

THE WINDS OF CHANGE

I was about to leave the house when suddenly I felt like something was wrong. It all came to me like the wind. I remembered it all and my vision got blurry. I was trying my best to keep my balance and the only thing I could hear was my own heartbeat. I felt his scent, never so close, never so real. He was behind me. The eerie silence continued when suddenly: *creak...* A door behind me opened slightly. I slowly turned around – no one was there. Just an empty staircase and my ajar flat door that just waited for me to go back. I've been sleepless lately and at that moment realised I forgot to lock the door. Maybe it was just the wind. Neither landlord nor the janitor were around. I was helpless, but if there was one thing I knew than that's that I couldn't run away now, I had to see him to believe it. I slowly started going back to my flat. The old ornate staircase which I would usually just jump over in only a few steps without batting an eye never felt so long. Each picture on the wall, each flower in the vase in the corner and even the old clock on the wall felt alive. They were all glaring at me, waiting to see what comes next. I felt like a stranger in my own home again. I finally came close to the ajar door and with last bits of strength in my body I dashed the door open.

The flat was empty. I was alone, left with a wide-open window and a note next to it. The note just read:

"Don't flatter yourself. Did you really think it would be this easy?"

My heart was still racing. When I looked out the window I saw the same rushing crowd I always do. All walking fast, looking ahead of them, not turning for even a bit. Birds were still chirping even though autumn was fast to come. As the last moments of summer were shining through my window, there I was – nervously searching through the crowd, trying to catch a glimpse of *him*. When, suddenly, I noticed that there was a man in the crowd sticking out across the street. The only person standing tall and still, in the middle of the rushed bunch. Looking back at me. Suddenly an old lady bumped into him, dropping all her groceries. He was laughing and offered to help. As he was walking away with the lady he turned to look at me again, but I swiftly walked away from the window.

"As phoney as ever."

As I was looking at a calendar I realised how close the date was – 11th of September 2023. It was in five days. I knew he promised to find me in a year, but I couldn't believe that that lunatic actually went so far. Since last time I saw him I moved away from London to an old, small town in Canada. I was obviously foolish enough to think changing my name and living in another county with a random university student would be enough to hide. This is when I realised that no one was truly safe from him and that all the stories circling around about him were true. He is ready for everything and is willing to push himself to limits to get what he wants. Even though I had a feeling he would come for me eventually, I never could've expected for him to give this kind of warning. Why is he waiting? Why didn't he end this show right here and now? Why did he give me more time?

I immediately ran to my room looking for that old suitcase of mine. Finally, I found it in the bottom of my wardrobe. When I opened it the dust flew up revealing all the old photos I managed to save when running away a year ago. Photos of me and my mother, my friends, and even the photo of my favourite kitten playing in the sun. All those photos were so dear to me and it pained me I won't ever be able to see them again. Going back to London now is like begging to be found. Bottom of the pile revealed the photo I was looking for. There he was – Haiden Smith. Back then he wasn't as scary. It's

interesting that his looks haven't ever changed. Blond curls dropping to his broad shoulders all packed with the wide, sincere smile. I was standing next to him in the photo, trying my best to keep a straight face since his, now deceased, younger brother was making jokes behind the camera. Haiden was the sweetest man I've ever met, we dated for about two years. The picture was taken on our vacation to my home country Greece, just a few days before everything started turning for the worse. Constant calls and emails from his job drove him mad and he fell tired, eventually we started fighting on daily basis. His brother was always the peacemaker, but not even he could've predicted a huge fight and the messiest breakup known to men. After the breakup Haiden has gone insane and promised to take his revenge on me for leaving me at his lowest. He said he will give me a years time to hide, and that he will find me wherever I am and kill me. But if he doesn't find me in that period he will leave me be, I still don't get the point of his game, I guess he wants to make fun of me and prove something to himself to feed his own ego. I've been hiding ever since, with my new life, and new identity. On the back of the photo was a long note his brother wrote ending with words "I just hope you can understand Erisa, sincerely Francis Smith." Hatred for both of these *boys* boiled inside of me, but, *God*, how I love the sound my old name, I really would give anything to go back to the-

"Aella!? What's going on here why are both the window and the door wide open?!" An angry voice with a thick German accent yelled from across the flat. I quickly put the pictures back.

