

The Park, Day 1

As they walked through park, Emilia suddenly stopped and pointed to the fountain in front of them. "If I tuck my dress between my knees, do you think I could do a handstand on it?"

Christian laughed. "Not both at the same time. You'll need your knees to keep your balance." But before he could finish the sentence, she hopped onto the concrete ledge and threw her feet over her head. "If you fall in, you'll catch—" Splash! "Pneumonia."

Emilia laughed and tried swimming in the shallow water. "Join me!" She yelled. Christian smiled, shaking his head.

"You're crazy," he said. She emerged from the water, and Christian lent her his coat to dry off. "As soon as Anna arrives, we'll get you home before you freeze."

But she wasn't paying attention. A street musician in the center of the park began a new song, and Emilia's face lit up. She tossed Christian's coat aside and squealed. "I love this song! Dance with me, Christian!"

"You're soaking wet!" But it was too late. She had leapt into his arms, and sprayed him with her wet hair. Christian simply smiled, took her hand and began spinning her in circles. "If you ever want a boyfriend, you won't be able to keep acting like this forever," he laughed.

Emilia smiled. "If you want to keep your girlfriend, you should learn to act like this more often."

"Having a party without me?" Came a voice from behind.

"Anna!" Christian bounced over to her and gave her a kiss. "Emilia thought it would be a good night for a swim and a dance."

Anna laughed and said, "Nice to see I left you in good hands."

"Just teaching him to not be so uptight." Emilia said. "You can thank me later."

Anna looked Christian in the eye playfully and said, "Yeah, he could use a few lessons in that area."

"Let's start moving home," Christian said. "If Emilia gets sick, her mother will blame me." He took Anna's hand in his, and the three began the walk home.

Emilia's house, Day 7

Emilia's mother and Anna worked at setting the table as Emilia walked in. "No, no," Emilia's mother cried, "Your hair so messy." She put down the plates and pulled a brush from a drawer. "You twenty one years old now, Emilia. I was seventeen years when I marry your father," she said as she brushed.

"I miss daddy," Emilia sighed.

"Your father was good man. Now time for you to find good man."

Christian laughed from the chair in the corner. "Well, Gabriel is a good man. He's a very hard worker.

"You see? Hard worker and respectable man." Emilia's mother said. "He can give you good house."

"How incredibly boring that sounds!" Emilia exclaimed.

"And he loves to dance." Christian replied.

"Oh," Emilia said. She smiled. "And when will he arrive? As soon as she spoke, a knock came at the door.

"Oh no, he's here." Emilia's mother exclaimed as she began brushing furiously.

"I'll get it!" Emilia's younger brother exclaimed, racing through the hallway. He opened the door and greeted a very tall, well dressed man. "Hi, I'm Alex, Emilia's brother."

"Nice to meet you, I'm Gabriel," the man said, smiling and shaking Alex' hand firmly. Alex showed him in and Christian introduced Gabriel to everyone.

Later, as they gathered around the dinner table, Emilia's mother asked, "You very often are working, Gabriel?"

"Yes ma'am. I'm often at sea for over a month at a time."

"Oh, you good man. Hard worker. Very good," Emilia's mother replied, enthusiastically.

"Wow, that sounds exciting", Emilia exclaimed. Have you sailed to many places?

Gabriel nodded. "All over the world. That's where I get the inspiration for my music."

Emilia's jaw dropped. "You're a musician too? I'd love to hear you play sometime!"

"I can make that happen."

Anna had been sitting quietly next to Christian, but then she chimed in, "And Gabriel will soon be the captain of his own boat."

"This is true?" Emilia's mother asked, giving Gabriel an impressed look.

"I work on a large ship now, but very soon I will be able to purchase my own vessel. It will allow me to make my own business decisions. One day I will buy a whole fleet, and then I won't have to go to sea anymore."

"And will you need any extra crew hands?" Alex asked fascinated.

Gabriel chuckled. "Not for a long time. I already have a small crew prepared. But if you like, I could take you out sailing one day."

