

ALWAYS WITH YOU, ALWAYS WITH ME

I'd never liked those curtains... They reminded me of my first years in high school, before my parents had decided to move to Alaska. Why would someone move to Alaska? I still did not understand it. Living in Alaska is like living on the North Pole. Its funny how my mind could wander off to these kinds of things after all that had just happened, although maybe funny wasn't quite the right word. I came back to reality, hazily realizing what had just taken place in front of my eyes. I looked down at my arm for a second, and winced at the sight of it. Deciding not to look at it any more, I sat there for another fifteen minutes. Just gazing through the room before I started thinking about how it had all come to this.

It all started a good three weeks earlier. As I was entering the classroom together with my friend Taylor, my eye fell on the – normally unoccupied – seat next to ours. Normally, but not now. This time a blond girl was sitting there. As she looked up to take a peek out the window, I noticed how beautiful she was. She wasn't in my school, not until now at least, that much I knew for sure. Our school might've had a good two thousand students, but a girl like that I would've remembered. Taylor gave me a slight press on the shoulder.

"David, do you know her?" Taylor asked me, whispering so loudly that there really was no point in whispering it.

"No, maybe she's new. She's so pretty..." I replied a lot more quietly.

"Unbelievable," he half muttered. "Let's go talk to her."

As class progressed we started chatting with this new girl. We found out she was indeed new at this school and had moved here recently. Her name was Ashley, and she seemed to hate Alaska as much as I did. Taylor couldn't fathom that of course, being the true Alaskan he is. He did most of the talking, but was more trying to impress her with fancy stories, than actually getting to know her. I noticed she only

really seemed interested when Taylor told her I had moved here from Michigan. Later that day, as I was walking towards my car, I heard a kind voice.

“I’ll see you tomorrow.” It was Ashley, flashing me a beautiful smile. “Or would you maybe want to do something together today? I could use someone to show me around town.”

“I’d love to,” I replied, not hesitating for even a second.

We spent the rest of the day driving around town in my car. There wasn’t much to see in the small town of Fairbanks, besides the two airfields. She told me her dad got stationed at the Ladd Army Airfield, just like mine, and that her mum had passed away when she was twelve. I found it hard to find the right response to that, and ended up just mumbling out a simple ‘ah’. I felt stupid, but she seemed to be OK with it. We spent more time together outside of school in the weeks that followed. I couldn’t help but feel surprised that a girl this pretty would want to hang out with me so much. Not that I was the insecure type – I was reasonably happy about the way I looked – but this was the kind of girl that you would expect to be hanging out with her cheerleader friends and be dating some popular jock, which wasn’t me by a long shot.

As time continued to pass, I started to feel like we were becoming more than just friends. Before I knew it I was spending my spare time with her every day. I didn’t mind that I hardly had any time left for other activities; I was falling for this girl. Taylor was ecstatic that me and Ashley were getting along, although every now and then I caught him watching us with an expression of disbelief comparable to the way I secretly felt. One day, I even went to Ashley’s home. Her dad seemed nice, although a bit absent-minded; army guy I guess... He didn’t seem to mind Ashley spending so much time with me though, so I couldn’t complain.

Ashley was actually a great cook. She got used to cooking diner after her mum passed, and it showed. That night after diner, we went to the cinema – a movie about two competing treasure hunters that fall in love with each other. It was rather gooey and cliché, but enjoyable nonetheless, at least with Ashley sitting next to me. Later that night was the first time we kissed. I hadn’t dated a lot of girls in my life and felt like I was on top of the world. I was now officially the guy with the hottest girlfriend in the school, not that that was the sort of thing I was going for at all. If anything, it was something that Taylor seemed to enjoy a lot.

Time flew by that week, and before I knew it, weekend had arrived. Ashley and I had plans to stay over at my place through the weekend. My parents were on vacation, so we had the place to ourselves. I had picked up Ashley that morning so that she could leave her car at home. Her sleeping luggage was already in my car,

and I helped her carry it to my room. I had already prepared a mattress for her and put on some music as she was unpacking her stuff. Neither of us really cared much for music, but pop was always nice to listen to.

As she was unpacking her stuff, I noticed something on her arm. Something a little darker than her skin colour was coming out from under her sleeve. I'd never noticed it before – it was Alaska after all, tees were out of the question.

"What's that on your arm?" I asked her, trying to sound indifferent.

"It's a scar. My mum cut me with a knife when I was twelve," She replied. I tried to find a hint of humour on her face, but there wasn't any.

"Are you serious?" I asked hesitantly.

"Yeah. I never told you this, but my mum wasn't so great before she died. She was an alcoholic and became abusive when she drank," Ashley said with a weird, unfamiliar expression on her face. "The scar reminds me of her, of how I much I feared her when she was drunk. She killed herself in one of her drunken rages."

"I'm so sorry, Ashley," I half whispered, searching for words again.

"It changed me, you know. Sometimes I feel just like her. As if I inherited that kind of behaviour from her," she said in a weird, almost mysterious tone.

"I don't believe that, you're the nicest girl I know," I replied, finally having found some words that seemed like a proper response.

"That's what you think... You don't know me David," she said slightly louder.

"I know you well enough to know you're not like that. You wouldn't hurt anyone, definitely not someone you know," I said confidently, though slightly uneasy.

"I admire your naivety, but you're foolish to really believe that," she replied, almost sounding angry.

"What do you mean?"

"The world is a messed up place David. People do bad things."

"Why are you being like this Ashley? Are you alright?"

She was starting to freak me out and I tried to look into her eyes to see any sign of sadness. She sat still for a little while, staring at the ground. Then she suddenly looked up at me – an expression of anger and agony on her face. Only as she jumped up in my direction, did I notice the knife. I tried to push her off, but she managed to thrust the knife straight into my right arm. A fierce pang went through my arm. I tried to keep Ashley away from me with my unwounded arm and somehow managed to do so. A couple of seconds passed before I realized I hadn't pushed her away, but she'd backed off herself.

"This way I'll always be with you, David," she shouted, doubt sounding in her voice. "This way you won't forget me, just like I can't forget my mother!"

She raised the knife, and before I knew what she was doing, she cut the knife across her wrist. Blood was gushing from her arm as she dropped to the floor. After what seemed like hours, but must've been minutes, she stopped moving, she was dead... The pain in my arm was terrible, but the shock managed to keep my mind off of it. I felt numb as I was looking through the room, unbelieving of what had just happened. I half dozed off, unable to control my thoughts. My gaze went from my arm, to Ashley, to the blood on the floor, to the red and white curtains. I'd never liked those curtains...