**Reverie**

 I slammed the book onto my desk and threw my head down. Only two words were going through my head, repeated over and over again—*it’s over, it’s over, it’s over*. It was like my heart was being ripped into millions of pieces. The thought that I would never again read about the unbearably charming Liam, or sweet, innocent Rosie, or the playful banter of Shauna and Remy, it just *crushed* me.

 For the next hour, I did nothing but lie on my desk and stare at nothing. No words came from my mouth but my head was a screaming mass of confusion and misery. *WHY IS THIS BOOK OVER WHY CAN’T THE AUTHOR WRITE MORE I’M GOING TO DIE IF I DON’T READ MORE LIAM I NEED ROSIE AND SHAUNA AND REMY AND RUBY AND COLE AND CLANCY I CAN’T MOVE ON WHAT IS LIIIIIIIFFFEEEEEEEEEEEE—*

 When the bell rang and I still couldn’t (or rather, wouldn’t) move, a familiar pair of hands forced me up and off of my desk. I might have thought it was Liam coming to save me but I knew well enough that it was only my best friend, Luke.

 “Come on, Ems, we gotta get to math…”

 I turned, making a face. “I’VE REACHED THE END. LIVING IS NO LONGER AN OPTION. WHY MUST I DO MATH?”

 “Because, Emma, you can’t make a living crying over fictional characters all day.”

 “THEY’RE REAL TO ME.”

 “I know, you’ve told me a million times. Now let’s go, we’re going to be late.”

 Grudgingly, I stood up and walked alongside Luke to class.

 In the classroom, I slumped into my seat, pouting. Luke focused his intense blue eyes on me for a moment, then sighed.

 “Stage one—depression. I shouldn’t complain, though. It’s worse when you’re in stage three and I can’t say a word to you without getting slapped.”

 I let out a small smile. It’d been a joke of ours for ages that there were four stages to my “book hangovers”. Stage one, depression. Stage two, denial. Stage three, rage. Then stage four, where I just do ANYTHING to hang onto my beloved characters—follow all the blogs, read all the fanfictions.

 Okay, so maybe I can be… *expressive*, to say the least. Maybe I enjoy overdramatizing just a *little*. But all I’ve ever wanted since I was a little kid was to go on an adventure to another world, to save a foreign land from monsters, to meet my own Prince Charming. And while I may never make that dream come true, reading is the best way to get to it. So *excuse me* for wanting to make my fantasy a reality, whether it be in my head or not.

 When the final bell of the day rang, I ran outside hoping to get away from the school as quickly as possible. Unfortunately, a boy blocking my car door delayed this. I gave an exasperated sigh, then took in his appearance. He wore a simple t-shirt and jeans. His dark, curly hair was very much like Luke’s, but his warm brown eyes didn’t make it seem like he was constantly reading into you.

 “You’re in front of my car.” I said flatly. “Could you please move?”

 He raised a brow. “Am I? Sorry, I didn’t realize.”

 I tried to detect signs of sarcasm but found none. “Well,” I explained, “when you lean on a car door, you can expect to be in someone’s way eventually.”

 He nodded. “I see.”

 Moments passed as I stared at him expectantly. “So… are you going to move or not?”

 “Alright, then.” He straightened himself up then strolled away, whistling a tune I’d never heard before.

 That night, a loud bang shook me out of my sleep. I drowsily looked over at my clock. Two o’clock AM.

 As I began to fall back into the arms of slumber, I heard somebody shouting. Irked, I threw off my covers and got out of bed. I looked out my window to see the same boy I’d met that afternoon.

 I opened the window carefully. “Would you mind? Some people are trying to sleep here…”

 “Oh, sorry.” He started. “I’m not really used to this green stuff.”

 “Er… okay…” *Oh, maybe you didn’t get the memo. That green stuff? Yeah, that’s called grass*. “Do you… need help with anything?” I asked.

 “No.” He answered firmly.

 I raised a brow, then watched as he began hitting the grass and screaming, “DIE!!!!!!”

 I sighed. “Alright, I’m coming down.”

 When I opened the door and found him yelling at one of my cats, I nearly turned back around and left him to fend for himself.

 “Good God,” I exclaimed, scooping up the hissing kitten and stroking him gently. “Are you insane?”