"That would be amazing!" Alex responded. He had an excited glow in his eye matched only by that of Emilia.

The park, Day 8

"What did you think of Gabriel last night?" Christian asked as they strolled through the park.

Emilia smiled giddily. "He's so fun."

"He is."

"Momma adores him, and Alex looks to him as a hero."

"So you'll see him again?"

Emilia stopped walking and gave him a playful grin. "He stopped in to see me at work this morning." She was glowing. "And I'm going to the shipyard to see him off tomorrow."

Christian couldn't hold back a large grin. He wrapped his arm around her shoulder as they walked. "I feel really good about this," He said. "I'm happy for you."

The Park, Day 34

Christian sat in the grass with his arm around Emilia's shoulder. Her knees were pulled up to her chest, and she buried her face in her forearms. As Anna entered the park, she took notice and paused a moment, unsure of what to say. When Christian noticed she was there, he leapt up and ran to her, leaving Emilia seated alone in the grass.

"I was waiting for the two of you for over an hour," Anna said. "What happened?"

In a low voice, Christian answered, "Alex's body was just found in the harbor. No one knows what happened to him." Anna's jaw dropped.

"But he isn't—"

"He's dead."

She covered her mouth with her hands. Christian hugged Anna lightly, and tried to kiss her, but she stopped him and said, "Well, don't just leave her sitting there. She needs you now." They walked back and sat on either side of Emilia. Christian put his arm around her again, and Anna sat quietly, unsure of what to say.

Emilia lifted her head for the first time. Her eyes were red. In a soft voice, she said, "He was only seventeen years old."

Christian gave her a soft kiss on the temple and said, "We all loved him dearly."
The three sat quietly for a long moment, deep in thought.

Emilia looked Christian in the eye and said, "This is why I try to make you enjoy your life while you can. You don't know when it will be over."

Christian forced a smile and said, "Maybe you're right."

Emilia turned to Anna and said, "Don't let him waste his life away playing safe all the time. He's a good guy, but he still hasn't learned to live."

Anna didn't know how to respond to that, so Christian responded for her, "Don't worry, Em."

But Emilia wasn't satisfied. "No, I am worried! What if I end up like Alex? What if I never leave the country? What if I waste my life away?"

Christian was shocked. She had been his closest friend since their teenage years, but he had never heard her talk this way. "Em, you'll have plenty of adventures. When Gabriel gets his boat he'll take you wherever you want to go. You'll see."

"No. I'm done with Gabriel," Emilia said between snuffles. "When he buys his fleet he'll be just like all the other business men, wasting away in the office. I can't be happy with a man like that."

Christian was taken aback. "Gabriel has a lot of spirit. I'm sure he'll always be able to fill your life with adventure."

Emilia shook her head. "I'm not sticking around to find out. I'm leaving town tonight."

"What? Where are you going?"

"I don't know," she replied, standing to her feet.

"How long will you be gone?"

"I don't know." She began walking out of the park

"Your mother needs someone to comfort her right now!" Christian yelled from behind.

"Comfort her then."

The Park, Day 55

Emilia, Christian, and Anna watched Virgo chase a terrified mouse around through the grass in the park. "Momma thinks he's trouble," Emilia said.

Christian couldn't help but agree. "And what do you think of him?"

"He's amazing" Emilia was beaming. "The night I met him, he took me sailing in his employer's skiff without permission. He's so brave." Anna and Christian exchanged uneasy looks. "And then when I asked him to come home with me, he just left his job and joined me that night without a care in the world."

Christian nodded slightly. "Well, your mother is certainly glad to have you back. When did you meet him?"

"About two weeks ago."

Virgo finally succeeded in catching the mouse. It gave a terrible shriek as he pinned it to the ground with a stick.

"See? Look how funny he is!" Emilia giggled. "He's the best man I've ever met."

"Did you see that?" Virgo yelled from across the park. He ran over to them, and Emilia leapt into his arms. He spun her around and placed a sloppy kiss on her neck. "I need some more beer," he said. "Let's go."

