

With my head spinning, I fell on the sidewalk. Like a collapsing snowman, I crumpled one section at a time. It was slippery and I felt clumsy. Everything around me was shrouded in the silence of a fresh whitewash of snow, the air above me hushed and thick. One minute I was walking, with my shoes making a sound that reminded me of summer, a crunch crunching sound like cracked shells over the thin stamped layer of snow that was blanketing the sidewalk, it reminded me of walking at the beach. As quickly as I had noticed the sounds under my foot, the next minute, above me, through a small hole in the clouds the stars shone crystal bright, their light intense as each of them stared back at me with laughing glances. So many stars, leering, the sidewalk so cold and my body numb from the bitter chill that ate at my back, my legs, my head, I felt all over the pin pricks of the thoughtless cold, it didn't care what I felt. I was confused and everything rotated around me, my eyes struggling to keep up with the stars as their light began making circular patterns that made me dizzy, around and around, making loops that lit up brightly like halos. My eyes swam in their sockets, trying to trace the ovals of light as they went faster and faster. I couldn't get them to stop, even though they hurt as they spun. I was drunk. I could feel the heavy weight of alcohol in my blood, and I knew I was drunk from how my forehead felt clammy and my mouth jammed full of cotton balls. I was drunk because I could feel the almost empty rum bottle in my hand, it was freezing to the touch, yet I held it like it was a million dollars, a precious newborn baby. I knew I was drunk because I would rather hold on to the bottle and lay on the sidewalk than do something, anything about it. I chose alcohol before comfort.

Near my feet, snapping me out of my staring at the rotating stars, I heard voices. They laughed, giggled, talked excitedly like teenagers do when they are young, drunk and invincible. Loud, the voices shot above me like staggering rockets, aiming for the stars that were now sitting still for me, at least for a moment. Lying on the sidewalk, I forgot who I was, who I was with, whose voices were around me, was I with them, did I know them? Was I safe? But with my reoccurring circular spinning thoughts and the sudden rise of nausea in me, I giggled, just because. Just because. It really didn't matter after all.

Feeling a hand slip behind my head, my eyes opened. Oh my God, there he was, staring at me, my face drool laden and my cheeks flushed. I knew him more than he knew me, I knew him more than anything. He was the reason I was staring at the stars. It was him who had stolen his parents' coolers from their fridge, it was him who had taken the mickeys of rum and vodka from their liquor cabinet. I'd forgotten about him. I loved him, I wanted him, I just couldn't remember his name, but I had looked at him longingly for years across the crowded hallways at school and had sat behind him in class and smelt his musty smell of autumn. With him near, I felt murky and under a spell. I usually forgot what the teacher was saying when I sat behind him. But what was his name again?

Giggling, I heard shifting, unsure footsteps following each other then a scream. Looking to the side, Julie lay beside me, her legs high in the air, her arm impossibly behind her back, her face beet red and contorted from laughter. Just like me, in her hand she clutched a bottle of rum, tightly her fingers wrapped around the neck, each digit white from the

strain of keeping a hold of the bottle, keeping it upright. The bottle looked to be her baby, not mine. Seeing her, I laughed at the sight of her twisted frame. She looked funny, even though the sight of both of us made me worry from the implications of what it looked like. Were we all right? Were we ok with him as he stared down at us. We were drunk. We were sixteen and underdressed, and he looked down at us with a crooked smile and I had a sudden shudder of fear, of being stalked, being sussed up, taken advantage of. I kind of wanted to run, but I felt frozen to the sidewalk.

But then, looking at him, his eyes, I loved him as I felt the warmth of his hand tight at the back of my neck, trying to help me up, his fingers warm through woolen gloves. So what was his name anyway, his fingers' touch pulsating down my spine, the goose pimples on my neck and arm arcing like lightning flashes.

I heard more giggles, then a trashcan rolled by my head, a loud scream coming from inside. More people, everywhere, slipping on the sidewalk, stumbling out of garbage cans and out of snow banks. Everyone was plastered. I knew that from how everyone had snow in their coat collars and caked to their eyebrows and hair. I knew everyone was out of control by the way wet unlit cigarettes dangled from chapped red lips, and eyes that were unnaturally wide open with watery pupils bulging.

I needed to move, and suddenly upright, the spins stopped and I helped Julie up. I wanted to be cool, to act cool, not be as drunk, because I knew he was beside me and looking at me, and I hoped that I wouldn't forget the feeling of his hand on the back of my neck. Ever.

