

## Endearment

The overwhelming heat of the coffee seeped through the cold porcelain and ached against her hands. It seemed to her that everything had been ridiculously intensified in the past several months and she knew that with the coming months it would do nothing but heighten even more. Cold seemed to not simply just be a uncomfortable feeling to be cured by a sweatshirt but a complete ache that enveloped her entire body and clawed itself into her very being. Warmth wasn't easy to achieve and when it finally was reached with countless jackets, layers, and coats it seemed to escalate rapidly leading to extreme heat and leave her miserable. Aside from the physically ailments of chronic body aches the mental torture was one that she wasn't sure any human being had ever dealt with. Though she knew the thought of her being the most tortured human being in existence was the most selfish thought in her entire existence. With the worry, stress, depression, and raw fear all battling together her mind was a gruesome battle ground.

The palette of colors in the coffee shop seemed to ease her mood with the various shades of red's fading into deep maroons swirling with light browns and several focal points of the room painted dazzling blue. The large sculpture of blue dog sat on the end of the counter surrounded with arrangements of napkins and coffee additives.

She looked around at the crowd in the coffee shop studying each face. The ages of the patrons varied from college students slaving over text books armed with highlighters to graying business men and woman enjoying a calming coffee break before diving back into the world of business. Though all the tables were occupied and the air buzzed with many conversations the entire coffee shop seemed empty and echoing to her.

“Riley, you okay?” Broken from her trance by the sweetest sound she could ever imagine she looked across the small round table at Ken. Her long time boyfriend and now care taker had been the only utopia she’d ever had. For the last few years they’d been together she’d completely broken out of the shell that use to encase her and had even taken up modeling. She had immediately boomed into the modeling world taking the modeling empire by the throat.

Ken not only kept a smile on her face but he reminded her why she deserved to smile. He touched Riley’s heart like no other human ever had and she knew no other person ever would be able to. Not only did his looks still give her butterflies from his shaggy brown hair that swept back at perfectly imperfect angles with scruff painted across his face and wrapping around his bright smile, his personality was what won her over. He never once saw her as anything less than the most beautiful woman in existence and dedicated himself to keep her happy no matter the conditions.

She smiled softly at him and let her cold hand wrap around his, “Yes I’m fine just thinking.” His green eyes sparkled at her in competition with the bright shine of his smile.

“Penny for your thoughts?” his free hand lifted his coffee to his mouth with the steam rising and caressing his face.

She studied his features for a moment, and then took a deep breath, “Ken we can’t keep sweeping this under the rug. We have to talk about this and get it over with. We both know what’s happening.” Her fingers loosened from his and latched back on to her coffee mug.

Brows furrowing and a grimace sliding across his mouth Ken’s blood ran cold, “Riley is something going on?” He pushed the sleeves of his shirt up past his biceps resting his elbows on the table to lean closer to her.

A wave of irony ran over her sending chills down her spine with a laugh escaping out her lips. Her eyes darted up at him with the hairs on her arms standing up under her multiple layers of sleeves. “Is that some kind of joke? What do you mean is something going on? Ken everything is going on and you know it is. I can’t take this anymore. The thought of losing you and being absolutely helpless to the fact does nothing but beat me down more. No matter how hard I try I’m going to lose you and everything is going to be over. Everything I know and life as we know it will be over and everything will change and there’s nothing that anyone can do to change that. It’s eating me alive Ken.”

The corner of his mouth twitched slightly while he looked at her and took in everything about her. The color of her pale skin, her haunting blue eyes that seemed to cut through him every time he looked at her, the way his sweatshirt swallowed her up, how the fabric of her head wrap occasionally fell down brushing against her forehead to be met with an eager hand to tuck it back into place in fear of unraveling.

“Riley you’re not going to lose me. You know that. You know I’ll never go anywhere and that nothing, absolutely nothing, can stop me from loving you. Don’t you dare say you’re going to lose me Riley why would you even say that?”

