

## **An Encounter**

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Susan and Reina leave the library at two in the morning, just like they have the past five nights. Susan waddles a bit as they descend the staircase, unsure of her footing, as gravity hasn't always been kind to her. As they get outside, Reina puts on her Harvard sweatshirt; winter had left a very slight chilling breeze in the mid-March night air. Unlike Susan, Reina was small, frail, and prone to catching colds that she tells people are allergies. Both of them are permanently pale, as if stained by florescent lighting.

Their sensible shoes don't make a sound on the concrete walkway, but squish when they traverse the schools freshly watered over manicured green. They pause at the crosswalk, and wait for white Range Rover, with bass radiating from its open windows, to come to a stop at the sign that reads "YIELD FOR PEDESTRIANS." It doesn't, and the car hiccups over the speed bump. Someone yells an offensive comment from the backseat, but they don't catch the words exactly. As they cross the street, they begin to notice the clumsy click of heels heading in their direction.

Savana and Ali cling to each other for balance as they walk back from their night out. Their outfits almost match as if they purposely coordinated the look, but if you told them that one of them would have to change. There is a very distinct sway in their hips with each step they take, as if it had been practiced until it became second nature. If not for the Fireball coursing through their bloodstream they would

probably be complaining that it was cold. Instead, they giggle incessantly, every now and then shouting something unintelligible for the world to hear and not care.

Reina and Susan hear their nonsense echoing off the building walls as they pass the Thomas Mayo-Smith visual arts building. The pair of tired students are suddenly stopped as the sprinklers a head of them spout from the ground and begin to hiss.

“Fucking sprinklers” Reina moans.

“I told you this would happen if we left this late again,” Susan retorts.

The pair reroutes and cuts across the empty parking lot. A couple of abandoned cars are scattered across the desolate parking lot, presumably custodial staff by the worn look and unrepaired dents and scratches of the early nineties vehicles. A gust of wind blows Reina’s stringy red hair into her face. As they reach the midpoint, they hear shrill screams behind them. They turn to each other and almost laugh.

“Fucking sprinklers!” Ali screams.

“Eww... it smells!” Savana says.

Savana and Ali quickly turn and to cut across the parking the parking lot. Susan and Reina hear the heels clacking towards them and the exasperating chatter crescendo slightly. Thankfully they are almost at their building. The second pair of girls is scarcely ten paces behind them, their long legs effortlessly letting them catch up to the exhausted overachievers.

Susan and Reina finally reach the six story brick building. Behind them are still the same girls that seemed to have stalked them the entire way. Reina looks

over her shoulder just long enough to see the two's drunken smiles almost taunting her. They go inside and begin ascending the stairway – the elevator has been broken since the start of the term; behind them Savana fumbles through her small purse for her student ID to get them into the building. Ali suddenly realizes that she had left her purse at the party.

In syncopated step the two make their way from landing to landing. By the time they reach the second floor the pair of black dresses have managed to make their way into the building. Their conversation echoes in the stairwell. Reina and Susan try to ignore them, but to Reina, one sentence sticks out.

“The entire school must have been at that party tonight” one says.

“It says a lot about the world they see,” Reina whispers to Susan, but she isn't listening.

Reina looks down at them. One is carrying her black heels in her hand, the other clinging to the rail as if the draft from the AC could blow her skinny body over onto her padded ass. Reina is certain that girls like that must believe that every girl owns a black dress, and she wonders if they see empty desks where the rest of the class sits, or if they can even see that far with their bloodshot eyes at the back to the classroom.

Susan holds the door open for Reina, who is still looking down at the pair. She almost makes eye contact with the darker-skinned one before Susan nudges her to step into the hallway.

Most of the rooms are either very quite or very loud; moaning comes from one of them. A guy slips clumsily out of one of the rooms in nothing but a pair of

boxers. The tag on the door says Ashley, the blonde girl they occasionally find vomiting in the communal bathroom.

“Shhhh!” he whispers at the girls holding his finger up to his lips. The words leave his mouth the same way he left the room. The two wonder how anyone can stumble over such a simple syllable.

They reach their room at the end of the hallway just as Savana and Ali get to the same floor. Ali continues up to the next floor. Susan takes the key from the lanyard around her neck and opens the door.

“Asshole!” one of the girls yells just as the door shuts.

Susan goes straight to her bed. Reina listens at the door.

She hears a man’s footsteps backing up closer to her door, and his voice comes into focus.

“How dare you!” Savana says.

“What?”

“What were you doing outside that slut’s room?”

“Ummm...” he struggles for a response.

The clicking of heels moves forward aggressively.

“Fuck you!” she yells.

Reina hears a thin slap.

“Psycho bitch!” he yells

Then Savana screams. She hears Savana’s purse hit the floor.

There is a sudden thud against the door and the frame shakes slightly. A door down the hall opens. Another voice starts yelling from the other side of the hall.

Reina can't quite make out the expletives from the other girl over the crying one outside her door.

"You said you were done with her!" Ashley screams.

"What are you talking about?"

The girl continues crying.

"You're a piece of shit, Ted" Ashley says.

"Well you know what – " a door slams violently.

Ted goes to help Savana up.

"Get your hands off of me!" she yells.

"What's wrong with you?" he asks.

"What's wrong with me! Are you serious?"

"Why are you wet? You smell like a sewer"

The clunky footsteps start moving away from the door towards the staircase.

"Get back here" Savana yells over her sobs.

"Fucking sprinklers," she cries to herself.

After a few minutes Reina gets undressed, puts on an oversized t-shirt and sweatpants, tries to go to bed, but the crying outside her door continues. She wonders if this girl who seems to have everything cries like this often. She walks to the door and opens it, regretting what she is doing as she turns the handle.

