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Candid

Click.

She is leaning against a tree reading.

Click.

He walks over.

Click.

They hug and walk away holding hands.

Click.

I put my camera back into its case and walk nonchalantly away. I am the queen of candid camera. Nobody here has the slightest idea of what I do.

When I get home I go to work. I have converted my walk-in closet into a darkroom. As I stand and develop my pictures I inspect each one.

A girl looking off in the distance, her lips pressed together in a straight line.

The star quarterback holding hands with the president of the Gay Straight Alliance behind closed doors.

Then there's *her*. Of all my subjects, *she* is my favorite. I watch time progress as she reads.

Then he shows up, and I cringe. He who kills me inside. Now they're holding hands. A fire wells up inside me and I take a laser light to his head, distorting the image of his face. Later, I may burn it.

I look through my pictures one by one. I find one where she's laughing at a joke only she has heard. I touch her face and smile along with her. I hang it upon the wall of my favorites, most of which are of her.

“Erika! Dinner!” My dad calls from downstairs.

“Coming!” I reply.

My parents also have no idea what I do. They are as clueless as everyone else.

“So how was school today?” asked my mom.

“Good. Mr. DellaVecchia is teaching us trigonometric functions.”

“Sine, Cosine, and Tangent.” Recited my dad.

“Yurp.”

It went on like that for a while. Dinners at my house are usually the same. Talk a little. Eat a lot. Clean up. Go our separate ways.

After dinner, I went back up to my darkroom.

“Christine...” I whispered.

Around ten o’clock, I went to sleep. Needless to say I dreamt of her.

The next morning, I woke up to an inane beeping. Sigh, Another day of life. I roll out of bed and throw on a purple T-shirt.

I throw on a pair of jeans, and pull through the tangled mane of dark brown mess that I call my hair. I fly down the stairs and into the kitchen, just as my mom grabbed her purse and started out the door. “Have a great day at school,” she said, noticing me.

“Have a great day at work,” I replied.

And with that she was gone. This was our normal morning routine. We feigned interest as we went our separate ways, both usually still half asleep. I grabbed a granola bar from the cabinet. It’s time for school. I grab my camera and bag and catch the bus.

It’s raining today. No outside photos. Darn. In Choir we are sitting in a large circle. There are no more empty seats, so Christine is right next to me. I sing as beautifully as I can, in a hope to get her attention. Alas, when class is over, she still has not said a word to me. I have butterflies in my stomach from hearing her angelic voice. But when he shows up, she runs to him. They leave together much as they did yesterday.

I left class with an empty feeling in my heart. This went on almost daily for weeks. Finally, one lonely day in November, I decided it was time to do something. But what?

I step outside the choir room, and am hit with a wall of giggles. Three girls, Brittany, Katerina, and Christine are chatting by the bulletin board. When *he* walks up Christine leaves. Brittany and Katerina disperse as well. I walk up to the bulletin board to see what's up there.

I know for a fact that Christine is very into the music program here. Why shouldn't she be? She has the most angelic voice I've ever heard. Scanning the board for anything I could possibly do, I see nothing. Then a bright pink flyer catches my eye. It's an advertisement for the school musical.

No way. Nuh-uh. Aint gonna happen.

I pull the flyer off of the board and slip it into my pocket.

At lunch I feel the flyer stabbing me. It's a constant reminder of the gutwrenching feeling I try to ignore. Finally I can't take it anymore, so I excuse myself from the lunch room. I head down to the choir hallway. I spend a lot of my time here because there is a little alcove within an alcove that fits me perfectly. And without knowing I was there, you'd never see me.

I sit down in my alcove's alcove and place a rectangular mirror at just the right angle to see out without having to peek my head around and be revealed. I pull out my camera and wait. This is the only place I'll get good pictures today because of the rain.

A few minutes later, a couple rounds the corner. It's *them*. They hold hands as she leans against the wall, and he leans against her. I begin telling the story.

She is laughing.

He kisses her gently.

He grabs her ass.

She pushes him away.

He is angrily whisper-yelling.

He storms off, leaving her there.

I can't help but smile at the fact that he's gone. But I'm a little sad that she's upset. I can't do anything about her sadness, and soon she sulkily shuffles away.

I'm up late that night, sitting in my dark room. That day's pictures were already developed. I sat with the flyer in my hands, the luminosity of it dimmed. I strained to see the words. The play was *Beauty and The Beast*. Tryouts were tomorrow afterschool, in the auditorium. Information was in room 228, Mr. Leinen's room.

I plucked my all time favorite picture of Christine off of my wall. She was sitting in the grass outside of the school. She had a book in her hand and the wind in her hair. She looked so peaceful; so beautiful. I gently touched her hair, ran my finger down the side of her face. I whispered to her, "I love you, Christine." My lips barely touching the photo, I kissed her softly.

I woke up the next morning, not with butterflies in my stomach, but instead a team of jackhammers covering my insides, all on the highest setting. I rolled out of bed, shutting off my alarm. I stood in front of my full length mirror in my white wife-beater and red boxers. My figure was not the most flattering, although, I probably wasn't the best judge.

