Chocolates for Andrew

Sunlight pierced through the branches of the snow-covered trees. It was a cold day ­— but Andrew Gallo was determined to see his mother. Stepping out of his small apartment, he made his way down the stairs ignoring the crude word that was etched onto his door. He climbed into his car and stuck the key into the ignition with shaky hands, finding himself breathing heavily from the walk down the stairs.

*“She’s got a smile that it seems to me*

*Reminds me of childhood memories…”*

Andrew cranked up the radio instantly recognizing the familiar tune by Guns N’ Roses. Nodding along to the beat, he slowly backed out of his driveway, and onto the small road of his quiet but peaceful neighborhood.

“Where do we go now? Where do we go? Sweet child o’mine,” he sang along quietly.

When the vinyl was first released a few years ago, he lined up along with a good number of others in front of the record store early in the morning to purchase a copy. He remembered thinking what luck he had when he was able to snatch the last one in stock. As he turned onto the main road, he pulled up in front of Tom’s General Store and turned off the ignition, cutting the music off. Before leaving his car, he checked to see that his chunky sweater covered his skin and that his hat was pulled over his ears, covering his head.

“Hey Tom, how you doing?” greeted Andrew, as he entered the familiar store. A few customers stared at him before reluctantly returning to their early Sunday shopping, casting him wary glances once in a while.

“Fine,” muttered the man in question. Tom was an old man with only a few grey hairs left on his wrinkled head. When Andrew was younger, he would always joke that his head looked like a wrinkly pig snout earning him a scold and a lecture from his mother. He knew that she found it just as funny as he did, even though she would never admit it.

Walking to the front of the store, Andrew grabbed a bar of Cadbury’s Boost and a pack of gum. He liked to bring a chocolate bar with him whenever he visited his mother. It reminded him of his younger years, when his mother would buy him chocolate to cheer him up or to congratulate him when he did something good. The past couple of months had been rough for Andrew but his visits with his mother reminded him of the simpler times in his life.

He placed his items on the old, worn out counter that seemed to stretch on for miles and miles between him and Tom, separating the two.

“That’s $3.50,” Tom grumbled, perched on his stool. His nose was scrunched as if someone was waving a rotten egg in front of him. His face was turned away from Andrew and his sweaty hands were clenched into fists. Andrew placed some change onto the counter when Tom made no attempt to take the money from his hand.

Suddenly, Andrew coughed causing Tom to flinch away from him.

“For God’s sake, cover your mouth!” barked Tom. The old man tossed the items carelessly into a small paper bag and then shoved it to Andrew’s side.

“Sorry about that. Have a good day,” Andrew said, with a wavering smile. As he headed to the exit, he thought he heard someone murmur “may God help your soul.” He snorted. Like he hasn’t heard that before, he thought bitterly.

God won’t be helping anyone like him.

Jumping back into his car, he headed to his mother’s house. Outside, what seemed like buckets after buckets of snow poured down from the sky, creating a soft blanket on the cold, hard ground. It reminded him of the snow globe his mother gave him when he was five and how with a simple shake of his hand, white snow would cover the entire city of New York.

*“Mama, why does it snow?” Andrew had asked, while shaking the brand new snow globe his mom had just bought for him.*

*“Well, honey, it snows because the angels up in heaven can feel when you are sad, so when it snows, they are showing that they know that you are in pain. It’s a sign that things will get better,” she replied, with a sad smile on her face.*

*“But mama, what about rain then?” he questioned.*

*“Umm…Why don’t you go ask Daddy that?”*

When the familiar small, yellow bungalow appeared across the distance, his heart warmed thinking about the woman who was waiting for him inside. She was the only person who had stayed with him and supported him when he was at his lowest. Parking his car in the driveway, he grabbed the bar of chocolate and hurried into the house. He pulled up the left side of the WELCOME mat and took the spare key, unlocking the door.

“Andrew? Is that you?” a silvery voice asked from the distance.

“Hi mom,” Andrew answered with a small smile.

“Oh my, honey…I almost didn’t recognize you,” she gasped from the opening of the living room. Her right hand was lightly clamped over her mouth as her eyes continued to wander over Andrew’s strikingly thin body.

“Mom, it’s not that big of a deal. It’s normal that this would happen.”

