

My little sister came running, my phone buzzing in her hands.

"Phone's been ringing. It's Carl."

Carl. The guy I had just met a few hours ago at a studio close to campus. He was seemingly reserved, barely said a word. I tried making him speak more than two syllables at a time, but all my attempts were futile.

A few hours had obviously changed nothing, because the conversation was simple.

"Hello?"

"Good evening. I've sent your photos."

The line went dead. I stared at the phone for about a fraction of a second, then shrugged. That was cold.

I had been a little busy making dinner when the call came in, so I got right back to it. I was excited though. The long awaited photos I had sent for editing had arrived, and I was more than eager to see how they turned out.

I was trying out modelling for the first time and Carl had taken the shots earlier today. Come to think of it, even the shutter of his camera made no sound when the flash went. As silent as the man himself.

As I washed the rice, my thoughts strayed back to him. Carl reminded me of a silent wolf. He never really made eye contact, but when he did, I could see the intelligence behind his eyes.

I could also see that he was the kind of man who took everything in, but gave nothing away. I set the pot of rice on fire and raced to my room to get a good look at the photos.

They were...beautiful. There was no other way to describe them. Quiet though he might be, Carl really knew how stuff. He was really good at what he did, almost bordering on perfection.

He took the flawed, blotchy photos and turned them into something breathtakingly beautiful, it was almost painful to look at. And I was thoroughly impressed.

I began wondering who this dark, handsome stranger really was, and how he came to be the way he was now. Did I mention how handsome he was? He could pass for a Greek god, and that was

saying something. He was also as dark as the rest of him, causing him to exude this terrifying, totally masculine aura.

I was really intrigued. I kept asking myself who this guy was. Well, there was only one way to find out. Perching on the edge of the bed beside my sister, who was sprawled in a very unladylike fashion and snorting at something she was reading from her book, I sent Carl a text.

Just a simple thank you. Seconds later, I got a reply. And, surprise, surprise! He actually said more than six words at once.

"You are welcome. I hope you liked the photos."

I contemplated my reply, then, as was very typical of an open and honest girl like me, I straight up told him what I thought about his sudden freeness of speech.

He actually laughed at my comment, and proceeded to explain that he did not associate his work with his personal life. Something I kind of admired because my entire life was a mess of tangled relationships, you could not hold the two ends at a go.

Soon, we fell to talking. And talk, Carl did. I tried my best to hide my amusement at his sudden change, but he seemed to perceive it. Frankly, I would have been very surprised if he had not.

We chatted for about half an hour, and I discovered how funny Carl was. No, not funny. Hilarious! Tears were already leaking from the corner of my eyes. Yes, I was enjoying myself. Then...

"Sis? Did you not put something on the cooker?"

I nearly cursed out loud. I had totally forgotten the rice! Rushing out, I did not need a soothsayer to tell me how badly burned the rice had gotten. Judging by how long I sat laughing my head off, I was sure about 60% of the rice was inedible.

Boy, was I wrong! By the time I reached the smoke filled kitchen, 85% of the rice was gone and the pot was horribly disfigured. The entire house was filled with smoke.

Mom was asleep, her door firmly shut. That was why she had not yet noticed the burning rice. I began panicking, rushing to open all the windows and turn off all the filament bulbs.

It was useless, completely useless. There was just too much smoke and I was already coughing really hard. Tears sprang from my eyes, but this time for a completely different reason.

I tried to calm down, but each time I thought about what Mom would do when she was roused by the smoke, I began panicking all over again.

Time and again, Mom had repeatedly warned us against leaving the kitchen when we had put something on the cooker. To say she would be livid would be an understatement.

A door creaked open, and Mom came out from her room, sleep obviously still making her disoriented.

"What is burning?"

I turned to face my nemesis, because there was no way I could get myself out of this by lying. Besides, I had promised myself never to lie to my mother.

The last time I did...I nearly died. Now that is a story for another day. I might as well escape death by the skin of my teeth today.

It did not take Mom a long time to figure out what had happened to her pot and the rice inside it. I waited, holding my breath and praying that the storm brewing would not sweep me away in its rage.

The storm did come. And I barely made it through. I would rather have sat on a keg of gunpowder than face my mother's wrath. By the time she was done raging, I was sobbing so hard I wondered if my eyes would fall out.

Thankfully, she saw how distraught I was and decided to give me a break. However, she instructed I clean out the mess of ashes I had made and throw out the condemned stainless steel that once served as a pot.

Cheeks flushed, I rushed to do everything she asked. As I was washing up, I thought back to what had happened. Carl. I could not entirely blame him. I blamed the flames, and I am not talking about the fire.