

MASON DEEVER

I WISH
YOU
ALL THE
BEST

PUSH

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ONE

“Ben, honey, are you feeling well?”

Mom plucks the plate from in front of me, with most of my dinner still on it, untouched. I'd taken maybe one or two bites before it fell into my stomach like a rock and what little appetite I'd had to begin with was gone.

“Yeah, I'm fine,” I tell her. Always easier to just tell her that. It's better than having her pull out the thermometer and every bottle of medication we have in the cabinet. “Just a lot on my mind.”

There. Not a *total* lie.

“School?” Dad asks.

I nod.

“You aren't falling behind, are you?”

“No, just a lot going on.” Again, not a total lie. Is it really even a lie if I'm just withholding certain information?

“Well,” Mom starts. “As long as you're keeping your grades up. When does your report card come in?”

“Next week.” It'll be all As, except in English, which will probably earn me a “We're not angry, just disappointed.”

“Are you sure you're feeling okay? You know these temperature changes have always gotten to you.” Mom walks back over to me and brushes the hair away from my forehead. “You do feel a little warm.”

“I'm fine.” I shake her hand away. “I promise, just tired.”

And I think that's enough for her because she gives me this little smile.

“All right.” She's still staring at me as she walks away. “We should schedule you a haircut, it's getting too long in the back.”

“Okay.” I sip some water to give myself something to do. “Did I tell y’all that Gabby Daniels had to drop out as Art Club president?”

“No, did something happen?” Mom asks.

“I think it was just too much for her, she’s in like every other club at school. But that means that I get to take over for her!”

“Oh, honey, that’s great!” Mom says from the sink, washing off the plates before she slides them into the dishwasher. “Are you going to have to do anything extra for the club?”

“It’s mostly organizing events and trips. I was already covering for Gabby most meetings, so it won’t be much different.”

“You sure that won’t interfere with studying?” Dad chimes in, a grimace on his face. “Remember our agreement: If your grades slip, you have to quit.”

“Yes, sir.” I can feel that light pressure in my brain, like something’s getting tighter against my skull. I look at Mom, hoping she might say something, but she doesn’t. She just stares at the floor like she normally does when Dad gets like this. “I know.”

Dad sighs and walks into the den, while I grab the last of the dishes on the table and take them over to the counter, before pulling out the Tupperware to pack the leftovers.

“Thanks, honey.” Mom doesn’t look up from the dishes.

“No problem,” I tell her. “How was work?”

“Oh, you know.” She shrugs. “Dr. Jameson keeps handing off his paperwork to me instead of doing it himself.”

“Doing his own paperwork?” I tease. “What a concept.”

“Right?” Mom chuckles and gives me this wide-eyed look. “One day I swear I’m going to tell him off.”

“Don’t you tell me to never burn bridges?”

“Yes, that’s true. But I’m the adult here, and I can do what I

want.” Mom giggles to herself and sets the dishes aside. “So, what did you do today?”

“Nothing really. Drew a little bit, worked on a few projects that are due after break, nothing too exciting.” Again, just withholding information.

Mostly my day comprised absolutely freaking the fuck out about what I was about to do, rewatching videos on YouTube about how people did this, rereading old messages from Mariam, and almost throwing up the peanut butter sandwich I’d made for lunch.

You know, typical, everyday stuff.

Mom sets the last of the dishes on the drying rack just as I’m stacking the Tupperware in the fridge. “Are you sure you’re okay? You didn’t eat anything weird, did you?” Mom reaches up to touch my forehead again, but I manage to avoid her.

“I promise, I’m totally fine.”

Liar.

“If you say so.” Mom carefully folds the dish towels by the sink. “You still up for the movie?”

“Yeah, sure, I’ll be there in a minute.”

“Maybe he won’t make us watch *Home Alone* for the twentieth time,” Mom mutters, mostly to herself I think.

“It’s a classic,” I tease, and she smiles at me, grabbing the little baggie of peppermint bark she made a few days ago, before she disappears into the living room.

When she’s gone, I drape over the sink, bracing myself in case my dinner comes up. I can do this, it’s going to be fine. Everything is going to be okay and this is most definitely the right thing to do. I know my parents, they know me, they deserve to know this thing about me as well.

And I want to tell them, I really, really do.