“Oh, come here dear!” she cried, throwing herself at him. Andrew opened his arms enveloping her tiny frame. It had been a while since anyone had given him a hug since everyone avoided him like the plague. Even when he wore thick, chunky sweaters, people did not dare lay a single finger on him —and maybe it was for the best. He welcomed her warmth and he could feel the loneliness in his heart melt a bit.

“Come, we have some catching up to do. Let’s go to the living room. I started a fire just before you came. You’re so cold!” she nagged. She led him to the living room where sure enough, a fire was lit in the small fireplace. Andrew sat on the worn-out couch where his mother was already waiting for him. His mother snatched the chocolate bar from his hand once he sat down and started to unwrap the tin foil.

“Wow, mom. You really missed me, didn’t you?” he joked.

“Nope. Just the chocolate you always bring,” she quipped. Andrew watched as she quickly snapped the bar into two pieces, keeping one for herself and giving the other to him.

“So what have you been up to?” she asked as she slipped a square into her mouth. “Mm, dark chocolate.”

Andrew chewed his square of chocolate slowly before answering.

“Not much. I mean…you know why,” he answered hesitantly.

“Now Andrew, that doesn’t mean you just sit at home and do nothing now, does it?”

“Well, I’m here with you now, aren’t I? Besides, I can’t get a job. No one wants to hire a man like me.”

She sighed before putting her piece of chocolate beside her. She took his pale hand between her tan ones and looked him in the eye with a gaze that showed nothing but love for her son.

“I know that this has been hard for you, but you can’t stop living your life. Yes, they are lots of cruel and judgemental people in this world but there are lots of kind and accepting people as well. It may seem like everyone hates you but you cannot let these people tear you down. Be proud of who you are,” she said warmly.

“You’re my mother,” he said. “You have to say that.”

“And you’re my son, so you have to believe me. Even as an adult, you refuse to listen to me, you stubborn child,” she chided.

“Well, it’s hard when people won’t even look at me. I never wanted this to happen, I can’t change who I am. Why can’t people accept that?” he whispered. He clutched his head in his hands. He was starting to get a headache.

“Because they don’t understand, Andrew. People get scared, and they panic when they don’t understand something or when they see something that isn’t normal to them. Those people don’t matter though, because at the end of the day, the only people who do, are the ones that care about you and that you care about. If they don’t see you for who you are and they can’t respect you, then they don’t deserve to know you and they don’t deserve your love,” she said.

When Andrew looked into her blue eyes, he could see tears falling slowly down her cheeks.

He sighed. “Mom don’t cry.”

“I’m sorry, I just … I can’t… this world is so cruel,” she sobbed. “You’ve lived such a hard life. Your dad left you when he found out, and now my baby…my baby is dying.”

For a while, they just sat there on the couch, mother and son. The only sound that could be heard was his mother’s sobs as she continued to cry. The tears subsided after a moment and when his mom was finally calm, she turned to him.

“Promise me that you won’t give up on life, Andrew. Life is hard and there will always be obstacles you need to face, but you just need to take it one step at a time. Don’t let anybody bring you down and don’t you let them take away from you what’s beautiful in life.”

He nodded. His head was pounding.

“I’m going to head home. I’m feeling a bit sick,” he coughed.

“No, don’t drive if you aren’t feeling well. Just rest here until you feel better, alright? Here take the rest of your chocolate.” She handed him the unfinished chocolate bar.

Andrew stood up, took the four remaining pieces of chocolate, and headed to his room, leaving his mother on the couch. When he entered his room, Nostalgia hit him in the face. He yearned for the more simple days of being a kid and living life with no worries. He yearned for those days when he thought his father would love him no matter what. He yearned for those days when he did not see boys as partners but simply as friends. But then Reality brought him back to the present, in which he would have to face the dark, cruel road that lied before him.

Taking off his sweater, he placed it on his chair and turned towards his bed. Before he could take a step, his reflection from the mirror caught his attention. Small purple spots covered his body along with rashes and bumps. He sighed.

Andrew was tired. He could feel his muscles protesting and begging for rest. Although he didn’t show it, he could feel his body weakening with every day that passed. But like his mother said, he would take it one day at a time, he decided. Weeks will pass by and then months, he thought. But right now, he was so, so tired. The last thing he thought before drifting away was how funny it was, that there were only four pieces of chocolate left —just like how he only had four months left to live.

Word count: 1881