

Would You Leave It All Behind?

“Hey, watch where you’re...”

His coarse, yet ever-so-soothing voice allowed the sentence to linger before deciding to abort the thought altogether. His tension was slightly aggravating, but somehow homely. My gaze slowly trickled up, starting with his pristine condition Jordan Retro 6’s, I noted the defined musculature evident through his snug white t-shirt and ripped American Eagle skinny jeans. My heart skipped a beat as my gaze passed his thick and welcoming lips, and my eyes began to settle on his. The blue was light enough to provide a sense of safety, yet simultaneously dark enough to tell a story of a more sinister past. The dirty blonde curls that fell gracefully from his head in long strands were not only bountiful but sat ever so subordinate behind the dominance of his striking jawline. With soft orange freckles chaotically scattered across his face, I found myself lost in his masculine beauty, so lost I had almost forgotten I had just bumped into him.

“Well excuse me, I tend to be pretty damn clumsy, and that’s before the booze.” I had been coming back down the staircase of Rachael’s home in Miami, her favorite of the half-a-dozen she owned when I missed the bottom step and stumbled into the gentleman I now have the privilege of looking at.

“That’s all good, I feel you. Hey, my name is Ryan.”

“Sara.”

I could feel the beads of sweat forming, and I worried Ryan could hear my heart beating himself, even over the shouts of partygoers and the sounds of gangster rap blaring from the speakers. Everything about his tone was damn near seducing me, and I struggled to focus my eyes to find his. Our eyes locked yet again, I gave a tempting grin, and he returned with a sly

smirk, and then my mind went blank. Nervousness didn't seem like the right emotion here, I mean I'd had a couple of boyfriends and guys definitely didn't scare me these days. So why was it so hard to even look at this one?

"Hey Sara, can you come help me mix drinks in the kitchen!" I heard Rachael's voice from the other side of the foyer and into the massive kitchen. With one more seductive glance, I turned my back to Ryan and proceeded into the kitchen.

In the kitchen there were at least 25 people crowded around, waiting for Rachael to mix and dispense their beverages. Although being quite the partier, she still had a touch of OCD and preferred to mix the drinks so nobody got either too drunk or not drunk enough. Knowing the appropriate allocation of liquors, juices, and candies, I started grabbing ingredients and a stack of red solo cups and took my place at the bartop counter next to my best friend.

"Hey girly, thank you for coming so fast. Look at all these alcoholics lined up." She had a subtle slur to her words and cherry-red cheeks. "Where'd you go? Last you said you were going upstairs to hook up with P.J. but then Remy told me she saw him leaving like a couple of minutes after that."

"Yeah, his mom called him and she was kinda freaking out. So then I found Jeremy in the hallway and made out with him for a while to keep me busy, but I got bored so I came back downstairs and ran into an unfamiliar face." I didn't want to come right out and ask if she knew Ryan, even though I could have been inseparable since kindergarten amidst our various disagreements over the years. Still, it was rare to find an individual at one of Rachael's parties that I didn't recognize, this could mean he's a personal guest and completely off limits, but even then I'd usually know.

“Oh, who was he with? Did you happen to catch his name?” She didn’t seem to be expecting anyone out of the ordinary, but also not necessarily surprised to hear that there was. Rachael often existed in her own world, and although she hated people messing up her house, she didn’t necessarily pay attention to what happened within either.

“He said his name was Ryan, but now that I’m thinking about it, he wasn’t really standing with anyone. I’m not sure if he was walking by or waiting on someone. It was sorta strange now that you mention it. I don’t know, we just kinda bumped into each other, said sorry, and went our separate ways.” I wasn’t quite sure why I had left out so much detail of the interaction. Yet somehow it nearly pained me to realize I had spoken so little of our moment, but it felt like so much more than just two people bumping into one another at a crowded house party.

When I had reached the bottom of the staircase and our bodies made that initial unexpected contact I hadn’t noticed which direction his body had been facing beforehand, I was just so mesmerized by his stance and demeanor. Once I’d faced him head-on it seemed as if all the other facts of the occurrence simply faded around me. The party, the pressure radiating from my left side where I’d first felt his touch, and the entirety of my life seemed to become nothing but distant memories of the past.