A burning sensation scratched its way up her throat as tears bubbled up in her eyes. “Ken I’m dying and there’s nothing we can do about it. I’m going to be gone soon and you don’t deserve that. You deserve to be happy and you deserve the entire world served to you on a platter. You don’t need to worry about a dying girl. I’m not beautiful. I’m hideous now. You deserve the most beautiful, funny, charming, smart woman on the planet and that isn’t me. You don’t need to worry about something like me and you don’t deserve to be forced to take care of

me. I just want you to know that if you want to leave you can,” she paused to recollect herself from her oncoming tears, “I just want you to be happy and I can’t give you that if I’m dead.”

The sounds of the coffee shop buzzed and echoed like a loud siren around her as she pulled her hands off the table stuffing them in the front pocket of Ken’s sweatshirt. She turned her head down and closed her eyes while the edge of her headscarf slowly unraveled. Her scalp was exposed but she didn’t even care. She knew the patrons would be looking at it wondering why she was bald and why her skin was blotched with red marks that resemble burns. She knew they would be horrified if they knew her entire body was covered with the same disfiguring marks and that since her diagnosis they had been spreading and causing all of her hair to fall out.

She heard the chair across the table from her slide out from under it and she knew that he was gone. Not only was she doomed to a few more months of life but now she was doomed to live those months alone with not a soul in the world to comfort her.

It was for the best though Ken simply did not deserve to have to worry over her and to have that impending gloom of death lingering over his head.

Her pale thin fingers slid out of the pocket and wiped the tears from her eyes as a few dripped down onto the grey fabric of the sweatshirt. She focused on it as she realized the entire shop had fallen silent. She knew that they must have been staring at her wondering why she was so hideous but this was something she had grown accustomed to. She had once been one of the most famous and idolized models in the entire nation and even across Europe but now she was just a rotting body waiting to die.

Finally mustering up enough courage to look up and face the disgusted curious faces of the people around her she took one more deep breath and looked up. She was right in thinking

that they were looking at her because they were, but they didn't have the look on their faces that she had been so used to. The people around her studied her and eagerly watched her as if watching the climax of a movie. She looked around at them and realized they were looking down at the floor next to her.

She turned to see what they were looking at and was immediately shocked by what she saw. There knelt Ken on his right knee with a box in his hand extended towards her with a massive glistening diamond ring smiling at her. She gasped and looked back and forth from the diamond to him.

Before she could even muster up a question as to what he was doing tears slipped from his own eyes while his lips quivered, "Riley you say that you want me to have the most beautiful woman there is. That you want me to be happy and that you want me to have the entire world at my finger tips, but you don't realize that I already have that. I have everything I've ever wanted and I cannot tell you how happy I am. I've tried to write it down and it resulted in pages and pages of writing on how crazy I am over you. Riley you are my dream woman and nothing you say or do will ever change that. From the sparkling in your eyes, to the way your nose wrinkles when you laugh, to the way you snore, I just can't get enough of you and I want you to know that I'm never going to stop loving you. You're all I want and all I need and nothing can take you out of my heart. I love you Riley for better or worse, for rich or for poor, and no matter what your health is, I want you to be my wife. Until the last clock ticks its final tick on the final minute of the final hour in the final day of eternity I'll always love you, and still on after that I'll continue loving you. Riley will you be my wife?"

The sounds and sniffing around her echoed from the patrons and in that moment they were all connected. No different social classes, no different nationalities or different last names they were all one big family witnessing a true act of love.

Mustering all the strength she had she pulled herself up from the chair and fell into his arms. Through Earth and still on past the pearly gates she knew Ken would forever be by her side and just that thought alone was enough to sweep away every cloud in her skies.

In the dirty floor of a busy city coffee shop they made a promise to each other. They made a public act of undying love proving to the citizens, to all of humanity that love is still alive. No matter what ever happens in this world, love lives on. Even when our small lives blossom and fade away love will live on and only get bigger and better enveloping all that encounter it.