

SICKLY SWEET



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Joy and I sat exactly opposite the entrance door of the café at a table for four. The bell above the door chimed as a couple walked in with two little girls who looked about the age of six. Immediately, one of the girls pointed towards us and squealed, "Mom, look!" My stomach churned as I tried not to look at them, or the humongous pink teddy bear with hearts all over its stomach sitting next to me, or Joy. Choosing a small café wasn't the best idea, for I could feel every other pair of eyes in the room turn towards me for the umpteenth time. Joy pursed his lips and beamed, as if he was holding back butterflies in his mouth. I closed my eyes, took a deep breath and regretted it the next moment as I felt my windpipe start to close. It was his overpowering perfume again and it was so familiar but I could not remember where I had smelled that scent before.

It was the exact moment when the waitress at the café set the plate of hot pancakes on the table that I remembered who Joy smelled like- Mrs. Rosy, from fourth grade. As he closed his eyes and breathed in the buttery smell that wafted off the pancakes, I slowly watched as his black curls unentangled into long, blonde strands of hair that went down to his waist. His complexion turned three shades paler, his full lips thinner, eyes much smaller and crueler and suddenly, I was a seventh grader in my school dress sitting opposite Mrs. Rosy during detention.

"Is everything alright, Simi?" she asked, slowly, and I felt a bead of sweat trickle down the side of my left cheek.

There was nothing but sheer malice in her eyes but she reeked of cherry blossom. The smell, so overpowering, made me nauseous and dizzy. She had just finished her long lecture of how obnoxious and careless a student I was and I knew what was coming. Unable to speak from the nausea, I would nod my head and she would assign me two essays and five hundred lines of, "I will not waste my teacher's time in class by asking questions" which I needed to finish by the evening.

"Is everything alright?" I snapped back into reality to find Joy staring at me. I regretted telling him I liked floral scents the last time we met.

"Sorry, I zoned out a little bit." I said, sitting up straight. He flashed his full set of teeth, white and shiny, and said, "You look cute when you zone out."

He chuckled and grabbed the bottle of maple syrup. I pulled the plate of pancakes towards myself. I liked the smell of butter. Perhaps it would make me less nauseous.

"You were saying?" I asked, as he held the bottle of syrup upside down with both hands, and made vertical lines of syrup on the pancakes. He started blabbering again about that one time he got intoxicated at a party and how that was the best night of his life. He now moved the bottle horizontally until the top of his pancakes were slathered with maple syrup.

All on a sudden, he stopped. He set the bottle aside, rested his elbows on the table, cupped his face and said, "Enough about me. Now tell me about you." He batted his long eyelashes and looked at me with sheer curiosity.

"Well, what do you want to know?" I

asked because first, I did not know where to start answering that question and second, the plethora of notifications that had flooded my Facebook since I met him three days ago and agreed to hang out with him as a friend were obvious indications that he had done his research well.

"Everything." He said and smiled. I could feel my bile rising up my oesophagus.

He cut out a small piece of a pancake and shoved it in his mouth. He looked at me with the same curiosity as he chewed before grabbing the bottle of syrup once again.

Sighing, I started telling him how busy my schedule was the following week, making sure I made it obvious that there was no way I could squeeze in another "friendly" meeting anytime soon. I told him how my midterms were approaching faster than I had time to prepare for them, trying my best not to stare at his plate while he poured and poured syrup until his soggy pancakes were sitting in a pool of syrup. I looked away from him, his plate of diabetes, the disturbingly pink teddy bear and straight into the eyes of the weather man describing the forecast on the television hanging on the wall. He followed my eyes, looked at the television and then back at me again, smiling, confused. I said I liked watching the weather forecast, which was possibly the dumbest thing I had ever said to anyone, but he seemed to find it amusing.

What I didn't tell him was that the back of his head looked like that of a man's who I once loved and that his eyelashes too made every girl envy him. What I didn't tell was that the last time I was on, what turned out to be, a date,

the two of us were sitting at a table of two and I was running my toes against his shin bones. That he never bought me a teddy bear, or wore floral perfumes, or went out of his way to impress me, but it simply did not matter because I was head over heels in love with him. That I was, still, head over heels in love with him.

What I didn't tell him was that as I was telling him about midterms and deadlines, his face kept transforming into messy black hair, warm honey-coloured eyes, cheeks that fit perfectly in my palms and I found myself staring into my past, telling the love of my life not to call me anymore.

"Did you zone out again?" He chuckled. I looked at him, cheeks flushing.

"Yeah, just lost my train of thought," I said, looking away.

Joy cut out a bigger piece of pancake, syrup dripping as he lifted it with his fork and put it on his mouth. He frowned as he quickly chewed and swallowed it with some difficulty.

"Oh my God, this is so sweet!" He exclaimed. "This is too sweet!"

He looked at me, and said, "I think I am going to be sick!"

The bell chimed as a few boys in their twenties walked in and did not try too hard to hide their smirks when they saw the teddy bear. I looked at the stuffed toy, the soupy pancakes, the weather man and Joy with his transforming face and said, "Me too."

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