“Oh well, I’m sure you’ll see him somewhere around here again. The night is still young baby girl.” That’s why Rachael is my best friend, her optimism.

I assisted with the pouring of drinks for roughly 25 minutes or so, and once everyone appeared satisfied I quietly slipped away. Wondering the halls of the 9-bedroom, 5-bathroom mansion, I started to realize the foolishness in my hopes of finding Ryan again. The party was huge, as they all were, and for all I know he’d left by now. Just as I was beginning to question my better judgment, I caught a glimpse of perfection standing near the fireplace in the upstairs

living room. Before having the chance to consider my options, our eyes were passionately interlocked yet again and he broke off the conversation he'd been only half attentive towards with a few biker guys.

"Hiya stranger thought you might've drowned in the alcohol." His witty humor seemed to make his soul only softer.

"Oh yeah, it was total chaos, but I made it somehow." Humor wasn't always my strong suit, but every good thing had to start somewhere right? I wasn't sure how to proceed and wasn't even sure if the conversation was what he craved.

"Sara." The strength and desire within his voice pulled me to be careless and naive to the rest of the partygoers around us. The amount of intensity that could be packed into two measly syllables was almost terrifying, all I could do was gaze up hopelessly. His impatience began to weigh and it was evident now that I had no clue what I was doing. Nevertheless, it was like he already knew all the right things to say and do.

"Lemme take you somewhere, I promise I'll be respectful, but I also promise you'll have more fun than you ever have in your life." And without hesitation I was riding shotgun in his 1964 Ford Mustang, letting my thoughts flow naturally, and immediately feeling like I'd known him forever, like this place in the shotgun seat of his car, has always been my spot. Better yet, an undeniable urge to ensure it would always be my spot.

After we'd left the party, Ryan had said he wanted to go for a drive and we began on the dwindling roads of Rachael's hilltop estate and neighborhood. We talked of our deepest dreams and desires, how I longed to be a social worker for troubled rich kids like myself, and he desired the lifestyle of owning a clothing store, but was sure he'd never live up to it. It saddened me to hear his certainty, and even after a few attempts at boosting his confidence in the end, I assured

him that no matter what he lived up to, he'd be the best at it. Just two overly wealthy kids, yearning for a simpler life than this. I went deep into my childhood, even sharing how my father overdosed in front of my very own eyes when I was only 11 years old. I told him how my mother had become both my best friend and my superhero after his passing. She ensured I didn't follow down the same path as my father, the lawyer for criminals. Nevertheless, there was a certain comfort and understanding underneath the roughness of his words, and I felt as if he could listen to me for hours. And he did, realizing it had already been two hours of cruising the same neighborhood, we began joking about worries someone would call the police about burglars scoping the place out.

Eventually, we made our way to the interstate, and for how fast we were moving, I felt so safe. Cruising at a speed of around 110 miles per hour, I felt as if the world around me could be crumbling, and I could still be confident I'd come out surviving and strong. I was Ryan's girl. We'd spoken so few words to one another at the party, but once we had that fresh Miami air I opened up like a book to him, and he to me. Learning the mini details as we go, we eventually got around to middle names and birthdays, but not before we discussed lifelong goals, morals, and virtues we live by daily. We slowly pulled off the freeway, and then down a secluded path into a wooded area, in an area unfamiliar to me. Ryan seemed to know the route and never let the odometer go below 50 miles per hour. Driving along the uneven dirt road, the trees around us grew thicker and thicker. The lights from the freeway disappeared from view, and the illumination of the moon would be soon to follow. Not for a moment feeling danger, the path got darker and darker as we drove further from the main road until we were surrounded by complete darkness. The only light to navigate us is shown from the headlights of the Mustang.

We were in pure blackness for just a brief moment, and then such giant, beautiful, and powerful beams came into view. It was hard to make out what I was seeing at first, but then I could visualize it. A peaceful lake in the middle of nowhere, with the glistening moon reflecting elegantly against the water below. The car rolled to a stop and he shifted the gear to park.

Looking at me with more love in his eyes than I'd ever received in my 26 years on this Earth. He grabbed the back of my neck, softly at first, pulling my lips to his, then applying more aggression with his grasp. When we finally pulled away he looked down at me with his mesmerizing blue eyes and pondered out loud.