So that's exactly what I'm going to do.

"Ben, bring me the popcorn," Dad calls from the den, and I feel my insides clamp up again. I grab the huge tub from the counter, the kind with the four different flavors that Dad always buys at Christmas, and migrate my way into the den, except it's like my feet are covered with cement blocks.

It still looks like Christmas in here. Mom and I actually agree that people don't appreciate the holiday nearly enough, so she tends to leave the tree and decorations up until the first of the year. I'm not really sure if that's how other families do it, but it's my favorite of her mom-isms.

She's already decided that *Elf* is the movie for tonight, except we don't own a copy of it, so it's my responsibility to find somewhere we can rent it.

"We can watch *Lampoon* next." Dad crunches on a piece of popcorn.

After a little exploring, I find it, enter Mom's credit card information, and settle in. It's weird, I usually love this movie to death, but tonight? It's almost irritating. But I don't think that's actually the movie's fault. I feel uncomfortable, no matter how I sit, it's like I have to escape my body somehow.

And then the movie gets to the weird scene where Will Ferrell's character is singing with Zooey Deschanel while she's in the shower, and I get that his character is supposed to be naïve or whatever, but it still creeps me out a little.

"Now, that's a woman." Dad chuckles, feeding himself another piece of the chocolate-covered popcorn. "Right, Ben?"

"Right." I try my best to act like I'm in on the joke, even though that couldn't be further from the truth. I wonder if they've ever seen through that disguise, if they've ever entertained the idea that I was anything other than their perfect son.

I don't like lying to him.

Or Mom.

I'm basically always living a lie. They don't really know everything about me.

And that's what I've been working up to tonight, or really, the past few weeks. It's the reason I didn't have an appetite, the reason why I couldn't really focus on anything over the past week. Christmas break seemed to glide by at a snail's pace because I promised myself it'd happen now, at some point over the break. Tonight feels like the right moment, even though I can't really explain why. Maybe I'm riding some magical Christmas high.

'Tis the season, I suppose.

Too bad I don't feel very jolly right now. Maybe I should've donned some more "gay apparel" to lighten the mood.

Some commercial starts playing, and a car company is running a sale for the "Ho-Ho-Holidays," and out of the corner of my eyes, I see Dad shake his head.

"Ain't right," I hear him mutter.

Mariam walked me through this half a dozen times; I just have to wait for a good moment, a lull in the night, when we're all feeling pretty good.

It was going to be fine; Mariam kept telling me that.

Everything was going to be fine and I was finally going to get this huge thing off my chest and it was going to be great and they'd respect what I was telling them.

And it was all going to be fine.

I keep telling myself that *now* is the right moment. Over and over again as the movie keeps playing and commercial breaks keep coming. But every time I open my mouth, the words fail me, and I can't force them out.

I shouldn't be scared.

But for some reason I am, no matter how much I've willed myself to not be. I can't get over this feeling. Maybe it's an omen or something. A sign that I shouldn't do this. Except I *have* to do this. I can't explain it; I just feel it inside me. And underneath all that, I really do think it'll all be okay.

It's cheesy, but I wait until the end of the movie, when everyone is together and happy and I see a smile on Mom's face.

Dad looks indifferent, but he pretty much always looks that way.

It has to be now. I can actually feel it.

"Hey, I wanted to talk to you two about something," I say, my voice really dry.

"Okay." Mom leans back on the couch, tucking her legs underneath her and balancing her head in the palm of her hand. "What's up?"

Dad reaches for the remote and turns the volume on the TV down.

"I . . ." I can do this. Just keep breathing.

There's that tightness in my stomach, like something is just twisting and twisting and it won't let go until the moment is over. And everything will unravel, and I'll feel free.

"I wanted to tell you two something."

Dad looks at me now.

This is it.

It's kinda funny actually; the script I wrote for myself, the one I typed in Word so I'd cover everything I wanted to, it's just totally gone from my memory now. Like someone zapped it all away.

Maybe that's for the best; maybe this is how I'll be the most honest with them.

If it just comes from *me* and not some rehearsed version of myself, maybe that will help; maybe that'll be better?

I tell them. Slowly.

At first, relief floods over me. I think I can actually feel myself relax.

I just wish that feeling could've lasted longer.