"Lotta you're home early. I tried cooking again but it didn't go well, I opened everything up so it airs out a bit. We can get pizza again if you want."

"Maybe later." she said walking up to the window where the note was. *Please don't notice it.*

"Deal! How did it go with the biology test?"

"Don't ask... I'm tired." Saying these words she closed the window. *Wait, where is the note?* "Aella, I'm going to take a nap, wake me up by six if I don't get up by then, *bitte*. I have another test tomorrow. Another all-nighter awaits!" – "Got you!"

She went to her room. The moment she closed the door I jumped up and hastily searched around for the note. It was nowhere to be found. What's going on? Did she take it without me noticing that? No, no, no she would've asked about it. Did he come back and take it? No wait why would he do that? Wind? No, it's not blowing. Huh? "Oh, Finally." I whispered. It fell behind the radiator. I put it in a pocket.

Time was ticking and the tall-case clock in the living room just strook four. I started searching for a bus to Ottawa in hopes of catching one. Great there's one in an hour. I packed up most of my things in the suitcase, but before leaving I ripped out a piece of paper from Charlotte's notebook.

"I am sorry, liebe Charlotte, but I have to leave. Something happened back in England and I must go back. I know it's sudden, but I will call you later and explain everything. Please forgive me for not having a proper goodbye, but I just couldn't take it now. P.S. If you don't wake up in time to study today don't be too harsh on yourself, I'm sure you will do well in anatomy, like you always do. Good luck! - Aella"

Then I left. Fastest way to get to the station was across the bridge and through the park. I should be there just in time. Walking fast I tripped a few times; I didn't know where I was. *He can't catch me now.* I began panicking, turning around every few minutes to check if someone was following me.

When I arrived at the bridge, I was out of breath looking ahead of me. Sun was still in the sky giving me the strength to keep going. The same way I looked at that rushing crowd earlier I was now looking at the river. It was fast and unpredictable, small, yet witty. Water sprayed all around big rocks protruding out. I started to fall jealous of the river. No matter how small the river is it kept going, circuiting each obstacle, making it look so easy. But it did even more – as it splashed around it made the rocks shiny. The river embraced each obstacle making itself glorious and strong. In that moment I realised what a fool I was, sitting around doing nothing for a year because I thought my glory days were over from the moment I packed my bags. New beginning was supposed to be just that – a beginning, not the end of my life. In that moment I felt a soft breeze messing up my curly hair after so long. I finally caught my breath and kept walking. The park was empty. Gorgeous tall trees each forming a unique shadow on a ground.

“I see the winds of change haven’t reached you, have they?”

Then I felt a metal gun tip on my back, I froze realising all is over. Haiden was behind me.

“You know I always keep my promises, love.”

I couldn’t run away anymore. Tears started to drop down my cheeks as I remembered the time I was the one behind the gun. Then I was as still as I am now, finger on the trigger. Moments away from shooting through Francis Smith’s head.

The date is 16th of September 2022. Birds were still chirping even though summer was fast to end. As the last rays of the hot summer Sun shined through the curtains Erisa felt her face becoming warmer. The air in the room was stuffy and heavy, and Francis was kneeling on the floor.

“Erisa you know I didn’t mean it, please leave the gun alone. I will keep my mouth shut I promise. Please!”

“I’m sorry Francis but there isn’t much I can do right now. I told you to leave the documents alone.”

Earlier that day while Francis was enjoying his morning coffee he stumbled upon a mysterious folder. He knew Erisa and his brother told him it’s an important business deal and he ought not to touch it. The top secret sticker looked intriguing though... his curiosity got the better of him. At that moment he found out both were working as spies, and that this vacation was nothing else but a killing mission. The target was a member of the French mafia, who came to Greece for an unknown reason. Right when he finished reading his brother entered the room. Francis was so shocked he couldn’t move. Haiden started yelling at him; “DIDN’T WE TELL YOU NOT TO TOUCH THAT!?” he explained to him that no one is supposed to know any of that, and that he will get killed if anyone found out that he knew about it. That’s when Erisa walked in. She exploded and dragged him into another room, locking the door behind her. Haiden was hitting the door begging her not to hurt him. But the only thing he heard in response was a loud gunshot, then silence.