The Christmas lights, yeah, I remember, it was all about the Christmas lights. "Let's get some booze and walk around the neighborhood and look at all the lights," someone had said as we'd skulked around bored that afternoon. It was a fantastic idea. Nothing says Christmas like underage drinking in public. Phone tag, we spread the news, a game of telephone, the plan morphing from three or four people with a couple of beers to a rag tag bunch of what looked to be over ten, maybe fifteen, bottles clinking in purses and jacket pockets, an overall complete loss of composure.

Laughing, I caught up to Justine. Her hands were cold and I held them because she had puke in her hair. I felt sorry for her, her tears magnified by the Baby Duck Champagne that glistened on her chin and dripped from her hair. She was a mess yet she clutched at the bottle like it was her only hope, her puckered lips desperately searching for the long straw that dangled forlornly from the top of the bottle. A chick blindly searching for its mom. I felt sorry for Justine because her boyfriend was an asshole, walking behind us with the other guys, his voice more loud and obnoxious than any of the other guys who were throwing their beer cans into the trees, just because they could. I wondered why the guys all had cans, and the girls had big bulky bottles of hard liquor. And then I realized, it was because we had refined tastes. We were better than the guys. We weren't animals.

Walking, I saw his shadow beside mine, and I walked with him, and he talked and his cheeks glowed along with his eyes and he looked at me, and despite the fact that I could taste the acidic coolers rising in my throat, I'd never been happier. His name, I asked Justine what his name was, because I'd forgotten, and she laughed at me and slapped me hard on the shoulder, saying that I was a funny person.

“How could you ever forget his name... you’ve talked about him every day forever... you funny...”

His name. It rhymed with bark and tree, something about a forest and smelt like a river in summer. Well, that’s what I thought when he talked to me anyways, and I knew that I should focus on what he was saying, so that I could try and remember. Not thinking about his words probably made me look like an idiot, a dumb drunk girl. But the more he talked, and I looked at his teeth that matched the falling snow and lips that were redder than the brake lights of cars that passed us, I wondered what it would be like to kiss them, and as I thought about his breath, I could feel the snow melting under my sweater and sliding down my shoulders, trickling down the small of my back and into my underwear. My ass crack was freezing, and that is what I thought of as he held my hand as we looked at a house with pulsating lights at two hundred beats per minute. So many lights, my eyes watered and he might have thought that I was crying because he pulled back his hand. Too eagerly, I grabbed it back and mistakenly hit him with my bottle of rum, and he smiled and took a swig and I did the same, our lips touching as the mechanical Santa and his reindeer danced along with a song that we couldn’t quite hear over the sound of our pulsating hearts.

Oh my God he held your hand did you kiss him oh my God he’s so cute I’m so envious of you two are you like boyfriend and girlfriend what does he taste like... and Julie went on and on, and I glowed in my skin, my face warmer and redder than Rudolph’s nose. I wasn’t sure how I felt, I mean, I felt drunk and was getting wobblier by the second, but I still felt a small twinge of disappointment from it all finally happening, the anticipation too long and too great, and also knew that there was a good chance that no one would remember anything once we all passed out in our own beds and woke up to the sounds of our family’s fighting and loud voices beside the Christmas tree. I would’ve felt better if I remembered his name, and I thought I could feel it on the tip of my tongue as he stole another kiss behind a tree that sparkled with blue lights that lit up someone’s front yard. But then as he pulled away, I lost the thought and took a drink from the champagne bottle that had made its way into my hand, the liquid flat and full of floaties, not lasting a minute inside my stomach before coming cascading out on the pure as heaven white snow that I stood on. And then it was over. The snow ruined, people falling and getting dumber, girls making bad decisions and guys with wide eyes for the easy pickings. It was obvious and stereotypical, and as I threw up some more, I felt my thoughts coming back quickly, clearly, until someone said something about hair of the dog and I took a long gulp of vodka that killed me but soothed me, and brought his name back.