"I think Anna and I have had enough," Christian said. "We normally just sit here in the park and talk."

Virgo laughed, and looked Emilia in the eyes. "You really like hanging around with these people?" He lifted her up and draped her over his shoulder. Emilia could hardly contain her laughter. "We're going for more beer! You can join if want." And with that, they were gone.

Christian's apartment, Day 60

Christian awoke suddenly. There was a sharp rapping sound at his apartment window. Startled, he made his way to the window and opened it. Emilia was there.

"Em! How did you get up here?"

"I scaled the lattice," she said, climbing through the window.

"What are you doing here?"

"I have nowhere else to go," she said, sitting on the bed. "My mother kicked me out of the house, and I haven't been able to find Virgo in any of his normal camping spots."

"Why would your mother do that?"

"She's just being stubborn. I told her that Virgo and I are getting married, and she threw a fit."

"Married?" Christian was shocked. He sat down beside her on the bed. "Sorry Em, but I agree with your mother."

"So are you going to kick me out too?"

Christian gazed into her eyes and replied softly. "No, of course not."

Emilia kissed him on the cheek and said, "You're the greatest."

Christian sighed, and gave her a long, mournful look. "You take my bed. I'll sleep in the chair." He got up and pulled a blanket out of the closet.

"Christian," Emilia said, "I wanted to say thank you for everything. And to say goodbye."

Christian stopped what he was doing. "Goodbye?"

"When I find Virgo tomorrow, we're leaving town for good."

The cafe, Day 71

"Anna, we need to do something about Emilia." Christian said as he walked into the cafe.

Anna set aside her mop, and gave Christian her full attention. "Let's sit," she said, motioning towards a booth in the corner. "What's wrong?"

"I just received another letter. I don't think she's doing well." Anna gave him a concerned look as they sat. Christian continued, "She told Virgo she doesn't want to get married yet."

"Well that's good news," Anna replied. "Her mother will be happy to hear it."

"Yeah, but Virgo didn't take it well. I think she's scared of him now."

Anna took Christian's hands in hers. "We need to do something for her. Does her mother know?"

Christian shook his head. "No, and we can't involve her either. Her mother means well, but she always makes things worse for Emilia. She's too strict, and Emilia doesn't react well to that. She's too much of a free spirit."

Anna nodded in agreement. "Christian, I think you need to go find her. You're the only one she listens to."

"I know." Christian replied. "I'm leaving tonight."

Outside Virgo's apartment, day 74

"About time you showed up, Em." I've been waiting here for hours.

Emilia stopped in her tracks. Her jaw dropped and an enormous smile crossed her face. "What are you doing here?!" She sprinted to the doorway where Christian was standing, and wrapped him in her arms."

Christian felt a wave of relief as she embraced him. "I followed the address on the letter you sent me, and it lead me here."

Emilia's face went stern. "You didn't tell mother where I am, did you?"

"No. Just Anna."

The smile returned to her face, She tightened her grip around his waist and rest the side of her head against his chest. "It's so good to see you, Christian."

"Em, let's go somewhere else. I don't want Virgo to see me here."

Emilia thought for a moment and smirked, "There's a park near here."

When they arrived in the park, Christian got straight to his point. "Don't marry him, Em."

Emilia stopped walking and eyeballed him. "Is that what you came here for?" There was a hint of accusation in her voice. "He's a good man."

"Emilia, he's no good for you. You can find adventure some other way."

"You think that is the only reason I like him? For his sense of adventure?"

"I know that's why you like him. You told me so."

"I never said that."

"Let's go on adventure together, Em. Right now."

An amused smile crossed Emilia's face and her mouth opened in amazement. "Is this really Christian I'm talking to?"

"Don't think about it Em, just come with me. Be spontaneous. We'll go anywhere you want."

Emilia could not longer contain her surprise and burst into laughter. "Virgo wont notice me missing until tomorrow afternoon. You have until then to get me back to the apartment."

Christian's face lit up, and his heart began beating faster. He knew his message was getting through to his old friend. "Where are we going?"

