

Charlie had grown accustomed to the quietness of this time of night. Plagued with insomnia, he would keep his bedroom window open to bask in the few midnight sounds. Only northwestern crickets in the summer, the hum of the snow in the winter and all of the awkwardness in between. But now, as he trudges through the woods in the deep snow, it's all anything but quiet. It seems like the world is screaming, shouting and it's making him feel as though he's on fire.

The unforgivable moon paints to the woodland snow a bright cyan and the crimson on his body a confused black. The colors of the world are louder too, apparently. And all it does is weigh down his body and drag him closer to the bleeding cold of the snow that soaks through his jeans. And he's shaking. He's shaking. He's shaking. For the cold and the reason why his vision is edged in red won't allow him to keep still.

It's a fair price.

Charlie knows he didn't kill him. His brain knows as much and knows it as logical that there was nothing he could've done. But Charlie felt like he killed him. His heart denies the truth and believes he could've prevented it. If only he was careful. And now there was literal blood on his hands. He was dead. Puck was dead.

Donna is calling Charlie's name, only yards behind. She is in scarlet too. But to him, she's only a vague hallucination, her words barely a whisper over the loudness of the wooden terrain. A terrain of glittering white and battered by the weight of its history. If only he knew the full extent of this history before it was too late.

Charlie wants to stumble and die of hypothermia. He wants to bury himself alive. He wants to claw out his skin, and reach into his heart. Anything. Anything to keep him from reminding himself of what had happened.

All Charlie could see was Puck's startled face when he sat upon the knife. The avid pain in his eyes as Donna and Charlie tried to fix him up in the dimness of the motel bathroom. Charlie couldn't stop seeing him cling onto the lifeless lump his body was becoming as he was bleeding out all over the white tiles. He was convinced that they would save him. That there was no way in hell that he was going to die...

Donna became louder... closer...

Puck was always there for Charlie. Sure, he was considered a part of the 'popular' bunch, but he never really fit in with his football friends. They were reckless, rude, didn't stop and thought of the consequences of their actions. Puck always said how much he hated being around them and felt isolated with them. It's the isolation that brought them together.

Puck worked at the cafe Charlie's dad managed. That's how they started becoming friends, seeing each other all the time only led to the inevitable befriending process. And then they started hanging out after his shifts- they'd drive around town or just walk around or hang out at Charlie's place.

Clear as day, as if it was yesterday, Charlie remembered one day with Puck. He had finished his shift and the two of them were hanging out in Charlie's bedroom, watching the X-Files. It was their favorite show and Charlie fortunately had every single season on DVD. Whatever episode

they were on, it had something to do with death. A character died gruesomely or something like that, Charlie doesn't really remember. But what he does remember is Puck's reaction to it.

He had wrinkled his nose and said, "That'd be such a fucked up way to die."

Charlie had smiled, "It really would be."

"I don't want to die like that."

"Chances are you probably won't," Charlie said and then a beat later, "How would you want to die, though?"

"Charlie, you know I'm immortal, I'm never going to die. And even if I was mortal, I know you'd keep me from harm."

As the memory full of warmth began to fade out, he could recall himself laughing at that. They were both teasing at the time- they were teenagers, for God's sake. For all they knew, they thought they'd actually live forever. Now it wasn't so funny.

Donna's voice was becoming less and less like a distant hallucination. But he still disregarded it. Charlie thought of the lake that was in the middle of the woods that were approaching ahead. He thought of its beauty, of its serenity, of its calmness especially on a nice night like this. It was freezing cold out and he could only imagine the freezing waters around him, feeling it drag him down like an insufferable lead weight. And he knew that every second of that, his thoughts would surround Puck.

“Charlie! *Charlie!*” Donna declared and grabbed ahold of Charlie’s arm. Her grasp was tough, her long blue nails gripping him back into reality. Like a whiplash, he turned to her with widened eyes.

“Charlie. Charlie. What the fuck are you doing?” she asked, breathless.

Her complexion was pale and drained. Horror danced in her eyes wildly and it caused Charlie to choke up with shock. This was real. This was real. This was *fucking* real.

“He’s dead. He’s dead,” Charlie sputtered out.

“Charlie, I know it’s-”

He tried to yank her away from him. He tugged and pushed and pulled and screamed. But she wouldn’t let up. Finally, she had both hands on either side of his shoulder and gripped him firmly in place.

“Charlie. *Listen,*” She urged. “You don’t think this is just as hard for me too?”

He stopped and looked up at her. Hysterically, he gasped, “He wasn’t your friend, you don’t get it. He was my best friend. Leave me the hell alone.”

“He wasn’t my friend, *but I knew him.* For heaven’s sake, we both just witnessed him die-”

“It’s my fault.”

“What?”

“It’s my fault. I killed him.”

Donna blinked, in obvious shock. She looked around then back at him. “No- it was an accident. It wasn’t your fault-”

“I could’ve easily stopped it.”

“Charlie, there was no possible way you could’ve stopped that.”

“He- he was dying. Right there. We both knew it, but he was still alive, right? Still alive. Yet he died. And it’s all because of me.”

Donna still looked shocked. “Charlie, I promise you there was nothing you could’ve done. Nothing we could’ve done. We did our best.”

“I killed him. I killed him, alright?”

She opened her mouth then closed it. From that, Charlie thought she’d stop, thought she’d just leave it there. Let him go off and continue on his downward spiral. But rather she asked: “Can I?”

“Can you *what?*” Charlie snapped.

She looked at him, once more and with uncertainty. But then with a sort of calmness, she leaned in and gave a tender hug. “Charlie. That was not your fault. You didn’t know. It’s okay. I promise.”

The world stopped as Charlie was greeted with the warmth of Donna’s hug. The landscape around them was cold and unforgiving. The dread and horror that rested in his heart wasn’t much better either. To him, it was the end of the world. To him, he was better off dead than alive. He deserved it, because he didn’t deserve to live on when Puck didn’t get to have that privilege. And he certainly didn’t deserve it when he took into consideration that he could’ve stopped it from happening-

“It’s not your fault,” Donna affirmed.

But it had to be? Puck was so alive. Filled with so much joy and care and kindness. A rare kind of human being that Charlie considered lucky to have known, let alone be close with. Puck was always doing him favors, always making him laugh, always being there for him, and Charlie vowed he’d always return the favors to him.

A burning sensation arises deep within him, the noise coming back all around him. If he squinted hard enough, he could see the walking outline of Puck coming towards them, right? That’s his figure coming back to him, assuring him that things were going to be alright, like he always promised they were... right? But it all got heavy when Donna squeezed him back into reality. The woods were cold and quiet and painted blue by the moonlight’s gaze on the snow.

*Puck gave him so much, but he couldn’t return the favor and keep him alive. How worthless he was for that.*

“It’s not your fault,” Donna repeated, her voice desperate with the need to comfort him.

But he knew better than that. It was his fault, it was his fault, it was his fault. The noise returned, he dreamt of falling forever into the lake- allowing for the fire he felt to swallow him whole- and maybe he could go and properly apologize to Puck.

*He killed Puck.*