

It was just one test, well a chemistry midterm but it's all the same, and I didn't study for it. If I left right then I would be able to make it up in two days' time. It wasn't the first time I had skipped school and it wouldn't be the last.

"Liz," Stephanie, my best friend of twelve years, started "There is no way you'll be able to take this test without failing it. Come on, I'm leaving, Ryan and Cameron leaving. We're just waiting for you."

The group was walking over to us as we stood by the courtyard next to the parking lot. Ryan showing his trademark smile as he spotted me and Cameron alongside, an arm slung over Stephanie's shoulder.

"Are you coming, love?" Ryan asked when he and Cameron reached us. His term of endearment could always make my heart flutter.

"Yeah but we should go to the beach near Oakwood, I haven't gone in a while. And Fuller Beach will be filled with cops, some retirement party. " I proposed.

"Oh yeah, I heard my dad talking about that. Lieutenant Rogers is finally stepping down" I'm not surprised Uncle Tony, my father's twin brother, told Cameron; he was planning on joining the police academy after getting his Associates Degree in sociology. He spent most of his time at the police station, and his goal was to learn the ways before entering the academy.

"So that's settled, let's go." I began walking toward the school's parking lot.

Leaving Southport High School was fairly easy considering that our security guard slept for most of his shift. Also having the lunch area right next to our pretty accessible parking lot filled with student cars, wasn't such a bright idea. Soon enough I was in the passenger seat of Ryan's black Audi; Cameron and Stephanie sat in the back awfully close. From the rear view mirror all that was visible was her auburn hair covering half her face as she giggled, most likely from my cousin's comments. My eyes wandered back to my small hand overpowered by Ryan's large hand, his thumb stroking mine as his eyes stayed focus on the road. The car ride was filled with comfortable silence for the most part; the occasional glance and smile from Ryan, or Stephanie's snickering turning into a giggling fit.

I took that time think about where I would be in less than 8 months. Ryan and I would be living in New York, both of us in NYU. Stephanie had been accepted into UCLA's psychology program in the spring and would be spending the time before that traveling Europe. Cameron

would also be attending NYU to get his Associates Degree in Sociology and then applying for the police academy

“Hey, what’s wrong?” Ryan looked over at me as we pulled into the Beach parkinglot, I hadn’t realized we arrived so quickly.

“I’m fine, just thinking about what’s going to happen next year.” A sad smile made its way onto my face and I stepped out of the car before Ryan could answer. I guess I didn’t walk away fast enough because his arms caught hold around my waist before my feet could touch the sand.

“Liz, don’t worry about that stuff. Remember, you have me, okay? And Steph will visit; it’s going to be all right.” He finished off with a kiss on my head and let me have my space to breathe.

“Stop moping, we’re here to have fun for once!” Stephanie shouted passing me on the way to the sea shore with Cameron trailing along behind her.

I laughed and ran towards her. We strolled along the dunes laughing about the past and telling jokes until we reached our usual restaurant. Our laughs were cut short at the sight of Sand-Bar’s parking lot filled by fifteen police cruisers. I recognized the patrol car’s number closest to us as my dad’s, 589. Alongside his car was my Uncle Tony’s, 603. It was impossible to have not been seen, most if not all the police officers were outside on the deck.

“What do we do now?”

“Are you kidding me, we have to leave without being noticed.” Stephanie and Cameron we’re already retracting as quietly and concealed as they could. Ryan was looking back and forth between us to see what my next move would be. Before I knew it my father’s booming voice reached us.

“Elizabeth Jane Foster! What are you doing here?!” My shoulders hunched as the strict tone of his voice hit my ears.

“Hi, daddy! Well you see, um, I- we thought we could-” My stammering for an excuse was cut short by my father’s yelling.

“You thought what? That it was okay to just leave school in the middle of the day? I am so disappointed in you right now. What could possess you to do such a thing? I don’t even want to hear it, just get inside. And Cameron, you know better.” My father voice had gone low by the end of his ramble.

"I'm sorry, Uncle Joe." Cameron's head hung in shame.

My father was pacing back and forth whatever was going through his mind I did not want to be a part of. His men we're watching from the deck wondering why their captain's daughter was there. The officers parted like the Red Sea when someone was trying to get through. His face showed shame when he realized his son was in our group.

"Cameron. I would never expect this from you."

"I know dad, I apologize." Cameron kept his head down while answering his father.

I couldn't help asking what had been on my mind since I laid eyes on the patrol cars.

"Wasn't the retirement party in Fuller Beach?" As soon as those words left my face my dad's face had transformed from anger to appall.

"We changed it last minute. Not that that should matter to any of you, you should've been in school."

I stayed silent.

"Just go inside, I'll deal with you at home." We followed my father and Uncle Tony into Sand-Bar. The party unsurprisingly had quieted down and the tension couldn't even be cut with a knife. I felt guilty because Lieutenant Rogers was trying to have a nice send off and we just ruined it by putting my dad in a mood. Ryan and I sat on chairs lined up against the wall while Cameron was being lectured by his father off to the side. Stephanie had called her mom and was now waiting to be picked up. Officers gave us sympathetic looks as they passed by. They knew no one wanted to get on the bad side of their Captain. Suddenly all the radios hooked onto their belts began sparking up and reporting a code that I didn't know. Officers we're frantically getting into their cars. My dad rushed over to us and told Ryan to drive me home and stay with me until he got home.