The sound of a train could be heard moving slowly past the other side of the park. "Follow me," she replied, taking his hand and walking in the direction of the train.

The Park

"I have to admit, it was exciting," Christian said. He was holding Anna's hand and sitting in front of the fountain Emilia had once fallen into. "She took me to the railroad, and we hopped into an empty boxcar. We rode that train for four hours into the mountains."

Anna was beaming at him. "Christian, I've never heard you talk like this before. How unorthodox of you."

He laughed and rested his head on Anna's shoulder. "I wasn't even afraid. I was more scared of losing my friend."

Anna smiled and squeezed his hand. "You're such a sweet man," she said. She kissed his cheek. "How did Emilia respond?"

"I think she wants to come home. She misses her mother, even though she won't admit it. But she's afraid of living a boring life here."

"Virgo isn't the only person in the world who knows how to have fun. We have to show her how exciting her life can be if she comes back to us."

Christian nodded ever so slightly. "I was afraid you were going to say that."

The boatyard

"What's he doing here?" Virgo yelled? "How does he know what city we live in?"

"Christian, why did you come back?" Emilia asked. There was fear in her voice.

"Come back?" Virgo yelled. "You mean he's been here before?" He gripped Emilia by the arm and gave Christian a death stare. "Why are you here? Go home."

"I just want to talk to Emilia." Christian replied. Cautiously holding out his arm as if taming a wild animal.

"Go home Christian." Emilia said sternly. I'm fine." She winced in pain. Virgo's grip seemed to be ripping her arm from its socket.

"You have nothing to say to her. She's my wife." Virgo yelled, yanking her along with him.

"I'm not your wife! There was no wedding," Emilia cried, struggling to break free from Virgo's grip. "Let me go." It was no use. He was just too strong for her to resist.

Virgo slowly stepped backwards along the wooden dock, pulling a struggling Emilia along with him. "If my baby is in your belly, you're my wife."

Christian was shocked. He saw a terror in Emilia's eyes that seemed to be begging him for help.

"Let's just talk for a minute." Christian said as Virgo pulled her toward a small sailboat.

"Talking never solved anything," Virgo responded. "Get in the boat, darling. We're leaving." Virgo let go of Emilia's arm, and she obediently climbed down into the skiff.

"Where are you going?" Christian yelled. Virgo remained silent as he hoisted the sail. "At least let her go home to say goodbye to her mother!"

Virgo untied the boat and pushed off from the dock. Emilia yelled, "We'll be back soon, Christian! We can talk then!"

"No we won't" Virgo retorted.

Gabriel's boat

"How do you know she's there?" Gabriel asked, the sea breeze blowing his hair.

"In one of her letters she gave me very specific directions to the island where Virgo hides when he is in trouble with the law." Christian replied. He gave a weak sigh, and scanned the horizon in front of the boat. "At first I was confused about why she would share that with me. Now I think I understand."

"That's where she wanted you to look if she ever disappeared."

Christian nodded. There was a lump in his throat. "I should have seen through it sooner. I should have found her while Virgo was away and forced her to come home with me."

Gabriel laughed. "I admit, I don't know Emilia that well, but she doesn't seem like the kind of person who can be forced to do anything."

"Well, if we find her today, she's coming home with us. I'm not leaving her any options." His eyes left the sea ahead and turned to Gabriel. "Thank you for helping me find her. You're the only person I know who could help."

"Of course. I'm happy to do anything that can help you," Gabriel replied. He paused a moment. "And her."

The island

They relied on nothing but the stars and the light of the full moon to land Gabriel's small boat on the beach. They landed half a mile north of the small campfire they had seen on the beach. It

served as a beacon, guiding them exactly to where they needed to go. After landing, Christian snuck along the coast, leaving Gabriel with the boat.

