

She wanted the guilt to wash away.

Abby set a plate down with a soft thud before smoothing out the wrinkles of a satin white napkin. She adjusted the napkin's triangle shape, observing its stark white contrast with the deep wine-red of the tablecloth.

She glanced up as a breeze brushed past her face, the cool sliver tendril of air making its way across the city as dusk began to call.

Abby walked into her kitchen and snatched a lighter to make the candlelight flames dance and create shadows against the apartment's patio walls.

She envisioned him bustling through the crowd of people, pausing every now and then to contemplate his own thoughts.

They both knew that their last days of even seeing each other were coming to a close. They both had acknowledged that either might leave unexcused when they wished to.

Sometimes life was like that; it left a chapter unwritten even though the script had been flowing nicely.

That's why the two of them had decided to close that chapter in the simplest yet most elegant way they could.

A click sounded as the lock to their apartment turned, and the curly head had his back to the door before the face was examining the apartment and the outdoor deck.

Abby stood there on the deck, not knowing what to do—a feeling she rarely felt.

Her eyes caught the cars on the valleys of highways below, humming like bees on bright flowers.

They were tidy folk, people said.

Abby stepped into their living room and brought a wedged heel over the baby toys, plopped conspicuously on the carpet.

"The baby is already fed," she said, bringing her eyes to his—briefly.

There was a silence as he slung off his brief.

–Daryll–

Daryll glanced at the table set outside.

There could be nothing she could possibly want. She had always been the smarter one. There was a tiny clench behind his eyes that he felt for a second. The wind blew softly outside, and he glanced at his wife calmly standing in the baby-toy strewn apartment, in a gray skirt and low heels that only she could pull off.

He walked over to the screen door and pulled it open for her, and both stepped out onto the balcony. As they stood behind the chairs, they caught each other's eyes—hers were faded crystal blue, his brown and rusty.

Daryll did not register the decorum.

–Abby–

Her eyes wandered over his own for a few seconds. It was there in those moments of waiting that they both felt a silence - the great IT, what they refused to talk about, to discuss, IT, IT was over. In fact, they knew IT had ended long ago. IT formalized on papers that sat at the bottom of their drawers. IT's words spoke louder than the voices that were never raised in defense, that never sparred. IT hadn't crumbled.

IT hadn't existed, thought Abby, as her fingers pressed the side of a music speaker and the notes began to dance in their ears.

She could hear the blasting music of the disco. It was another venue, another wedding. Abby tried to push the memory away, but she could still hear the music. And his voice - "Abby, why don't you come dance with me?" he was saying. The music floated into the air and was swallowed up by the softness and the melody in his eyes that had always been there, yet somehow for the first time she was seeing it...

At the table, Abby squinted at her glass and picked up the bottle of sparkling cider, frowning, before wiping her face clean as if it were a clear and cloudless day.

-Daryll-

Daryll scooped himself into his chair. He lifted a spoon under scallops swimming in a buttery sea of sauce, dipping them onto his plate.

Abby's hair had tendrils buffing in the breeze. Daryll looked at them bouncing.

He could see them again, brushing near his face, the day they had climbed the mountain. It was one of those overcast days that were perfect for taking pictures. Abby spoke in the wind, her voice clear above the pitch.

"I glanced down!" she said. She was smiling. He looked into her face, pale with chill but a blush under her cheeks. There was something clenched in his stomach as he hung there, in ropes and straps, as he clung there on the misty mountain.

He felt the same feeling again in his stomach as he sat there at the table—a knot almost—and as Daryll glanced down the sides of the balcony porch where they sat, the city below that

stood like a miniature, he knew that the fear he felt was not connected to the drop below. And he bent over his plate and picked up his fork.

–Abby–

Abby deftly slipped a spoon into the sugared strawberries and plopped a serving onto her plate. She pulled her chair in with a jump.

She remembered how the bumps in the road had made her jolt. Her legs were swung out in front of her over the expanse of invisible ground. There was laughter from the front of the vehicle, and she knew by its tone that it was Daryll.

What would it take to hear that laugh? She smiled (softly) to herself. His laugh was refreshing but different from drinking a cold glass of water in the summer.

Abby was in the present again, staring at her fork. She lifted it heavily, poking it into a strawberry before she lifted it to her lips and let its sweetness swirl on the tip of her tongue.

–Daryll–

Daryll could taste peppermint in the brownie.

What would be Abby's response if he raised his brows with appreciation? He would not meet her eyes, and instead they roved over to the wall.

And there Abby materialized. It was a bright and sunny day. Abby turned her shoulders to him and gave him her rare smile, her mouth lifted in perfect angles. *Thank you so much*, her eyes said. She turned, and her blue gown whipped crisply as she moved to speak with family nearby. Daryll smiled softly as he watched her, tall and proud, little curls about her face escaping

her usually neat figure. He knew that the fingers wrapped around her blue diploma were pressing firmly.

I will never let this girl go, he had thought.

And there on the balcony, Daryll could find himself daring to meet Abby's eyes as the upbeat music faded in the rush of city cars.

–Abby–

Sitting there on the balcony, the memories made Abby smile. Her straight face had a hard time not showing it, and she could feel its muscles wishing to simply smile. She must not show it. Significance, she realized, is that sometimes a person just makes you smile, and it warms your heart, and that stays with you.

A little patter of footsteps jolted them out of their state.

The baby had scooped into another room. They glanced at each other. *He's safe*, they thought.

A loud crash followed with sounds of shattering glass.

Daryll, on his feet, dashed into the next room.

Abby stood there on the balcony, in a moment of silence, before clicking her way to the next room in a half-rush.

A shower of glass decorated the living room floor amidst a rattling baby toy.

In the middle of the room, the chubby baby gave them his best smile.

Daryll—his head was drawn into his chest, his back turned from Abby, and he was standing still as a statue.

Abby slipped slowly by his side.

As she drew near, her eye caught sight of the wooden square within his clutch.

Her eyes traveled down to their wedding picture frame—an Abby in all white and a Daryll in his best suit—before Abby found Daryll’s eyes. And his eyes traveled to the mantelpiece before his shoulders relaxed. Daryll gently placed the frame back above the fireplace. There was a crack down the middle and some leftover shards of glass created vacancies, but the picture—Daryll placed his arm under Abby’s. The picture was still intact. They would keep it that way.