**Pools of Green**

If you make a left on Central Park West, right on the corner of 81st, there’s a greasy-smelling hot dog stand with lemonade for a buck fifty. And right across from that hot dog stand is the subway station, which is where I met him- on the fifth bubble-gum stained stair down to the Subway. He pushed past me onto the train, and then I stood next to him, clutching the metal pole. I was going to Rockefeller Center to see the Christmas tree and meet my then-somewhat estranged father. I asked him where he was going and he said, “Away.”

“Well, where to, exactly?” He seemed immediately wary of my question, as if I was interrogating him. In fact, I couldn’t care less about where he was going; I was trying to take my mind off the anticipation of the lurching subway train. The sudden movement of which usually caused me, no matter how static I made myself, to launch into a nearby passenger.

The boy shrugged and shook his hair out his face- a movement that proved to be a compulsive habit by the end of our conversation. His eyes, two pools of green, captivated me. “Nowhere,” he said.

I laughed, partly accidentally and partly not. “Oh, please. You must be going somewhere. It’s two days until Christmas.” I regretted this last part a second later, on the afterthought that he could be Jewish, but he didn’t seem perturbed.

“Well I dunno where I’m going then. Just away from New York,” he said. He fidgeted some more.

“Are you going to see family?”

“Family?” He laughed then, though it seemed quiet and repressed. “I hate my family.” The uncomfortable, familiar feeling arose in my stomach.

“You don’t hate your family. No one does.” I spoke with the learned certainty of the words I tried to convince myself so many times before.

He looked me over, taking in the Dooney & Bourke purse that lazily slung over my shoulder and the Chanel No.2 Lip gloss shimmering on my pursed lips. He shook his head in slight disgust, “What would you know?”

If it had been anyone else, I would have shrugged, pulled out a magazine and pretended to read. I wouldn’t have even bothered to unlock myself. But something about the stranger pulled me in. I found myself leaning toward him.

“My dad and mom are divorced,” I began. And seeing him start to laugh and shake his head, I rushed on, “and I know, that’s not bad. But the thing is, my dad just kind of took off. He didn’t want custody of me. He said his new apartment was only fit for one… Now he barely sees me, and he’s always angry. You know what he says to me when he’s mad? He says, ‘Wow. You really are just like your mom.’ And each time he says that I just, well, I lose a little more of myself.” His expression was one of tolerance now. I continued, “You may have your problems, whatever they maybe, but guess what- so does everyone else.”

Staring at him coldly, I said, “You look at me and tell me that a father deliberately separating himself from his one daughter isn’t emotionally debilitating.”

A quiet air of understanding blanketed us, enveloped us, and pulled us together with our single similarity. It was broken by his stubborn insistence. “So what? So that’s your problem? I have mine.”

“Exactly. So don’t act like yours are better than everyone else’s.”

He glanced around, his eyes shifting from the car insurance ads posted on the banner around the top of the subway car, to the other passengers, seated and unaware, reading their newspapers and People magazines.
And then the subway car screeched to a stop at Rockefeller. But there was that split-second right before the doors opened. That split-second separated our bubble of understanding from the outside world. Through the glass, I could see the expectant, wind-blown faces of the parents, exhausted from Christmas shopping, and the eager, rosy faces of their children. They seemed alien, so different, so far away. And then the moment was over, the bubble burst, and the doors opened. I glanced back at the boy, the stranger who I had given myself to, and offered a small smile, which he didn’t return.

I stepped out then, into the mass of happy shoppers, all of who had their own secrets, their own problems, and their own cracks in the vases of their lives. All of whom were always subconsciously searching for the one person, who could unlock them, and who, in some strange way, could make them whole again.

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