"Dad, what's going on?" My anxiety level was constantly rising whenever my dad was called onto a case. All I had was my dad ever since my mom died when I was thirteen; if anything had happened to him I would never be able to recover.

"Nothing sweetie, just do what I say and go home. Ryan, please take her home now." Before he could walk away I clutched his elbow.

"No, tell me now!" The desperation that was displayed on my face took a toll on my father's guilt.

“There was a robbery in one of the shops by Fuller Beach and the men are armed. Now please go back home. Ryan I trust you to keep my daughter safe until I get back, understood? I’ll call you when everything is sorted out.” He kissed my forehead and went to his cruiser; most of the cars had already left.

“Yes, sir, I understand.” Ryan nodded and led me back to his car.

Inside the car I laughed at the fact that dad had told my boyfriend to go home with me and stay with me for a couple of hours, all alone in a house. I knew my dad didn’t see it that way; my dad and I had an open relationship ever since my mom passed away.

“What’s so funny?” Ryan looked over at me smirking.

“Just my dad; he trusts you enough be alone with his daughter, for a couple of hours, at his house.”

“Well he knows I wouldn’t try anything. Your dad still really scares me.”

That had made me laugh even harder. “Aww, poor little Ryan, afraid of my dad. It’s not like he’ll do anything, oh wait; he’s a cop.”

“Ha haha. You’re so funny.” He laughed humorlessly and parked in front of my house.

I lived in a common two story, the same one since I was born. My mind had gone back to thinking about my dad and the armed robbery my hands shook as I tried to fit the key inside the lock. The familiar warmth of Ryan’s hand covered mine as he guided the key perfectly inside and opened the door. We stepped through leaving our bags besides the window and Ryan locked the door. I went silently towards my black leather couch and sunk into the plush pillows. My eyes focused on the unlit fireplace praying to whoever is above that my dad would be okay. A cup of warm coffee appeared in front of my face, my gaze on the cup following the hand that was holding it. Ryan sat next to me, my favorite mug still in his hand propped up on my knee. I smiled gratefully at him, and took the cup. His arm came around my shoulders and rested on the back of the couch. My back relaxed on his chest; occasionally sipping my coffee and focusing on Ryan’s even breaths to keep me calm.

We stayed in the same position for an hour until Ryan spoke up.

“Liz, don’t think about your dad right now, here, I know what’ll make you feel better.” He stood up and walked over to the stand next to my TV and pulled out my favorite movie, “Bridesmaids”. A smile appeared on my face and I sat up straight. The opening credit appeared on the screen and Ryan returned to his original position and I used him as a pillow. The next

hour was filled with laughter until tears were flowing down my cheeks. Ryan's eyes rolling playfully at me as I recited quotes from the movie to him.

"Do you want to tell a cop about it? We're just like priests except we would tell everybody afterwards." Officer Rhodes had just said this to Annie, the main character, and the irony of my dad's profession made me laugh harder.

"Remind me to never tell your dad anything." He chuckled.

"Yeah you shouldn't, I can guarantee you that the entire precinct knows about every embarrassing moment I've had since the sixth grade. Can you put the news on really quickly; I want to see how everything's going."

Ryan grabbed the control and turned to CNN, a reporter began to talk about what I already knew.

"An armed robbery has occurred in Fuller Beach this evening. There are two gunmen keeping store owner, Betty Henderson, as a hostage. Wait- I've just been informed that they have safely gotten Mrs. Henderson out of the store. The gunmen are being taken into custody this moment. I've also gotten word that a police officer has been shot and is being rushed to J. Arthur Doshier Memorial Hospital as I speak. Please stay tuned for updates. Thank you." The screen turned to commercial and I stood up.

"Ryan! What if it was my dad? We have to go to the hospital! Right now, Ryan! I'm serious."

Ryan stopped my pacing and held onto my shoulders. "Elizabeth Foster, calm down, you can't think like that."

"You're right; I should just wait for my dad to call. Unless the station calls to tell me he's been shot. No, nope, I can't wait that long." I reached for my car keys on the coffee table but Ryan had beaten me to it.

"No, you're staying here and waiting. Now go sit down and breathe."

I practiced the same breathing I did in yoga. Eventually, I drowned in a much needed nap and when I woke up; my father was sitting in the place of Ryan. I sprung into his arms and welcomed him back.

"Dad! You didn't get shot! Wait, who got hurt? Are you okay?" I asked still not letting go.

“It went fine, I promised you I would never leave and I intend to keep it” He squeezed me when he finished his sentence.

“Dad, who got shot?” His avoidance of my question did not go unnoticed. We had let go and I was now staring at his eyes.

“It was Uncle Tony, honey. But don’t worry he’ll be fine. It was just a flesh wound.” He said calmly.

My face paled, “What? How did that happen?”

“He was trying to get Mrs. Henderson out safely and one of the gunmen quickly took fire. He’s in the hospital resting now. We can go see him later tonight.”

We fell into a comfortable silence. He was the first to speak, “Do you understand why you go to school? What if you had been there? It’s the one thing I ask from you; go to school and learn. It’s also comforting to know where you are.”

“I really get it now, dad.”

“Well until I think you do; I will be driving you to school and back and if it’s not me then it’ll be Tony.”

“Are you serious?”

“Serious as a heart attack.”

“Fine.” I grunted.

“Now go get ready for dinner, after that we can go see how your Uncle is doing.”

“Okay,” I walked towards the stairs but turned to him before the first step, “I love you dad.”

He smiled, “Love you too, kiddo.”