

Light streams through the window. I groan and roll over hiding my face from the unyielding rays of the midday sun. Jesus, last night was rough. Stretching, I adjust my eyes to the light looking around the room. It's simple nothing too fancy. I've never been one to decorate. My room has wallpaper that seems like it been here forever. Small, light salmon colored pin stripes run vertically on the wall across from me. I used to hate the stripes, how imprisoning they felt, but it's grown on me. The source of blinding light comes from a big window to my right with floor length cream-colored sheer curtains that do nothing to block the sun out. There's a dresser across from the bed and a squashy, well-loved armchair sits next to the window. Only two things hang on the walls: a mirror above the dresser and a painting of a sea landscape on the wall to my left. I sit up finally coming to terms with the fact that I have to get up. I can't hear anyone moving downstairs, maybe Hilly's still asleep after last night's events. To avoid waking her, I tread softly down the short hallway to the stairs. The rickety staircase creaks like no other and I silently curse it the whole way down. I turn and walk into the kitchen looking for literally anything to drink.

"Morning sunshine," I look over and see Hilary sitting at the small kitchen table. She looks just about as bad as I feel.

"Morning," I reply groggily.

"Coffee's in the pot," she says without looking up. I nod and turn my attention to the cabinet. I grab a mug and smile faintly. The mug I have was a gag gift from Hilly last Christmas. "World's Best Dad" is in big bold cursive letters on the side of the mug. I grab the coffee pot and pour a heaping cup. The coffee's stale, my guess is it's been sitting out for a while now.

"What time did you get up?" I ask Hilly mixing a teaspoon of sugar into the black liquid.

"Too early," Hilly mumbles, "woke up with a massive headache. I hate wine," she says sourly.

"Sure you do," I laugh, "I still can't believe you gave that guy your number!" She looks at me deadpan, "Mistakes were made."

I nod smiling, but in my head I am agreeing, *mistakes were made*, but these are mistakes that Hilly doesn't need to know about. Mistakes like how I'm the shittiest friend to exist or how I didn't think twice when I . . . anyways it doesn't matter now. It's over, it happened, whatever. I must've been too in my head because Hilly gets up and crosses the kitchen to come stand by me at the counter. She waves her hand out in front of me trying to get my attention.

"Hello? Anyone home up there?" she grins at me. My stomach feels queasy. For a moment I have to choke down the vomit that threatens to spew out. I chalk it up to being hungover and not because of what I did.

"Hmmm?" I look up at her. She stares at me blankly waiting for me to reply to something, but I didn't hear her. The look on my face makes her roll her eyes playfully.

"I said, how're you feeling after last night."

Right. That's a good question. How am I feeling? Awful, horrendous, guilty, to name a few. Instead of saying any of those I settle for, "The little person up there is cursing me for not knowing my limit."

“Mine too” Hilly chuckles. “So, where’d you run off to after Finn showed up? You left me all alone there I couldn’t find you. I only knew you left after you’d texted me like four hours later.”

Finn Conway was *not* someone I ever wanted to see again. But, of course with my luck he waltzed right into Mickey’s last night. I think back to last night. I’ll admit yes, he looked good, but he is the living, breathing definition of a devil in disguise. I feel bad I left Hilly there, but I needed air. In hindsight I should have told her I was leaving, but I knew if I went over there, she’d tell me that I need to go talk to him and that was not happening.

Snapping back to the present, I look at Hilly.

“I’m sorry I left. I should have texted you sooner.” Hilly waves her hand as if to say, ‘Don’t worry about it’ and looks at me to continue. “Well, first I hid in the bathroom for a solid twenty minutes and then I decided fuck him, why should I have to ruin my night because he showed up? So, I went back to the bar and got more drunk.”

“Ah what a lovely coping skill,” Hilly laughs.

“Yeah, it was great,” I agree, “but then my confidence wore off and I decided to be moody and mysterious, so I sulked on the beach.”

“Nadineeee” Hilly whines, “I thought we talked about this! You can’t avoid him forever, you’re gonna have to talk to him sooner or later you know.”

