

Done with the scant amount of unpacking required, primarily his day to day wardrobe comprised of black t-shirts a few pair of khaki pants and well-worn regular fit dungarees, Marshall surveyed what would be his home for the next ten weeks. He liked what he saw, not that he was a stranger to the view or to the enveloping hug of Audrey's couch. Although not an official resident, his status had been elevated from that of mere visitor. He would miss Brooklyn. Manhattan had not been his home address since he lived with roommates for a few years after college. This was followed by a year in Astoria, Queens in his first solo apartment and then a move to Brooklyn where he'd been ever since. He wondered if the temporary change in zip code would have an effect on his writing style, infuse it with heightened energy. Other things were pondered as well, but he tried not to dwell on them as they were the stuff of pointless daydreaming.

He reminded himself that his presence was the result of Audrey needing him to be here, by no means the same thing as *wanting* him here. Desire and dependency were not identical twins, though it was not unheard of for one to segue into the other. Still, he would resist the urge to grow ensconced in a set-up that came with an expiration date.

His cell phone rattled and hummed, indicating receipt of a text message. Minutes earlier he had left a news breaking voice message for Chase. Chase sometimes joked that he was working on a book chronicling Marshall's eternal quest to swing his

relationship with Audrey from the platonic end of the spectrum to the end featuring naked exchanges of bodily fluids. A stellar wisecrack was likely about to be read. As it turned out the message was far from humorous and the sender was not Chase.

*Heard about your new living arrangement. More proof of what you'd deny to my face if given the chance. Gotta go. My man's waiting for me. Enjoy your ready-made family. You'll learn the truth someday. SHE WILL NEVER LOVE YOU.*

He pressed delete, refused to let her words irritate him. For someone who claimed to have moved on to a more fulfilling relationship, Sarah did an impressive job of keeping tabs on him and expressing disdain for his actions. Perhaps the man waiting for her was fictitious. He reflected on the last sentence of her message. It being spitefully intended did not remove the possibility of its being true.

Most people surrendered fairy tale hopes in exchange for cookie cutter lives. If a convincing image of happiness was presented to those looking in from the outside, success was claimed. But some opted for chaos at the expense of the facade of tranquility. Perhaps for them the appeal of the race was stronger than that of the finish line, the thrill of the chase more valuable than actually catching up. Was the notion that Audrey would never love him in the most gut wrenching definition of the four-letter word precisely what made her his perfect woman, the carrot just beyond reach of his bite?

Another text message arrived before he could answer the question. He had asked it of himself often without being able to resolve the matter, so this interruption could not be blamed. On the screen he found an example of Chase's ability to say much with little.

*No need to worry about safe sex so live and love dangerously.*

"Marshall, could you get me a glass of water."

Audrey had woken from her nap and was summoning him via the intercom system they set up. It was a baby monitor employed well in advance of baby's arrival that they used for one way communication. One way communication was a fitting match for a one directional love affair. Since he could not respond through the receiver, Audrey would have to trust that her message was delivered and her request would soon be accommodated. Such trust was well founded. Where else would he be but there for her, at the ready to quench her thirst while his own lips remained parched from lack of her kisses?