 “That strange guardian creature,” he began stiffly, “was blocking my path.”

 “Strange guardian creature? What are you talking about? This is one of my cats, Chairman Meow.” I patted his head fondly.

 “Chairman Meow.” He repeated slowly.

 “Yes,” I responded, “and I have another one, Crookshanks.” He frowned, thinking hard. “You know, from *Harry Potter*?” Recognition flickered in his eyes.

 “Oh, Harry Potter! I had dinner with him once.”

 I stared.

 “Ha, ha. I had lunch with him once, too.” I replied, my voice dripping with sarcasm. He clearly didn’t understand the concept, because his eyebrows raised in excitement.

 “Really? Where else have you been? I played chess with Annabeth Chase yesterday. As one might expect, I lost badly. And Percy, he showed me this really neat trick…”

 I wasn’t listening anymore. I couldn’t believe my ears. This guy was rambling about my favourite characters and stories and places and, and EVERYTHING like it was his life. Was he joking? Was he insane? Was I dreaming? I pinched myself. Ouch, definitely not dreaming.

 “Hey, doesn’t that hurt?” he asked, grabbing my hand gently and looking at the red mark on my arm with concern. “Are you okay? You look pale.” I shook my head, dazed. Then, bringing myself back to reality, I ripped my hand away.

 “I’m gonna go now,” I said, backing away towards my house. This guy had to be crazy. I mean, I love fictional characters more than anyone, but they’re… *fictional.*

 “What? Where are you going?”

 “I’m getting sleepy, I should get back to bed.” I started walking towards the house, but when I glanced back, he looked so hopelessly confused and… lonely. Then I relented. “Well, I suppose I could stay awake a little longer.” I hesitated. “Why don’t you come in for some hot chocolate?”

 He brightened a bit. “Alright.”

 Inside, I turned on the kettle then heard the floor creak upstairs. I motioned for him to stay silent. After a few moments, I heard another creak, then silence. I let out a relieved sigh.

 “We should probably go upstairs, or my mom will start to get suspicious.” I poured hot chocolate into two mugs. “Not a single sound.”

 “Don’t mind the mess.” I said, as we entered the safety of my bedroom. I couldn’t remember a time when my bedroom *wasn’t* covered in books. There were bookshelves lining the walls (of course they were in desperate need of reorganizing), and piles of books on my desk, floor, and even the corner of my bed. My mom sometimes complained that she spent more money on my books than food.

 I sat down on my bet, then took a sip of my drink. “So what do you mean when you say you’ve met Harry Potter? Annabeth Chase? I mean, surely you haven’t. It’s not possible.”

 He grinned. “Well I can sort of travel, between worlds. Hogwarts? My first visit there was *years* ago. Idris, Panem, wherever you can think of, I’ve been there. I thought you could too. Didn’t you say you’ve had lunch with Harry Potter?”

 I laughed nervously. “It’s something called sarcasm. Maybe you’ve heard of it?”

 He wrinkled his brows. “No, I haven’t. What is it?”

 I sighed. “It’s when I say something but I don’t—that’s not the point. So you can travel between *fictional* worlds. Why should I believe you?”

 He gave me a wry smile. “I could show you.”

 I stared at him in disbelief, shaking my head. “There’s no way you can actually do that. How would it even work? It’s not like you have a pocket portal or something.”

 He shrugged. “Well…” He reached into his pocket and took out a small, blue cube. Then he smashed it on the floor and nearly gave me a heart attack. I jumped from my bed and probably would have screamed at him if not for the fact that the cube started glowing. Its light pulsed for a second, then a tall, thin piece of wood, that could be nothing but a door, shot out from it. To be quite frank, it looked kinda stupid.

 “You could travel with me.” He suggested. I laughed weakly.

 “No, I couldn’t. I have a whole life here. For God’s sake, I don’t even know your name!”

 “Jem. Short for James.” He said.

 My mouth dropped open. “No way. Like Jem Carstairs? Or Jem Finch? I imagined you to be so much more different.”