"Are you ok?" Reina asks.

"No" Savana whimpers.

"Do you want something to drink?"

"You have Vodka?"

“I meant like water”

Savana nods and reaches out her perfectly manicured dainty hand, her fingers are clad with a couple of rings and her wrist with an expensive looking silver charm bracelet. Reina helps her onto her feet, noticing that her heels are comparable to stilts. Savana invites herself into the room; she grabs the doorknob for balance as she enters the threshold.

Reina hadn't expected her to come in. At the most Reina intended to give her a red plastic Solo cup so the girl would stop crying outside the door and she could go to sleep. Now this stranger was in her living room and clumsily making her way to the vinyl couch. Reina clicks on the lamp on her desk. As she sat down, Reina poured her a cup of water from the kitchenette sink.

“Do you have any mixers for the vodka?” Savana asks too loudly.

“Keep it down, my roommate is sleeping” Reina hisses back.

Reina can hear Susan faintly snoring in the next room. She hands Savana the red cup. Savana looks into the cup disappointed.

“Do you at least have ice?” she says.

Reina shushes her. “Just drink it,” she says.

Savana puts the cup to her lips and gulps the water down like it is medicine. She puts the empty cup down on the table leaving it with a red stain of lipstick that is just a few shades darker than the cup. Meanwhile, Reina slides her wooden desk chair across the rug and sits facing opposite her uninvited guest.

“I'm Savana, like the city, but spelled differently” the girl says, still speaking too loudly.

“Reina... and please keep it down”

“Is someone sleeping in the other room? Is it a guy?”

“No it’s just my roommate.”

“Are you two lesbi-”

“No, she’s just my roommate” Reina says grimly.

The two look at each other for a moment, then Reina gets up.

“Can you get me more water...please” Savana whines.

Reina grabs the cup and goes back to the sink, she refills Savana’s lipstick smudged cup and then takes a glass from the cabinet for herself. Savana makes herself at home and lies down on the couch. Reina comes back and hands Savana back her cup.

“Can you not put your shoes on my couch”

“Sorry” Savana says and she takes off her heels.

“I mean can you not put your... never mind”

Reina sighs and looks at the disheveled beauty queen lying on her couch. Its almost 3:30 in the morning, but she doesn’t quite know how to get her to leave.

“Guys suck,” Savana mumbles, and she almost starts to cry again.

“I guess” Reina says, not knowing how else to respond.

Savana starts to close her eyes and her mouth tilts open.

“You can’t sleep here” Reina says and nudges Savana’s shoulder.

Savana sits up, crosses her legs, and takes a sip of water from Reina’s glass.

The two take another moment to look at each other and Reina realizes that she is still wearing her over-sized t-shirt and baggy sweatpants.

“Do you have something that I can wipe off my...”

Reina goes over to her desk and gets a box of tissues. As she hands them to Savana, she notices her own fingernails compared to her guest. They are crudely cut to the fingertip, with a few remnants of green paint on them, most of it chipped off. Savana tries to wipe off her running makeup from under her eyes. After another several silent moments Savana looks at Reina closely.

“I think I’m starting to get sober,” she says.

“Good.”

“What’s wrong with your eyes?”

“What do you mean?”

“They’re all red and stuff.”

“I’m just tired is all, by the way, if you’re feeling better you should probably -”

“Here, I have eye drops, they’re in my purse... where is my purse?”

“I think you left it outside, it’s fine, really, I just need some sleep”

“Can you get it for me?” She whines.

“You really need to go to your own room, why don’t you just get it on the way out?”

Savana looks blackly at Reina until she gets up. She gets up and goes to the door and picks up Savana’s purse. She admires the expensive looking purse and is almost tempted to go through it, but decides against it. When she turns around Savana is at her desk going through her textbooks on her desk.

“Why do you have all of these? Don’t you ever sell your books at the end of the semester?” Savana asks.



"They are all from this semester."

"That's a lot of books."

"Yeah"

"Must take a lot classes."

"I do. Can you please be quiet my roommate is sleeping?"

"Sorry."

Savana piles some books on top of each other and sits down on the empty space of the desk.

"Can you not sit on my desk?" Reina says.

Savana gets down and Reina hands her the purse. Savana starts emptying it on Reina's desk looking for the eye drops. She takes out keys, a couple tampons, a tube of lipstick, a small makeup mirror, and some old receipts, until she finds the eye drops.

"Here" and Savana waves the eye drops in front of Reina's face.

"I told you I don't need them, I'm fine"

"Ok, just trying to help you"

"Thanks" Reina says insincerely.

Savana collects most of her belongings and puts them back in her back.

"Where's the bathroom, I have to pee" Savana asks.

"Two doors down the hall."

"Come with me."

"Why?"

"Because,"

“Fine, but then your going back to your room, its really late”

Reina grabs her toothbrush and toothpaste and opens the door. The bright fluorescent hallway light blinds the two for just a moment. They go to the bathroom. Savana takes the stall and Reina brushes her teeth. She was relieved to finally have the girl out of her room. Before Savana can finish, Reina spits out her toothpaste and leaves the bathroom. Savana calls out some sort of goodnight from the stall as Reina exits the bathroom.

Reina comes back to her room and goes to collect the lipstick stained glass of water from the table. She leaves the glass in the sink to wash tomorrow. She almost trips over a pair of black heels. She gives them a long condescending look. Then, curious, steps into one of them, and then the other. They almost fit, but she is too afraid of falling to try to take a step, and immediately takes them off. She looks at them again, embarrassed. She goes over to her desk to turn off the lamp and notices the small makeup mirror and tube of lipstick Savana left behind. She opens up her desk drawer and adds them to the assortment of paperclips, pens, and pencils. Then she turns off the light and goes to bed.