When he was in sight of the camp fire, he stopped. Emilia and Virgo were wrapped in an embrace, kissing passionately. He thought a lot about what his plan of action should be, but hadn't come to a definite decision. He could try talking to them, but that never seemed to work with Virgo. Alternatively, he could attack Virgo from behind and try to overpower him. But that plan was risky too. He didn't pretend to understand what Emilia's current emotional state, but if he injured Virgo severely, she might never forgive him.

In the end, he decided to go with a hardline diplomacy approach. He stood up straight, lifted his chin, and marched toward the campfire as confidently as possible.

"Who's there?" Virgo yelled, jumping to his feet.

"Emilia is coming home with me now. I don't care what you say," Christian replied in a deep voice.

"Christian! Why do you keep following us?" Emilia yelled as he stepped into the firelight.

"How did you find us here?" Virgo yelled. Then the *réalisation* came to him. "You!" He yelled, turning to Emilia, who was still seated behind him. "I told you not to contact anyone from your old life."

"Virgo, I'm sorry," Emilia whimpered. "I didn't—" her sentence was ended abruptly as Virgo kicked her square in the face with the bottom of his boot.

"No!" Christian exclaimed, running towards Emilia.

"Stop there!" Virgo yelled. He pulled out a long knife and held it against Emilia's throat. There was blood streaming from her nose, and she was crying. Christian stopped right where he was. He couldn't believe what he was seeing.

"Get to your feet." Virgo said to Emilia, knife still against her throat. "We're leaving." She silently complied.

Christian stayed put, hopeless as he watched the two back away towards the boat on the beach. "Don't kill her!" He yelled, but there was no reply. He trembled as Virgo raised the anchor, and pushed off.

Then, suddenly a huge silhouette came gliding silently across the waves, and crashed violently against Virgo's boat. "Gabriel!" Christian yelled, sprinting towards the sight of the crash, "is that you?" But no reply came. Only the sound of two men grunting and wrestling on the

wooden boat. When Christian reached the water, he dove in head first and wam with all his might.

“Christian!” Came Gabriel’s voice as he grappled on the floor, “She fell overboard!”

Christian felt a wave of panic. The water wasn’t deep, but Emilia was a short girl, and Virgo had tied her hands together when they got into the boat. “Em!” He screamed as he swam furiously, “I’m coming!”

As he approached the two boats, he heard Emilia splashing and struggling in the waves. He wrapped his arms around her, and kicked with all his might back to the shore, fighting the whole time to keep her head above the water. When he had delivered her safely to the beach, he turned around and started to swim back towards Virgo and Gabriel.

“No, Christian!” She sputtered. “Don’t leave me! I need you!”

“Gabriel needs me!” Was Christian’s reply as he dove back into the waves.

By the time he reached them, the only thing left of Virgo’s boat was a sail sticking out of the water. Gabriel had him pinned against the mast, and was punching him hard in the face. “That’s enough, Gabe,” Christian shouted. “Emilia is safe. Let’s get her into your boat and head home.” Gabriel let Virgo’s body fall limply into the water.

The Church

Christian had always thought Emilia was very pretty, but today she took his breath away. Her long blond hair flowed down the back of the white dress her mother had made. Her bright blue eyes turned to him, a tear running down her cheek, and seeped into the corner of her smiling lips. Christian took a deep breath, and extended his arm for her to take. She wrapped hers around his elbow, still gazing at him silently. “Your father would have been so proud of you,” Christian said finally.

Emilia nodded, and wiped a tear from her eye. “Christian, thank you so much for being here,” she said. “Thank you for everything.”

“I’m always here whenever you need me.” He replied as they walked through the church doors. Gabriel was at the end of the aisle, smiling radiantly.

“I would have been so lost had it not been for you,” Emilia said as they made their way slowly down the aisle. When they arrived at the altar, she turned to face him. He wrapped her in his arms and squeezed tightly. Emilia kissed him on the cheek and looked into his eyes. “You’ll always be my best friend, Christian.”

Christian’s smile was as large as it had ever been. “I’m glad to hear it, Em.” With that, she turned away, and joined Gabriel at the altar. Christian took his seat next to Anna. His heart was filled to overflowing with joy for his friend.

