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The Moment of Blue Skies, Golden Eyes, and a Rolling Green Valley

Andrew Nosti

“Hey! You are not allowed to do that!” you said as you pushed your index finger lightly into my chest, your caramel eyes dancing with a smile.

“A simple ‘thank you’ would suffice,” I replied, grinning crookedly, pulling my hands from your hips. “I did just save your life, you know.”

You squinted at me, trying to act tough while regaining your balance. “Oh, hardly.”

“Maybe if you didn’t almost trip every ten steps, I wouldn’t have to do this.” I placed my hand back on your hip for a second, knowing you’d smack it away. You did, but not hard.

“You are so ridiculous,” you mocked, rolling your eyes at me. I noticed the smile that played around the corner of your mouth, your coral lips twitching as you tried to hold them straight.

“You’re one to talk. You yelled at me for rescuing you. That’s what I call ridiculous, and I think most people would agree.”

You ignored my retort and turned to continue our trek up the forest path, but I could see your still-present grin through the back of your head as you moved through the shadows of the trees, carefully stepping from rock to rock along the trail. Secretly, a part of me hoped you’d trip up again so I could “save” you and dish out a snickering “I told you so.” Maybe that second time you’d let my hand linger there, the tips of my fingers ever-so-lightly gracing your hip bone. Or, more likely, I’d just draw out another smile and a gentle, joking slap on the hand. You made your way fine on your own, so I never found out which it would be.

The weather was fair, another September day that tried its best to hold onto the last vestiges of an almost-forgotten summer. Birds chirped from their hidden perches, and the treetops swayed with the wind that their boughs kept from touching us, a couple prematurely-turned leaves detaching and tumbling to the ground. The smell of dirt wafted through the air, mixing in with the slight hint of your perfume that floated back to me.

After a few minutes of hiking in a silence broken only by the bird songs, footsteps, and labored breathing, we stepped out of the woods and into a dazzling sunlight, finally arriving at the clearing we were searching for. Spray-painted onto a small boulder stood out the name of the place: Bake Oven Knob.

We moved past the boulder-sign and took a few steps closer to the ledge. A sea of trees spread out below us, breaking off to give way to rolling farmlands dotted with the occasional weathered, off-white house. A puzzle pattern of trees, grassland, and dashes of macadam moved off as far as the eye could see – on and on until the clouds drooped down to touch the gray silhouettes of the distant mountains. A lone hawk swooped across the sky, its red tail feathers reflecting the sunlight.

We simultaneously stopped to take in the picture before us. It felt like we stepped into some museum painting, an image that an artist marked down to share with future generations. The entire world stopped moving as we breathed in the beauty. A strange serenity coursed through me, erasing my senses and ejecting all thoughts from my mind, leaving behind only the knowledge of the scene before me and the tingling sense of your presence just inches from my side.

Regaining reality, we sauntered over to the edge of the mountain we had just climbed, finding a safe but still jutting-out place to sit. I sat down first, my legs dangling over the edge, covering up the evidence of a distant love affair graffitied on the smooth gray surface. You lowered your body next to mine, so close that our feet bumped against each other's over the precipice.

I glanced over at you, examining the stretch of black eyelashes, almost too long to believe, that bobbed as you blinked. The slight breeze that the trees shielded us from fluttered through your chestnut hair, pushing some stray strands across your pale forehead. Your face was a portrait of perfection, every inch of it worthy of a Renaissance masterpiece. But your eyes! They stood out from everything else – two captivating orbs that made me forget any hint of beauty that could lay in the land stretching out below me.

The rays of the sun came in and melted the caramel of your eyes, setting them ablaze in a fire of wonderment. They turned from a light, sweet brown into a dazzling gold. For the first time, I understood why millions of men dedicated their entire lives in search of that wondrous metal. El Dorado sat in the sea of your eyes, not in the jungles of Central America. I couldn't move, I couldn't speak – I just sat there, silently mesmerized, basking in the warm liquid of your irises.