“Skinny dip?”

“Hell yeah!”

The water was warm and we waded around for quite a while. Sneaky picking me up and throwing me, Ryan's charm made the time fly. As we floated on our backs, fingers interlocked, gazing up to the stars, I felt a soft pang in my stomach.

“Damn, I'm kinda hungry. I haven't eaten since before the party.” And almost as if already planned, he scooped me up from the water and carried me back up to the car. Quickly grabbing some towels from the trunk, we dried off and redressed and I hopped back into my place as the shotgun rider. We laughed and joked all the way to a tiny busted-up diner at the edge of town. As we pulled into the parking lot I could see only 6 bodies inside. A single waitress and a single cook, three truck drivers drinking coffee in a booth, and a middle-aged woman wearing scrubs eating breakfast after a seemingly long shift.

Ryan and I took our place up at the hightop bar and each ordered a root beer. I glanced up at the retro neon pink clock hung directly above the cash register and realized it was already

shortly after 4 in the morning. While eating our eggs and pancakes I noticed a slight shift in Ryan's demeanor. It was as if he'd seen a ghost.

"Hey, you alright?" I asked gingerly, unable to prepare for the response. It was so abrupt, straight to the point, and utterly sad.

"My mom died here. It was a burglary gone south. The official report leaves out the most gruesome details too. It says she was alone, but when those two men came in with guns I'll never forget my mother throwing me under the booth, watching her body fall to the floor lifeless after hearing all the gunfire. The second thing those reports won't say, the burglars didn't come to steal anything from the restaurant specifically. No, they were attempting to rob the King of Hashabar, a remote island in the middle of the Pacific Ocean. The men came to cut his arms off and take the ancient golden bands he wore around his wrists, but an innocent woman was murdered in the process."

At a loss for words, I grasped his hand intimately and followed his gaze down. Simultaneously, we both noticed his hands were shaking, and once I looked back up I saw tears slowly begin to form. He reached down to his pocket where he pulled out a Louis Vuitton wallet and laid a \$50 bill on the counter for the waitress. Alerting us that the total was only roughly \$14, he pitifully mustered to tell her to keep the change, and I followed to the car with one my arm looped through his.

Back in the confines of the vehicle, he burst into heavy streams of tears for a few moments, then the tears slowly faded away. "I apologize for my behavior, I haven't been back here since and I just needed that closure I guess." He then started up the engine and pulled off.

Back on the road, the clock now read 5:30 am, but I felt like I'd been with Ryan for a few lifetimes rather than a few hours. When we arrived at our last destination of the night, we pulled

into what appeared to be an abandoned amusement park. There were huge rides overrun by Earth's elements and crumbling structures stretching a few miles. Navigating the Mustang through the deserted paths of the park, he finally put the car in park at the end of the park. To the left, there was some sort of illusion attraction, a caved-in building with two 7-foot clowns keeping guard at the door. On the right, is a collapsed gift shop, with broken toys and dirty stuffed animals littering the floor. Looking straight ahead was a waterside clift with carts and ropes suspended above the waters. The ropes that held the transport carts led down to an island that also appeared deserted and overgrown.

We talked for a couple more hours, distinguishing how we could live out our hopes and dreams, together, making plans, and deciding we were soulmates. It was like a switch directly linking my brain to my heart had been flipped for the first time in my life, and if I left his presence it would switch back, never to be flipped again.

Around 7 am we began to see the horizon soften and the sun began to show its face. Watching the sunset in his arms, I knew nothing could ever separate us. My life was complete, and it was like the universe had just handed me my soulmate already prepared for me. My eyes began to flutter closed when his question not only intrigued me but confused me.

"Would you leave your life and everything behind to be with me? Or would you give me up forever to keep your life the way it is?"

"Well, I'd certainly be willing to make sacrifices to be with you, and I don't prefer life the way it is now, but I'm not sure what you mean by giving everything up." The fear in his eyes spoke louder than my words, and he held me tighter.

“I need to tell you something, and it will seem quite a bit shocking, but it’s true.” His face grew more serious than I’d seen before, and his voice went low and blunt yet again, just like it had in the diner.