“Yeah, yeah, I choose later.” She sighs at my stubbornness and after a bit of silence she tries to change the subject.

“I saw Maggie last night.”

“Did you?”

“Yeah, she nearly talked my ear off about all the things she’s done. Then she tried to teach me French *again*.”

I grimace. Maggie McGowan is a sweet girl but believe me as sweet as she is she’s also a one-upper. I met her and Hilly freshman year. Since that time, Hilly has been my best friend and Maggie sort of turned into more of an acquaintance. She has some obsession with France so this year she did a study abroad program. Good for her really, but I don’t want to hear about it every single time I talk to her.

“When’d you see her?” I ask considering I never saw her last night and Maggie always makes sure to find us and tell us about her French adventures.

“After you left. I *was* looking for you but found her instead.”

Oh. “Sorry if I stressed you out. I just didn’t want to bother you with all my shit.”

“You didn’t stress me out,” Hilly assures, “I’m used to your tendency to frequently disappear. And I hope you know that I *want* you to bother me about what’s going on with you.”

“I know,” I sigh, “I just didn’t want to ruin your night.”

Hilly can tell that I’m not expanding any further on my night.

She squeezes my arm, “Here if you need me.”

She gives me a sad smile and makes her way out of the kitchen. She goes back up the stairs, each step creaking as she climbs upwards. From the kitchen I can hear the shower

turn on and with her gaze no longer on me, I allow myself to deflate. My shoulders sag and I feel like there's a weight crushing my chest. I sit down at the table where Hilly sat a minute ago and look out the window by the table. It's a quiet day. I can see a light breeze make its way through the trees. I think back to last night. What I didn't want to tell Hilly was that I *did* see Finn last night. He must have seen me leave the bar and followed me out because one second I was enjoying the cool night breeze on the beach and wallowing in my self-pity, and the next I heard his unmistakable voice say, "Nadine Harris, what the hell are you doing out here?"

I rolled my eyes and let out a breath, "What's it look like? Sitting on the beach."

I didn't turn around to look at him, but I already knew he was rolling his eyes.

"No shit sherlock, I mean why are you sitting on the beach at one in the morning?"

"Is Hilly still inside?" I ask praying he just leaves.

"Yes." I go to get up ready to leave him and this beach and continue on with my wallowing. I go to pass him, but he grabs my arm to stop me. "Nadine, please can we just talk."

"I don't know what there is to talk about."

"Please don't be like that." His brown eyes are pleading with me, and I almost give in. In the time it takes me to consider talking to him, I take the opportunity to actually look at him. He looks the same as when I last saw him two months ago. His dark hair is more grown out now, his curls have started taking a bit more form. Against my better judgment, I shrug his arm off, "Five minutes. That's all you get."

Reluctantly, I sit back down and Finn sits next to me.

"So, how've you been?" Are you fucking kidding me. This man rips my life to pieces, begs to talk to me and starts with '*how've I been*'? I try to suppress the anger bubbling up my throat. I laugh, "How have I fucking been? How do you think I've been Finn?"

"Jesus, sorry don't rip my head off. I was just asking," he shrugs as if I'm being unreasonable.

"You know what? I'm done, so glad we could have this chat," I start to get up again and he grabs my hand this time.

"Nadine, wait. I'm sorry, ok?"

"Sorry for what? Ruining my life, cheating on me, or deciding to come out here?"

The first time I met Finn was during fall semester of my junior year. He was sweet, caring. Now looking back, I can see he was a total narcissist who never really cared about me.

I'm snapped out of my thoughts when Hilly calls from upstairs asking if I can bring her shampoo. I yell back up to her and make my way out of the kitchen and up the stairs. I grab some shampoo from the hallway closet and pass it to Hilly through the bathroom door.

"Thank you," she calls out from the shower.

"Mhmm." I walk back into my room and flop onto my bed. I watch the ceiling fan spin and spin and spin. After minutes of this I roll to my side, refusing to do anything. My eyes land on my shoes on the floor by my bed. A few small drops of blood are present on them. Fuck.

Tears stream down my face, it's late and I'm tired. We've been fighting in the kitchen for the past hour.