 He chuckled. “No, I met Jonah Carstairs a long time ago, Jem was named after me.” Sighing, I threw myself back onto my bed. This felt like a dream. “So… what do you think? About travelling with me, I mean, I could use the company…”

 I hesitated. “I really shouldn’t…”

 He took my hands in his. “Come on. Look around you.” He motioned to the immense piles of books surrounding us. “All those places you could visit.”
 I looked around my room. I had to admit, I wanted this more than anything. To explore a land greater than my own. To see a world beyond the pages of my books.

 “Could we be back in time for my physics test tomorrow?” I asked (of course I wasn’t *really* concerned about it).

 “We could be back in time for breakfast, if you wanted.” I wrung my hands. Jem stood and opened the door, revealing a faint light. The doorway to infinite possibility.

 He held out a hand. “Just one trip. If you get homesick, I can bring you back right away.”

 I looked at his hand stretched before me. I itched to take it and leave.

 “Just one trip?” I asked meekly.

 “Just one.” He answered with a smile.

 And with that, I took his hand as we stepped into the dim, white glow.

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 I slammed my books down onto my desk and threw my head down. Only two words were going through my head, repeated over and over again—*it’s over, it’s over, it’s over.*

 I felt Luke’s eyes on me as I took a very deep breath, willing myself to get through this day. And the next. And the next.

 “As far as I recall, you didn’t phone me about a book last night or this morning. You wouldn’t have been able to start another book anyways, after finishing that one yesterday. So I wonder what this could be about…” he mused.

 “Shut up.” I said.

 I could just picture his hands going up in mock surrender. After a few minutes of silence, he spoke again. “Seriously, though. What’s wrong? You’re never like this unless you’ve finished something *really* good, and you always contact me somehow to tell me.”

 I sighed. I *had* just finished something really good, and it ached not being able to tell him. I had always told Luke about everything. He’d always been the one to lift up my spirits, and while he was sometimes brutally honest, he never judged me for my melodramatic tendencies.

 I’d spent the last month of my life travelling with Jem to the most amazing places. I’d gone to every world I ever read about and more, and it was just… unbelievable. But after some time, I began to grow tired of it. Don’t get me wrong, I loved meeting my favourite characters, and I loved seeing so many complex worlds brought to life. But as I travelled more, Jem changed from the one I’d met in the parking lot of my school.

 He always seemed rushed, like he had somewhere else to go. We never stayed more than a day in most places, never really taking the time to appreciate the new world we were in. I was tired of constantly moving, constantly running from something that wasn’t there. I spent a month of my life on the move and I’d had enough.

 When the time came and I finally asked to go home, he was true to his word. I was back home in time for breakfast and my physics test. However, before he left, he said something to me that I don’t think I’ll ever forget.

 *“Jem, come on. Just tell me, because I’m having trouble trying to understand. Why can’t you stop and take a breath, or enjoy the view? Why can’t you stop moving from place to place?”*

 *He shifted uncomfortably, then sighed. “Look, Emma, this is just how it’s been for my whole life. I don’t like to stay in one place when there’s millions more to explore. Can you tell me, honestly, that you didn’t enjoy this past month of your life?”*

 *I crossed my arms, shifting my weight to one foot. “I… I wouldn’t regret it for a million dollars.” I responded flatly. “But that’s not the point I’m trying to make. It’s like you’re constantly afraid of settling down! Just try to stop running from world to world, and explore one for a while! There may be more to it than whatever magic is in it, or who the stories have been written about.”*

 *Jem smiled sadly, and took me in his arms one last time. “I think you should try listening to your own wisdom for a change. It would do you a lot of good.”*

 *He pulled away, then dropped his little blue box on the floor. He opened the door that sprung out of it, and stepped through. “Until next time, Emma.”*

 I don’t exactly know when I started crying, but tears were suddenly streaming down my face. Luke was immediately by my side, begging me to tell him what was wrong, but I couldn’t explain what I was feeling to him or myself. Perhaps it was the loss of a friend, the loss of a life I could’ve had travelling with Jem. Or maybe it was simply sadness, because a chapter of my life was over and a new one about to start. But one thing I knew for sure was that I *would* try listening to myself. I would try finding adventure in my normal, dull, ordinary, yet extraordinary life.

 Then, maybe—just maybe, I would be happy with the ivory pages of my books.

(2,487)