“My mother and I were only at that diner to eat, I was small and hungry, and she was very compassionate, always putting me before herself. She was indeed an innocent woman killed in vain, but she did so by her family. My father was the man wearing the ancient golden bands around his wrists, known as the Bands of Osharma. In our homeland, Hashabar, Osharma was more than a simple founder, he was a symbol. You’ve likely never heard of Hashabar because it is not on most maps, and the nation chooses isolation from the rest of the world. You cannot travel to Hashamar unless granted permission, and particular transport. Osharma, like many of the people of Hashabar, had been fleeing the never-ending wars of the Middle East. Once just a sailor, he discovered this secluded island while lost at sea, noting its coordinates, he offered a selective amount of people initial transport to the island. From here, he established a governing body, and a royal throne, and stocked the island with whatever resources would be needed for indefinite survival. Now, Osharma had to do some not-so-holy things to accomplish the greater good and freedom of mankind he believed humanity deserved. So, he had workers steal thousands of dollars worth of goods and supplies from various countries. In turn, he offered refuge for them and their families on his island. However, with some of the gold he stole, we welded 4 golden bands to be worn on the wrists of the King, 2 to each wrist. Yet few people know why the King is where the bands are and that is because they contain a failsafe mechanism. See Osharma would have rather killed himself than be taken alive by any of the countries who so badly wanted him. He’d not only coerced their citizens and stolen from them, but he’d spilled many secrets obtained during these thefts to enemy nations to stir up some trouble. Putting

targets on others' backs took some of the attention off the target on his own I suppose. Anyway, because of this, he built explosives into 4 areas of the island in the event they were ever attacked. The civilians do not know, but the King is obligated to blow up the island, everything, and everyone on it to preserve our pride and prestige. The buttons are built inside the bands, and all 4 must be pressed simultaneously to rig the explosives. That night, when I was young at the diner, one of our enemies had come for my father. Being the 7th king to the throne, he was the guardian of the Bands of Osharma and these men had come to not only steal the bands but use them to destroy our home. We were in Miami, against the orders of the royal court because my mother had become depressed in our isolated homeland. After years of begging my father, he decided to show her and their child the world. Beginning in America, an unknown enemy nation began tracking us as soon as we entered international waters. They followed us to this quiet diner, which Father thought would be the perfect place to avoid attention, but they'd already gained it. When they attempted to grab my father, his soldiers jumped in, one of the men was shot and killed, and the other ran off with a bullet hole in his arm. We never found out who was responsible, but the King survived! Unfortunately, his Queen did not. Ironically, not even the Queen is supposed to know the secrets of the bands, so she'll never even know what she died for."

There was a brief pause and a moment of silence. Oddly enough, everything he'd said made sense, and I felt as if I would be foolish to even begin a singular doubt. Grasping onto one another with a force unlike any other, we kissed softly, passionately, and methodically. It was like that one kiss, sitting in this old-school Mustang, of an abandoned amusement park, with the Prince of Hashamar was exactly what my destiny was.

“I’m so sorry Ryan, what can I do? I-I love you.” Nearly shocking myself, I felt the validity of the statement. He gave off a soft chuckle and gazed into my soul with those piercing blue eyes of his.

“When we bumped into one another on the staircase, I almost got upset because I was trying to blend into the crowd, not stick out. But then, for the first time in years, I heard my mother’s voice. She’d said ‘Mind your manners, she’s worth it’ and then I saw you.”

“And here we are.” Intriguing how this stuff happens.

“Sara, I came here to get that final closure I needed. To see life in another country, and revisit the place where my mom died. It’s time for me to go home. I had to take this trip to get my mentality aligned because in 2 days I’m set to take over the throne from my father. He’s grown older and weaker, and he’s appointed me to step up. I just didn’t plan to find the love of my life. You know what they say though, “Mother is always right.”

Then his question made sense, would I leave it all behind or give him up? I thought of Rachael, my other friends, my family, and my pets back in Las Angeles, and realized I wouldn’t even get the chance to say goodbye.

“So, what do you say? I have to be at the chopper in the next two hours.” He paused to grab my face and hold our eye contact in an unbreakable manner.

“I love you, Sara, you’re my soulmate and I desire more than anything to make you my queen. Will you come with me?”