"Fuck you, Finn. Get out!"

He stands unmoving in my doorway.

"Get Out!" I say louder this time taking a step towards him.

"Let's be rational here Nadine--"

"Rational! What the fuck about this is rational! You cheated on me not once but *three* times and almost got me kicked out the honors program! And not only that but you tried to turn everyone in my life against me!"

"It's not my fault you were acting like a lunatic! So what? It was time everybody finally knew the real you!"

A violent rage fills me. The audacity to come to my house, try to belittle me in my kitchen and gaslight me into thinking that everything that has happened is somehow my fault.

"Oh my God you're actually fucking insane! I tried for a year to justify your behavior but you're just a piece of shit who only thinks about himself."

"I only think about myself? You *needed* me to pass that class. You shouldn't even be in the honors program. It's good they tried to drop you."

I can't believe what he just said. At this point I've reached my limit. I look at him, hands shaking as I grit out, "Get the fuck out."

At this he turns and leaves, but I hear him mutter something under his breath. I sat in the kitchen for a long time that night. What the hell happened? How can someone be so sweet and caring and then turn into a backstabbing narcissist. When Hilly came home later that night, she sat with me while I cried.

I scramble out of my bed and grab the shoes. Shit, shit, shit. I fly down the stairs and go straight to the kitchen and turn the faucet on. Just as I run the first shoe under the water Hilly walks in.

"What're you doing?" she asks towel still wrapped around her hair.

"I got some mud or something on my shoe last night, just trying to wash it off," I say hoping she won't notice the slight shake in my voice. I quickly dunk the other shoe under the water and pray she doesn't see the red mixing with the clear liquid. Luckily, she meanders over to the fridge in search of something to eat.

"Where did you go where there was mud?" I love Hilly, but right now I wish she'd stop talking.

"I'm not really sure if it's mud but it stained my shoes. Maybe I got spilled on at the bar," I say casually regaining my composure.

"Hmm, weird. There's stain remover under the sink I think."

"Perfect, thanks."

Hilly takes her plate with the sandwich she made and thankfully leaves the kitchen. I breathe out a sigh of relief at this, thankful she didn't ask any more questions. I spray my shoes all over with the stain remover and throw them into the washing machine. I head back upstairs telling her I'm going to lie down for a bit. Once I'm in my room, I shut the door and my thoughts race back to last night.

"I'm sorry for being an ass." Finn looks desperate but I know he just wants to weasel his way back into my life. I remain silent waiting for him to try to bait me into saying something I don't want to.

Just as I thought the next words out of his mouth are, "But it's not my fault you were struggling in your classes. You were out of your reach Nadine."

I want to scream back 'you know why I was struggling? You! You were the reason I almost flunked out of three classes!' However, for as long as I've known Finn, saying anything like this would only end with me in tears and him complaining about how shitty I am and how perfect he is. My mind races around to all of the times he told me how stupid I was and how easy the classes were for him. Instead, I sit and listen to what he's saying letting it roll off my back like the waves returning to the sea.

"Listen, I know you've always had issues with me being smarter than you and all," when he says this I reach a new level of rage I didn't know I could reach.

"Shut up, Finn! You are the most self-centered person I have ever met in my life! You only ever think about yourself and guess what, you're not even that smart! You only got into the honors program because Mommy and Daddy bought your way into it!"

"Oh, so this is what it's about? The fact that I can actually afford to go to school? Listen it's not my fault that your trailer trash mother couldn't keep a job."

At this point I'm seeing red; I stand up from where I'm sitting but he grabs my arm again.

"Finn, let go."

"No."

"Let me go!" I wrench my arm out of his grasp and begin trudging through the sand back up towards Mickey's.

"You know your friends only ever hung around you because you were with me. Without me, you're nothing. Just a low life, idiotic slut with white trash for family." At this I stop in my tracks and turn towards him. He's standing now walking towards me.

"I swear to God, stay the fuck where you are."

