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The Streetlight Bled Through The Shades

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Author Bio

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I can still feel her nails digging into my back—the pressure of her manicured claws gripping me. I still feel the pull of her trying to tear me open even though I already opened myself up to her as far as my head and heart let me. She had no words. She let out no sound other than her breath, and she did not touch me with her hands except to scratch. She kept her fingertips pulled back and instead led with her harpy's claw.

I can still taste the wine on her lips, but it tasted more expensive on hers than it did on mine. I remember noticing the softness in her kiss. I mean actually stopping to notice. It was almost as though she was sleeping, and we were both so drunk I worried I'd be waking Aurora, but she continued to scratch and kiss back, if only just to let me know she was still there. There was a level of peace, of sleep, that I can't even begin to describe. Kissing her was like stepping into a cathedral.

Hours later, in the middle of the night, she rolled over and shook me. Her voice was quiet and her breath still smelled of wine. She was calm. "W-we messed up." Her eyes started to well up just a bit. Her lips pursed just a touch and her face grew half a shade more red.

"No, we didn't. We're going to be fine." I touched her face as soft as my half-drunken brain would let me.

"I...I do feel something for you. I do," she paused for what felt like an hour, "but we can't tell anyone about this, and this isn't going to become anything."

"Okay."

"I'm sorry, it's just," she waited again, "I know you'd be good for me and when I'm with you I feel better about myself and about everything but for some reason I just—"

"It's fine." I kept quiet and held every argument I could back. "And what would our friends even say? And what would they do if they found out? Oh my God they're going to find out eventually...I'm awful, I'm so stupid." She grew more and more frantic, more and more anxious, with each passing word. Her breath shortened and her face tightened again into tears, until she stopped, took a deep breath, and shook her head to collect herself. "No one is ever going to find out about us. No, not 'us.' There is no 'us.' There can't be an 'us.' Okay?"

"Okay." She rolled back over away from me and started to drift off back to sleep. I leaned over and kissed her. "Sorry," I whispered as we pulled away, "I just wanted one more."

As the sun came crawling into my window a few hours later and her alarm went off, I ran through every last reason for her to stay just another minute; the combinations and permutations of words I thought I could say to make her stay glazed over my eyes, and before I had anything real, all I could mutter was, "Okay." I still feel the gravel grind in my throat as I let it out. She stood up and put on her clothes with methodical reverence. She moved slowly, as not to make a sound, or maybe just to delay even for another second having to face the world outside that small college apartment. Still though, she continued on toward the

door, stopping only once she was out in the hall.

"I'll uh, see you later, I guess," she was quiet then, her eyes down, "maybe we can grab lunch or something." I nodded.

As she closed the front door to the apartment, the blood finally rushed like the breaking of the Hoover Dam back up to my head, and I was met with sober, unadulterated clarity. It's just as likely that as soon as the door closed we both stood on either side of the door and sighed knowing the mistake we'd made. She might've cried. Knowing her, actually, she probably cried.

I tried to go on about my day with some semblance of normalcy. I slid back and forth between self-hatred and pride about five thousand times, each with a different reason to feel each way. I tried to slip back into sleep and pretend like it was a dream, but every time I closed my eyes I saw her there, every time I rolled over toward the wall I felt her behind me, and every time I walked into the room I half-expected to see her tangled in the sheets and bathed in the streetlight that bled through the shades, just as she was before. But of course, there was nothing. She left a ghost in my apartment, a demon that I didn't yet have the experience to excise.

We met later that day to talk about what happened the night before. We tried to piece together the little pieces we had of the night, like building a jigsaw puzzle where we both had half the pieces. We looked through our phones trying to find out how it came to be that she got to my door. She looked through our texts and our calls; she sat and worked with Bobby-Fischer-like focus trying to rationalize why she'd come over. She was investigating our night like a plane crash.

When she knocked on my door that night, I honestly couldn't tell you if I was expecting her or not. I don't remember if I invited her over, or if she came on her own, and it doesn't matter to me at all. I know I'm guilty for what I've done. I stuck a pin in my arm and shock collar around my neck to keep myself from being as stupid as I wanted to be, but damn, the second I saw her in my door, her hair and shoulders wet from rain, everything just went cloudy.

The first thing I saw was the cresting of her shoulders when she got inside and tried to get dry. She turned and started to pull off her sweatshirt, setting off the alarms and neon signs to confirm every expectation I had for the night ahead. I closed the door slowly, my conscience fighting the rest of myself; my id beat my superego and viciously stomped out its teeth. Clarity begged the fog of misattributed lust to stop its psychotic advance but it simply wouldn't. We moved toward each other like dogs.

Now, days later, she's still all I can think about. Having to act like nothing ever happened is pins and needles—torture, even more so when we and our friends spent every waking moment only seconds and steps from one another. We tried to have our stories straight, she and I. We talked for hours about how to explain where we were, why we didn't answer our phones, why she wasn't in her bed, and why they saw her leave my building the next morning. We poured as much water onto the coals as possible to cloud the room but all we did was smother the smoldering flame out entirely.

They suspected us. They knew without knowing. They saw the guilt tattooed on our faces and the taps of our nervous hands spelled out our stupidity

on the table like morse code. They were so close to finding out, so prodding with their questions, that she started to break.

She sat in my room, nervous as all get out, eighty-five percent of the way to tears. "I think we should just tell them," she shook like a bad day in California as she let it out, "they're gonna find out eventually."

"I'm fine with whatever you want to do," I sighed, "but you know they're going to expect us to be together if we tell them."

"I know."

"That doesn't mean we have to, though. It really doesn't. I couldn't give less of a shit what they think. It's none of their business."

"I-I have to think about it. If we do tell them, then I guess the biggest problem with us dating is gone... if they already know, they're already going to judge us, and that's what I wanted to avoid."

"Okay."

"I don't want you to think—"

"No," I said, almost under my breath, "it's okay. I get it."

That night, as all of our friends sat in the same small dorm room as always, in the same spots, drinking the same drinks, and gossiping about the same people, she looked okay. I mean, beautiful as ever, but she finally didn't have that terrified glaze over her eyes. Her hands weren't shaking and she didn't look like she was about to throw up all over the floor. The conversation shifted as it always does, and eventually someone decided to warm cold cases.

"Hey, so what happened the other night? I came looking for you and you were gone!"

"Oh," she thought for a second, "I went over to Jack's for a bit."

"Wait, why?"

They all froze and twelve eyes stood at attention right on the both of us. We both ran through, silently of course, every second of what happened. We thought about every implication of what could happen if we came clean, and we tried to relive, albeit painfully, the seconds right up until the crash.

Her eyes went down as she collected her thoughts. She bit her lip, and opened her mouth to speak. As she did, I felt the entire crash again before me. I heard the pilot and the flight attendants shout for us to brace. I heard the engine rumble and cut to silence. I saw the water grow closer and closer to the belly of the plane. I heard the crack as the plane struck the water, and watched the glass of the windows shatter all around me as I saw her begin to tell them why she came to my apartment the night before. The cracking glass slowed from its instantaneous lightning bolts right down to flowing honey. The bits of shrapnel hung motionless in the air, and everything stood absolutely still and silent, even among the chaos, as she spoke. "Just to hang out, I had to get a guy's perspective on something."

They all nodded and laughed, making the same basic jokes about how 'stupid boys are' and about our lack of emotional availability or maturity. She shot a glance at me, her blue eyes shining like searchlights in the lamplit room. I pulled my face into a smile, using every ounce of my strength to hoist the corners of my mouth upward, and laughed along with them. I deflected the light away, demanding silently to be left to drown.