly.

Carlos grins, wicked and shitty, more handsome than anyone you've ever met in your life. 'Hey man, there's the spirit.'

You groan, putting your head in your hands. 'Did you even talk to the DJ?'

'Yeah, and would you believe he turned down my whole playlist? Do you know how long it took me to come up with all that? To channel what I knew in my heart of hearts would be the correct ambiance for this kind of venue?'

'Yeah, hard to believe he turned down Wu-Tang Clan Aint Nuthin Ta F' Wit.'

'I know!' Carlos exclaims, fervent and impassioned. 'I mean, Christ, you'd think he'd never heard any decent music before.'

'Yeah, what a tragedy.'

Carlos tsks, shaking his head and putting his hands on his hips. 'Yeah. I told him that if he refused my requests I'd be forced to take drastic measures.'

'Please don't, for the love of God.'

Carlos is quiet for a second, eyes closed and head tipped slightly downward. The reunion moves around him, lights moving around the auditorium, wandering over the crowds of people you were perfectly content never seeing without acne. You fold your arms, watching him, trying to brace yourself for anything he could be about to try.

Then his head comes up and his eyes spring open like he's been possessed, and he goes off like a siren:

'TO THE WINDOWS! TO THE WALL! 'TIL THE SWEAT
DROP DOWN MY BALLS! AND ALL THESE BITCHES
CRAWL!'

You clutch your ears because he was a lot closer to your face than you realized, and humiliation and laughter come over you all at once in equal measure. You're positive every single person in the auditorium is staring at you, and you're also pretty sure you're the only one laughing, and you're mostly laughing out of nervousness. Carlos tilts his head back and practically yodels;

'TO ALL SKEET SKEET MOTHAFUCKA! ALL SKEET SKEET
GOD DAMN! ALL SKEET SKEET MOTHAFUCKA! ALL
SKEET SKEET GOD DAMN!'

And then, across the auditorium, you hear her laugh, loud and ringing and beautiful - you look up and there she is, standing alone on the wall with a cup of punch in hand, and she's laughing. And then, someone near her starts shouting along, and then another.

'SHORTIE CRUNK! SO FRESH SO CLEAN CAN SHE FUCK
THAT QUESTION BEEN HARASSIN' ME!'

Carlos climbs up on a table before you can stop him, and the DJ turns the music off. Someone locks their arms over your shoulders and suddenly you're being swayed back and forth as your boyfriend leads the recitation of Get Low, standing on top of a crappy cafeteria table. Halfway through, the DJ finally puts it on and everyone screams their support, starting again from the beginning.

You join in, but it's barely a mumble. You can't take your eyes off him and you wish you could, because you've never been more embarrassed in your life.

He finally hops down, sweaty and slightly hoarse as the song ends, to rounds of applause. His tie has come unknotted in his enthusiasm, and the top three buttons of his shirt have come undone. You want to kiss and murder him at the same time.

'You have to tell me her name,' he gasps into your cheek, clapping his arm around you.

'You can remember Lil Jon and the East Side Boyz by heart, but you can't remember the name of a girl you dated for two months?'

'Dude, give me a break, I listened to that song last week!'

'Yeah, well, you didn't date it.'

'That is patently untrue, that song and I have been in a steady, committed relationship for years.'

'Clearly. Well,' you say gesturing to the billowing throng that surrounds you now, undulating to music you think could be appropriately substituted with metal trash cans being dropped down flights of stairs, 'We're now at another high school dance, thanks to you. Happy?'

'Hell no, man, this is the worst thing that has ever happened to me.' He frowns, tongue darting out to lick the sweat that catches on his upper lip. 'Seriously, this is terrible.'

'Terrible,' you say, feeling thrown wildly off-kilter.

'Catastrophic,' he says, shaking his head. 'A real...dance-saster.'

'Carlos!'

'An unbelievable...dance-erpointment. A...cool-amity.'

'Get away from me,' you groan, and he laughs so hard it tickles your shoulder.

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Within an hour it's too hot to stay inside. Carlos has goaded you into dancing more than once and you're sweating through your clothes, longing for fresh air, and so you drag him out, surprised when he doesn't complain more loudly or drag his feet. Hell, he practically tugs you half of the way himself, hopping over a few sloppy drunks laid out near the bathroom and pushing through the doors to the exit like a man on fire.

Fall catches your face in a cold, deep kiss, making your eyes water and your cheeks pinch as you grin. Carlos leans over the railing on the edge of the sidewalk and looks back at you, laughing.

'Your dimples are showing,' he sing-songs.

'Shut up,' you say, immediately trying to hide them. But he catches your wrist and pulls you into him, kissing your cheeks and making you laugh and laugh until your sides hurt and you're both leaning shoulder-to-shoulder, holding hands. You run your finger along the downy hair roosting on the acrobatic curve of his forearm, studying it in the wan light.

'This didn't suck as bad as I thought it would,' you sigh, twining your fingers.

'Nah,' Carlos shrugs, 'it sucked.'

You look over at him. He shakes his head and shrugs again. 'I didn't really want to come either. Just thought we should.'

'I thought you said you wanted to come.'

'Nah,' he says. 'Reunions are gross, y'know? All that reminiscing and longing for the so-called good old days, it's like... man, I hated high school. I hated high school and I hated everyone in it, and I hate standing around with people ten years later trying to be funny and act like it didn't fuck me up. High school's like prison, okay? You're not supposed to ever want to go back, that's kind of the whole point.'

You look at him, then -- really look at him, like you've been trying to avoid all night. He looks good, good as ever: cute face, great bone structure, strong neck. He's beautiful and puckish like he always is, sweat drying on his forehead, darkening the pits of his shirt until they're almost black, making the strands of his wavy hair stick together. You look at him, and you try to think of what it would be like to see him only as the kid he was, and not the man he's become -- the man who whispers puns to you when you're trying to sleep, and brings you falafel from that place you like when he gets off early from work, and who you remember having Chemistry with in sophomore year, but only vaguely. You're not even sure you remember what he looked like back then, what clothes he wore or whether he wore cologne. You didn't notice him back in high school, not really, even though you were friends. Even though you had an 127 Hours boulder-worth of crush on him, even though you actively prayed for him to break up with who he was seeing whenever he was seeing them.

You look at him, and all you can see is your stupid boyfriend, who's been trying to cheer your mopey ass up all night.

'Yeah,' you say, finally. 'You're a free man. No point in keeping the shackles as a souvenir.'

'Yeah,' he says, squeezing your hand. His palm is sweaty. 'Holding hands is easier without 'em, anyway.'

He's quiet for a moment.

'...did it start with a C?'

'Stop fishing for her name, I'm not telling you,' you say, obstinately.

He snorts. 'Okay,' he says. 'Guess I'll just have to go on not knowing.' He lifts your hands and gives you a meaningful look.

'No,' you say.

'Guess I'll just have to...'

'Carlos, no.'

'Wait for it.'

'Carlos, don't.'

'Wait for it.'

'Carlos, I swear to God.'

'...hand-le that.'

You groan so loudly another couple in the parking lot gives you a look.