"Or what Nadine? What're you gonna do about it?" He's taunting me but I don't care. I can feel the anger radiating off of me. The next sequence happens in a flash, it almost doesn't even feel real. One minute I'm standing there staring at him and the next I'm holding a rock. I throw the rock as hard as I can at him. In a sickening crack, it hits him in the right temple. He's down almost immediately. A nasty gash is visible and he's bleeding heavily. I was close enough to him for the blood to splatter onto my shoes, but not clear headed enough to realize. Fuck. I move in a flurry not fully thinking through what I'm doing. What I do realize is that the jacket

I'm wearing tonight is one I borrowed from Hilly. I shrug it off and throw it down beside Finn. It was a shitty way to connect someone to a murder I know that, but hey I've never done this before and I sure as hell didn't have a lot of time to prepare. In a last fuck you, I kick sand at Finn leaving him to rot on the beach. I wipe the tear that fell from my eye, I didn't even realize I was crying. After a few deep breaths, I speed walk as fast as I can back up to Mickey's. Except instead of going inside, I take the alley behind the bar and walk out to the street. I begin the walk back from the bar to my and Hilly's house. As soon as I'm through the door I run straight up the stairs. I kick my shoes off and flop onto my bed. I grab my phone and text Hilly I was feeling tired and went home.

I can't think of this anymore. My head is throbbing uncontrollably, and I know it's not from the hangover. I sit up, my breathing speeds up and I feel like no matter how hard I try I can't suck in any oxygen. I start to panic as thoughts race around my head. What's going to happen to me? What's going to happen to Hilly? What the fuck did I do? What the hell happens now? After what feels like an eternity, I manage to slow my breathing back down. I suck in big deep breaths and exhale slowly trying to slow my heart. A single tear comes to my eye, but I brush it before it can fall. Fuck crying, what's the use now? I need to be calm, level-headed. No one even knows what happened. For all anyone knows it could have been an accident. Maybe he slipped or tripped and fell and hit his head. I can't hide in my room; I need to act normal. I work the courage up to go downstairs and walk into the living room. Hilly sits on our couch flipping through channels trying to find something good to watch.

I walk over to her and plop down on the couch next to her.

"Nothing good on?" I ask.

"Not in the slightest," Hilly huffs.

"Boo."

She continues flipping channels for another minute or so until she lands on the local news station. Breaking news flashes across the screen in bright red letters making it almost impossible to miss unless you were blind. Hilly stops and pauses, watching the T.V. My heart speeds up a bit wondering what they are going to play on the screen. The camera pans to the bright and usually shining face of Allison Chen. Today instead of shining she looks somber. She takes in a deep breath and begins to read off the teleprompter behind the camera.

"Police have reported finding a deceased male on Evanston Beach this morning. He has been identified as twenty-one, year old Finn Conway."

Hilly lets out a gasp sitting straight up looking at me. "Nadine!"

A picture of Finn from this year flashes onto the screen. It's a picture from the school newspaper when he got featured last semester. God the ego boost that gave him. He was insufferable. He wouldn't shut up about it. If I'd mention how much he talked about it, he'd just accuse me of being jealous that I wasn't smart enough or well liked enough by everyone on campus to have a newspaper feature me.

I'm brought back to the present moment when Hilly exclaims, "Oh my God!"

She grabs my hand, Allison Chen continues on with the report, “Police say his body was recovered on the shore lying face up. As of now they aren’t releasing any other details, but they do suspect foul play and say that a jacket not belonging to the victim was left behind.”

Hilly gasps again and my eyes go wide. Not from shock of his death but from fear of what I did to Hilly and terror of what this will mean for me.

“It’s a sad day in Evanston, and our hearts go out to Finn’s family and friends.”

Hilly turns to face me. Her eyes are wild with confusion, shock, sadness, and disbelief. I assume she expects to find the same emotions littered across my face. Instead, she finds me staring blankly at the television, a small smile etched upon my face. She continues to look at me, the gears in her brain slowly turning as she pieces together the night.

“Oh, no. No.”

She’s looking at me shocked. I still haven’t said anything, but she knows me well enough now to know what my silence is confirming. Plus, she got a big enough hint from me already when her jacket was never returned this morning. She lets out a shaky breath as a tear falls from her eye.

“Oh Nadine, what did you do?”