

The Magic of a Moment

I take a deep breath and dig my toes into the cold sand. I shakily exhale and clench my fists. Breathe in, breathe out. Clench, unclench. I am going to collapse. My body is a ticking time bomb.

Ever since I arrived in May Beach, Florida, I've felt like a leaf about to fall from a tree at the end of autumn. Dried-up, cracked, dangling by a thread. I'm almost gone.

My old hometown, New Orleans, was just struck by a hurricane. So my mom decided to move to another city along the gulf just as hurricane-prone. Not the most logical decision, but she was drunk at the time. She's been a hopeless alcoholic ever since my dad died. So basically, she's always drunk.

I shake these thoughts out of my head as I solemnly shuffle along the beach. It's late, past 11, and I'm about to spend my New Year's Eve alone on a deserted beach with nothing but the moonlight, my iPod, and the ocean for company. Most people are out partying, looking forward to the promise of a great new year. I'm just gloomily moping, dreading yet another year of bad grades, beer bottles, and broken family ties.

I'm so deep in thought I nearly trip over a full bottle of Jack Daniels, half buried in the sand. I unscrew the cap and the familiar smell of home fills the air. Ew, gross. But... I check my iPod for the time. 11:58. It's New Year's Eve. Might as well. My mom does it. And she's still alive, so... I raise the bottle to my lips. I take a shaky breath and just as I'm about to take a sip, the bottle is pushed out of my hands. I shriek and jump back in shock.

"What are you doing?!" a voice shouts, shattering the silence of the night. Standing behind me is a boy, who looks about my age, 15 or 16. His light brown hair falls perfectly over his forehead. It's the same chocolate color as his eyes, which seem to be staring straight into my soul. He's wearing a black jacket, dark skinny jeans, and a couple dog tags. He bites his lip and crosses his arms over his chest. He's judging me, scrutinizing every move, every breath, every line on my face, every curve of my body.

"Uh... I dunno," I say quietly. Then I just stand there twisting my feet around and scratching the black off my nails.

"How old are you?" he asks.

"15."

"And drinking?"

“Well, I wasn’t actually going to... like... umm...” I stutter and stammer until we come to another awkward silence.

He shakes his head and looks down at the ground. Finally our eyes meet again.

“Uh, you know what? I shouldn’t be all up in your face like this. Sorry... I mean, I just have bad... memories... associated with like, alcohol... and stuff. I should be going. Have a nice New Year’s Eve.”

As soon as he says these words to me, he turns around to leave. But I can’t just let him go like that. This complete stranger just saved me from making the worst decision of my life. I have to hear his story, where he came from, why he’s here. I can’t let him walk away.

“Wait!” I shout. “I... never got your name.”

“Brody. You?”

“I’m Meagan,” I say with a smile. After all, he is pretty cute. He nods and starts to walk away again.

“No, wait! If you don’t mind me asking, what happened? In your family and stuff, with alcohol? My mom’s a heavy drinker. Sometimes... I think she loves her scotch more than she loves me. It’d mean a lot to hear from someone with a similar background.”

“Well, I don’t talk about it that much, but I guess it wouldn’t hurt just this once,” Brody sighs. “My family’s not that rich and we kind of live in a ghetto. There’s a blood stain on the street. It’s not the nicest part of May Beach. But we got by, and we were happy. Then my dad lost his job. He was really bummed and he went to the gas station one night to get a beer. The next night he got another. And the next night he got two. Before he knew it, he had taken up drinking again and six months later he died from alcohol poisoning. So from that day on I swore I’d never take a sip of liquor, ever. I... try to stop people from going the same place as my dad. So when I saw you here on the beach, I...”

“Stopped me. I know,” I interrupt. “I’m... really glad you did. I don’t know what I was thinking. I guess just wanted to celebrate New Year’s Eve. I don’t have much else to do; my mom’s passed out on the couch, so I figured I’d sneak out to be alone. I love the sound of the ocean, especially at night when there’s no one else around. It’s... soothing, huh?”

“Mm-hmm,” Brody says quietly. It seems he’s suddenly moved closer to me again. The moonlight reflecting off his face makes him look even more handsome. Flawless, even. He looks so perfect and on top of things; I never would have guessed he’s had such a hard childhood. His

eyes show no pain, he looks strong and determined. Ready to push forward, and tackle whatever life throws at him.

CRACK! A firework goes off in the distance, snapping me out of my trance. Brody seems to jump too, surprised by the sudden explosion in the stillness of the night.

“Hey, do you know what that means? Fireworks?” he says with a smile.

“It’s 2013?” I reply. Quickly, he pulls out his phone to check.

“Yeah, 12:00,” He takes a step closer to me. “Wanna help me think of a better way to celebrate New Year’s?”