I threw on a grey tank top, black skinny jeans, and a black zip-up hoodie. I zipped up my knee-high black converse, and brushed my hair and teeth. I did not want to face my mom this morning, because I was afraid of what would come out. If my jackhammers were torturing my insides, imagine the verbal vomit that would come out if I tried to talk. How the Hell am I going to do an audition? Oh well.

As soon as I heard the door close, and I saw her car pull out and drive away, I walked downstairs. I grabbed a granola bar and opened it. Just as I was about to bite in, I saw the time: 6:48. Shit! I grabbed my bag and my camera, and ran out the door, just barely making the bus.

In choir she sits next to me again. I can smell the vanilla scented shampoo in her hair. It takes all my energy not to touch her. I try not to look at her, because I know I'll never stop. I can't help the glances though. The end of class is bittersweet. The pain and inner turmoil is gone from the conflict between what I want to do and what I can do, but the smell of vanilla lingers in my nostrils, and I can't help but wish that she was by my side again.

I shake my head as I approach Mrs. Carter.

"Something wrong, Erika?" she asks. I snap back into the world of jackhammers.

"I – uh – are you – erm – 6th period – busy?" oops. I forgot about the verbal vomit. I inhale deeply, plan out my question carefully, then exhale. "Are you busy 6th period? I was wondering if I could use the piano."

Mrs. Carter laughed. "You're in luck. 6th period is my lunch, and I spend it in my office. You may come and use the piano if you would like."

"Th-thank you." I stutter, and scurry out.

I then ran to Mr. Leinen's room. When I arrived it was empty except for him. Thank God. I knocked, entered, and asked for Theatre information.

"A little last minute, don't you think?" He asked.

"I know, I know. Sorry. I'll be more punctual next time." Reluctantly he gave me a packet.

I skipped my 6th period lunch and went to the choir room. I sat at the piano, and played an A. I sang "Someone Like You" by Adele as well as I could. Then, deciding I didn't like it, I played a D#. I sang through "My Own Worst Enemy" by Lit. I definitely liked that one better. I practiced that song about 6 times. After that, I went through my classes, not doing my work, but instead reading and rereading my monologue. It was an excerpt from *Beauty and The Beast* where the Narrator tells the story of the Beast.

When the bell rang dismissing us from our last class, I shuffled my way to the auditorium. I was not the first, nor the last to audition, but instead nicely placed in the middle. As soon as my audition was over, I left. Once home, I went up to my room. I opened the door to my darkroom and realized I hadn't taken any pictures today because I was too wrapped up in auditions. Damn. So instead of my normal routine, I ate and laid in bed, in the dark, thinking. The next thing I knew, my alarm was ringing in my ear.

At school that Friday, there was a crowd of people huddled around the cast list. After they dispersed, I looked. Yes! I got ensemble! Perfect. Now, to look for Christine Rivers. She got Belle, of course.

At practice that day, I congratulated Christine. She thanked me and walked away. I assumed she was being modest, and that she had gotten so many congratulations, she was a little bored by the people.

As the weeks passed, I talked to Christine a little more each day. At first, just a "hello" here and there, then, a "how are you?" was thrown in. Soon, she began addressing me with a "hello" and a smile. I swear I could fly by the end of practice each day.

I didn't have much time to take pictures at practice, and that fact bothered me. So one day, I snuck up the stage crew ladder, and hid behind the spotlights in the ceiling. I snapped a good two dozen pictures that day. Some while she was singing, some between scenes when she was herself, and even a few of her in her grand yellow ball gown. I loved all of them, because they were her.

I did everything I could to get close to her. I talked to her almost every day. I took more pictures than usual, so that I had more of her at home. Home. Home is where our relationship bloomed. I would talk to her, unafraid to

tell her everything. She loved me. The pictures proved that. I knew she loved me. So, by opening night, I was ready.

By the time the curtains opened on opening night, she had added me on Facebook, called me a friend, and probably knew my name. If she didn't love me, why would she bother doing that? It was her way of saying that she was ready to love me where the world could see, and not just at home in my darkroom.

When the curtain closed for the last time that weekend, and everyone cried and gave each other hugs, I took my chance. We loved each other, and I was not about to let this slip by. I was not hiding in my dark room anymore. I ran up to Christine, hugged her, and kissed her right on the mouth. I was floating. My dreams were coming true. We loved each other and now everyone could see it. I tried to entangle my fingers in her hair as I inhaled the vanilla.

But she pushed me away. My fingertips brushed her face as I fell to the ground. What had happened? Why did she push me away? She loved me. I knew she loved me.

“EW!” She screamed wiping her mouth on her sleeve. “You little creep! Get the Hell away from me!”

“I...”

“I said go away! I never want to see you near me again! You hear me? Never!”

Tears pricked at my eyes. I scrambled to my feet and ran offstage. I didn't bother grabbing my things.

When I got home, the tears were flowing freely, and large sobs made their way out of my throat. In my darkroom, I ripped up all of my pictures of Christine. How could she do that to me? I loved her. She was supposed to love me, not throw me away. I loved her. I *loved* her...

Running to the basement, I was blinded by anger. I grabbed a rope and tied it around a support beam. I scrawled a note to my parents on the wall with chalk. Standing on a chair, I tied the rope around my neck. I took one last look at the note. Then I kicked the chair out from under me, and hung there. The last thing I saw was her face behind my closed eyelids.

I whispered to no one, “I will always love you Christine...”