I always knew you were beautiful, but in that moment, you were inhuman, otherworldly. No woman, no human being could be so stunning.

But you were a woman – the woman I loved – and you sat only inches away from me, close enough to feel the heat radiating from your body.

That moment felt like ecstasy, some limbo between dream and reality. I could have sat on that rock and stared into your eyes for an eternity and have never missed anything worth experiencing. But I knew that moment was temporary, fleeting, a moment that would one day put a painful smile on my face while I described it to my children, who wouldn't have your golden eyes. I knew that you would never be with me, not in the way I wanted, and that you could only ever feel what I felt in that moment for other men. But it didn't matter. The pain was worth it – it always would be.

Your eyes brought back memories that crashed over me in a wave of nostalgia. A quick, solitary moment of young, hesitant lips brushing against each other. Dozens of whispered phone conversations that lasted until the sun peaked out over the horizon, your voice fading into that far-away song of a murmur as you fell asleep and I fell in love. Thunderous, violent arguments that would cause us to ignore each other for a day or two before the loneliness crept up our spines and forced our fingers to type out "I'm sorry." Memories of tears and laughs and the thumping of a bursting heart swam through my thoughts. A thousand promises drowned me in a sea of blissful remembrance, promises I always intended to keep.

Four years had passed since you broke it off with me, saying you "couldn't do it anymore." Four years had passed since he kissed you and you kissed back. Four years had passed since I screamed into my pillow and pounded my anger into my bed. But those years had changed nothing. I crawled back to you, like I always had, and you opened your arms just wide enough to let me in, then squeezed just tightly enough to hold me there.

You were all I wanted and all I needed, but you were, and always would be, someone else's. So I waited. I endured those spans of hopelessness, shouldered the burdens of my sorrows until you arrived at the last second, saving me from my plummet into my self-created abyss. I waited until your voice invariably beckoned me back from the edge of my sanity, showing me why life is worth living and dreams worth having.

You were both my strength and my weakness, my anchor to reality and my object of religion. You were both my pain and my relief, my torturer and my savior. You consumed my conscience day and night, awake or asleep. You comprised the memories of my past and the hopes for my future. You, you beautiful being, were my infinity.

I lived for you, through you, marking the days by how long had passed since we'd spoken. Our fights, our estrangements, your boyfriends and my attempts at replacement, none had nor ever could change what you meant to me. Time, and its consequences, had altered nothing.

Those thoughts reverberated through my mind for the span of a moment that covered a lifetime, a lifetime I would never share with you. Yes, I knew that that moment on that cliff, with the sun on your golden eyes and the wind in your chestnut hair, would pass, and many years of loneliness would come, but it didn't matter, because I loved you and always would. What is love but a collection of moments, anyway? Moments of euphoria and anguish, smiles and sobs, all rolled up into one big collection called love. This was just another moment to add to that collection: the moment of blue skies, golden eyes, and a rolling green valley.

"It's beautiful, isn't it?" you asked in a whisper, your voice as distant as my thoughts.

"Yes," I answered, knowing full well that we weren't thinking of the same thing.

I placed the edge of my hand over yours, looping my pinkie with your index finger. I expected you to pull away, brush off my not-so-subtle advance of affection like you usually did on the seldom occasion that we ever actually saw each other. But you didn't. Instead, you wove the rest of your hand into mine, giving a small squeeze as you did so.

Our hands clenched together, our feet bumping over the ledge, you watched the sun cross the sky, and I watched you watch it. Another man held your heart, and others would follow, but your hold on mine would endure, as unbreakable as the sun's path across that clear blue dome above us.

The moment passed, as I knew it would, but that doesn't mean that the moment is gone. Whenever I feel desperate, whenever the air thickens and bows my shoulders with the sheer weight of its magnitude, I think back to that day, back to your golden eyes, and the world becomes a little lighter.

Yes, the moment passed, but its memory lives on in the deep chambers of my heart, catalogued within the only collection of love I'll ever have, the collection with your name on it: Annelise.