I want to say something smart and witty but I can’t. My voice has vanished and my mind has gone completely blank. So I just stand there with my mouth halfway open looking like an idiot. I’m literally gawking at Brody, and for seconds that seem like hours, we stand there staring into each other’s eyes. I just met him, but it seems like we’ve known each other forever. I’d always thought I was alone in this world; I’d always thought no one had it as bad as I did. But apparently... I was wrong. Just these few minutes out here had changed me. I can turn out better than my mom. I can make better choices. I can do something with myself, be someone.

It’s weird to think that after years of teachers, counselors, and other concerned adults constantly trying to turn my attitude around, a random boy on the beach did it in just a few minutes. There’s something about him... and for the life of me I can’t figure out what it is. He makes me crack like ice, tremble like a leaf, but I still feel safe around him, like I’m wrapped in a warm blanket in front of a toasty fire. I don’t even know what I’m feeling.

Maybe I’m under a spell. This guy’s like a magician. Everything is perfect right now... the timing, the moonlight, the swoosh of the palm trees in the wind, what Brody said to me, the slight freckles on his nose... everything. I’ve never felt so strongly before, and I don’t know what the emotion is, but it’s strong, overpowering even. Right now, there’s nowhere I’d rather be than here in this moment, with him. I’ve had a couple amazing nights in my crazy life, but nothing beats this. I feel so energized, so radiant, so serene. There’s this calming electricity flowing through my body. Maybe it’s magic, maybe it’s lust, maybe it’s love. And it’s this something inside of me, something I can’t control, that makes me step even closer to him.

A faint firework, a small one, goes off in the distance. I’m sure it’s past midnight by now, but by my clock we still have time. I glance up at Brody. His expression is indecipherable, even though his face is literally 3 inches away from mine. He’s probably thinking the same thing I am.

“Meagan,” he whispers. “Promise me you’ll never try a bottle of beer. Ever again.”

“I promise,” I whisper back. And I truly mean it.

“Good.”

And suddenly his lips are on mine, and it’s just us two, kissing in the moonlight. My whole world goes silent, except for these little crackles I’m hearing. They sound like fireworks, but I’m not sure if they’re in my head or in the sky. Maybe it’s just sparks flying.

I stand on my tip-toes to deepen the kiss. Then he wraps his arms around my waist tightly, as if I’m going to be blown away by the wind. I feel so light and airy that I might be. Or maybe I’m floating. I don’t want to open my eyes to check.

With the icy water lapping at my feet and the wind tangling its frigid fingers in my hair, I still feel more alive than ever before. Brody rests his hand on the small of my back and I tilt my head. *So this is what heaven is like*, I think. I’m so carefree and happy, and I’m not really thinking about anything in particular. Just enjoying the night. And the kiss. Mostly the kiss. All my problems have been washed away, at least for now. For once in my screwed-up, miserable, dysfunctional, imperfect life, I feel perfection.

For this one magical moment.

All of a sudden, he breaks away. We stare at each other intently, and I can’t help but notice the shine in his eyes now. I know he’s still holding dark memories, dark secrets in those eyes. Yet, for a moment, I watch them disappear. He smiles at me and says softly, “Happy New Year’s.”

“Happy New Year’s to you too,” I say.

He does this cute half-smile thing and asks, “Where do you go to school?”

“I’m gonna start at May Beach High next week,” I reply.

“Oh, I go there. I’m a sophomore.”

“Me too,” I say.

We stand there in a comfortable silence for a few seconds, then he says, “So... um... I guess I’ll see you around?”

“Yeah,” I answer. “See ya.”

He turns around and starts jogging down the beach. I get the feeling that this isn’t the last time I’ll see him. That it’s only the beginning. And then I get the feeling that maybe my new life in May Beach isn’t going to be so bad. If I take the right paths and make the right decisions,

I'll be just fine. I'll get decent grades this year and help out my mom. I'll graduate high school and go to some cute little community college. With enough courage and motivation, I could totally do it.

I'm so deep in thought I nearly trip over the same bottle of Jack Daniels, half buried in the sand. I unscrew the cap and the familiar smell of home fills the air. Ew, gross. So I turn it upside-down and watch the sparkly brown substance flow away. Once it's empty, I chuck the bottle as hard as I can into the ocean. It shimmers like a diamond as it floats off into the distance. I watch it until I can't see it anymore. "Probably sunk," I say to myself. I hope it did.

Because life isn't about feeling sorry for yourself and drowning your problems in whiskey. It's about moving on and having the confidence to get up when you fall down. It's about cherishing the little memories, like tonight, that change you forever. It's about finding the joy in every tragedy, finding the magic in every moment.