At home, I slouched on the front step under my family’s animated Christmas lights, shivering yet not wanting to go inside. My shoes, their surface was dulled by the cover of vomit from Julie and Justine, Mark, Samantha and Tim, yet not from me. Sick, everyone had walked in snaking side-to-side paths that made us look like zombies. Sure, the lights had been beautiful, and if you stopped long enough, you could hear the sounds of voices around fireplaces and could sense the smell of trees in the air. But even though bathed in the thick of pine and fir, we wouldn’t remember a thing the next day, despite our wake of bottles and snow angels, tipped over snowmen and piles of barf that littered our neighborhood. Merry Christmas, I was embarrassed for that. Looking out at the street, I

knew that maybe tomorrow would be ruined, for sure would be ruined as our faces emerged pale from our bedrooms, our hair matted and our mouths full of bile and dust that would make us u-turn near the Christmas tree and force us back to bed. None of us would be able to face the smell of a turkey without reliving all the alcohol again. We would conjure up stories of the flu going around, or maybe shrimp and mussels at so and so's house to cover over our hangovers, and for some of us that would work.

Against my shoulder, Julie sighed and burped, the smell of her perfume sweet in my nostrils, yet barely disguising the stench of the night that we'd lived. Laying across my lap, Justine snored loudly, and I smiled and lit a cigarette, knowing that this act alone would probably wake my parents, but I didn't care, because the alcohol made me bolder and made me feel more alive, stronger, older and impervious to rules and traditions of enjoying Christmas whether I damn well wanted to or not.

All three of us stayed outside until my feet felt blurry, how they stopped burning in pain from cold, that worried me. On the porch, I was in and out of consciousness, and there I dreamt of him who I'd forgotten his name, but his face rotated around and around along with the stars, and I hoped against everything else that he would at least remember walking with me in front of all the Christmas lights. I needed him to remember holding my hand, then pulling away, me grabbing back. I needed him to remember how our breaths collided and made our vision foggy as our noses brushed against one another. I knew that I would remember, maybe I wouldn't remember, well I might. Who knew? Someone would hopefully remember out of our group. Maybe. Someone?

I worried as I stood up and quietly opened the front door, barely rousing Justine and Julie once the door was open, just long enough to coax them into the house. In front of the glowing fireplace, they passed out in my brother's uriney smelling sleeping bags. That's how far gone we were, that the smell of my brothers did nothing to stop us from sleeping in their filth. Standing back from where my friends slept, I smiled as I took in the smell of our Christmas tree, the noble fir's sap that warmly filtered out into the air of the room, making everything feel fresh and positive, not monotonous and boring, like I felt Christmas to be. Oddly motherly, I put glasses of water beside Justine and Julie, and bowls at their heads just in case, and I sat at their feet on the fireplace mantle and watched their faces as the lights reflected on their cheeks.

I wasn't going to sleep, I'd decided that long ago. I didn't want the morning to come, none of us did, that's why Justine and Julie were huddled drunk in my living room, or our other friends that were passed out on front porches or in friend's bathrooms. Who knew where everyone had ended up. We'd hemorrhaged people one by one as we'd wandered around drunk all night, losing people one by one. Mark might still be passed out in the Manger at the community Church, Wes could still be asleep at the base of the gigantic penis that he'd been building in the elementary school yard. But that's how bad Christmas was, that people would choose laying in drunken states in pissy sleeping bags at friends' houses or braving the night outdoors under either the crisp light of the stars or beneath a blanket of falling snow. No one wanted the morning to come. Was every family as messed up as mine?

But I knew that even as I thought those words, that I knew that I had one of the better families. That's how bad that was, that I had one of the better families. No wonder we were all drunk.

None of us wanted to deal with Christmas anymore. The yelling, not meant words. So many fuckin tears and random shouts. I didn't want to see my dad, I was nervous of seeing what he would be like, his eyes shining back at me and immediately telling me what he would be like. Maybe he would be happy, maybe he wouldn't leave his room all day, ignoring the smells of turkey and hot chocolate, the sound of carols and voices crawling up the air ducts. Nothing had the power to rouse him or change him. Maybe his loud cusses would drown out our singing voices and we would all just sit and sulk in the thick air that his rants brought with them.

Rummaging through Julie's purse, my hands fumbled feebly with the contents, my fingers searching for the cool solid surface of a bottle, and after a long drunken search, I found it, although it was smaller than I'd hoped. But it was a bottle, and there, on the mantel of the fireplace with the mini liquor bottle of Drambuie in my hand, I watched my friends' faces flicker as they glowed under the light of the tree and fireplace, and only then did I realize that this moment was going to be the best part of Christmas. Nothing would top this exact moment.