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Short Story Workshop

Professor Coster

Black Friday

The room was cold. I’m not just talking about the temperature either. For a place that was supposed to welcome social justice, it sure seemed uninviting. There were no windows, the only sources of color were from the American and Alabama state flags on each side of the judge’s banc. The floor was a rough, puke green carpet stained here and there with coffee and god knows what else. Everything else was wooden; the walls, the tables, the chairs with no cushions. Nothing comforting. Not like I needed comforting or anything.

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The first time I met Chase was two years ago, at North Point High School’s freshman orientation. Like most of the other pubescent boys in our class, Chase was overconfident in everything he did. Too cool for school, too cool for everything except sports and girls. Looking back, I’m not sure why I was so attracted to him. With a backwards hat overtop of his shaggy black hair, khaki shorts, and boat shoes, Chase essentially blended in with every other boy in our whole town. The only thing that set him apart, at least to me, were his honey brown eyes. Most eyes reflect light. Chase’s captured it. Little specks of yellow embedded in a sea of brown, catching sunlight and saving it for days when the clouds drowned the sun.

I remember sitting beside the group of boys before Principal Warren called the rowdy auditorium to order. My friends Annelise and Charlotte were to my right. We all quieted down when Principal Warren picked up the microphone. I shifted in my seat and straightened my pink and white tunic dress.

“Want a piece of gum?” I asked Annelise and Charlotte.

“Sure, thanks for asking,” chimed Chase.

I whipped my head around, flushed, I’m sure, with embarrassment and nervousness. His eyes caught my attention immediately, the little yellow specks playful and inviting. Annelise nudged my arm, acknowledging that a cute boy had just asked me for a piece of gum. Giggling, I handed him the packet of Wrigley’s and prayed he’d say something else.

“Who do you have for homeroom?”

*Thank God.* “I have Chadwick, what about you?” I replied.

“Looks like I’ll be seeing a lot of you this year. I have Chadwick too,” he smiled, “maybe I try to sit next to you?”

A small giggle was all I could muster out at the time. I couldn’t wait to get to homeroom.

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“Miss Stewart? Would you like a cup of coffee?” the grey clad secretary asked me. The wrinkles around her eyes framing her face in a way that added some warmth to the wood paneled room.

I declined the offer. Caffeine was the last thing my nerves needed. I sat in the chair looking at the stack of files in front of me containing intrusive facts of every aspect of my personal life. When we first met with the lawyers I was apprehensive to speak about such an intimate part of my life. Momma was the one who reminded me that I wasn’t the one who did anything wrong, prompting me to tell the lawyer every detail I could remember. Now, being in the courtroom, I felt the true weight of having my life on display. Momma sensed my discomfort.

“Lizzy, do you want to step outside for a moment?” she asked, her furrowed eyebrows accentuating the wrinkles on her forehead, the same look she’d given me countless of times over the last few months.

“No, Momma. I’m just ready to get this over with,” I replied, still staring at the files on the table.

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It didn’t take long for Chase and I to become best friends. We sat beside each other in homeroom every morning, in addition to Algebra and World History. About mid-way through the first semester, Chase started to pass me notes in class. They started off as snarky comments about the lecture, or funny little drawings. Me, being the goody two-shoes I am, never indulged him by sending a note back. I usually just giggled or rolled my eyes at him, knowing that I would make a comment about it after class.

One day, during a lesson on polynomials, Chase flicked a smaller-than-usual piece of paper onto my desk. I gave him my usual eyeroll and uncrumpled it:

*Are you a math teacher? Because you got me harder than trigonometery. Text me if you want - 232-555-6789*

I wish I had a more romantic story of how Chase and I started dating, but that was it. I texted him after class, and the rest was history. We spent every minute we could together; car rides home, weekends, and of course between-class kisses.

Sophomore year, when Chase made varsity football team, I made it a point to be on the front row of the bleachers at every game. At school, and around town, Chase let me wear his varsity jacket. I secretly loved how envious other girls were that I got to walk around in a standout football player’s letterman jacket. Annelise, Charlotte, and I lived for Friday nights, when we got to meet up with the football team at Joe’s Diner after the game.

“Lizzy!” Chase would shout as soon as we walked in, “I ordered two milkshakes each with one straw, but instead they brought us one milkshake with two straws.”

It was the same joke every time. I didn’t care though, I loved it. Sitting across the table, like a 1980’s romcom, I’d lean in towards the milkshake, never letting my gaze fall from the light-emitting yellow flecks in his eyes.

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The door the courtroom opened. In walked Chase and his team of lawyers. Behind him was a slew of reporters. North Point was a small town, news like this didn’t go unnoticed.

Looking around the room I wondered where Annelise and Charlotte were. They knew I needed them there with me, even if they didn’t support taking North Point’s best wide receiver to court. Sure, as my relationship with Chase developed so did his relationships with my friends. But I was their best friend first, not him. I remember when I told them what happened.

“You’re just overreacting Lizzy, he loves you, you know that,” Charlotte postulated.

Annelise, sitting beside Charlotte, leaned forward with her elbows on her knees. “You can’t seriously be thinking of ratting on him? Stuff like this happens all the time…and think about the football team.”

North Point High was predicted to win the state championship this year. Everyone said it was my fault we didn’t make it past the second round of playoffs, no one cared that they were adding insult to injury. I stared at the American flag to the left of the room. It looked so different than the flags presented by the Jr. ROTC at football games; the grandeur of the marching band playing the national anthem, beams of light reflecting off brass instruments with every chord change, and the American flag at the center of it all flowing vibrantly in the wind as the Friday night lights shone through the colors. The flag I see in the courtroom is nowhere near as excited as the one raised on the field. Here, the mesh of red, white, and blue hung still, lifeless without any airflow to lift the fabric. No presentation of the flag, no lights surrounding it. It just sits in the corner, a forgotten guest.

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By junior year, Chase was the star receiver on the football team. Historically, North Point, along with most of the other teams we faced, just focused on running the ball, no big passes. But Chase had good hands, and that, along with his speed, gave North Point an advantage most schools couldn’t match.

The night we played West Gunner High, our school’s biggest rival, is referred to as “Black Friday.” It’s the night the whole town looks forward to every year. Everyone in North Point, ages young and old, can be found in the stadium sporting light blue attire. Last season’s Black Friday was no different. Charlotte, Annelise, and I were in the front row, decked out in blue, glittered jumpsuits, myself with a painted #34 on my cheek.

The game between West Gunner and North Point was always a close one, last year being no exception. With twenty-two seconds left in the fourth quarter, both teams were tied 21-21. North Point had the ball on West Gunner’s 30-yard line, second down. I knew it would be left to Chase to run long, and I was right. The ball was snapped, and I saw Chase take off down the field. I saw more than he, or the quarterback did. I saw the West Gunner safety running dangerously close to Chase. I saw him intercept the ball. I saw him run it into the end zone for a West Gunner touchdown.

“Lizzy!” Chase shouted as soon as Charlotte, Annelise, and I walked in Joe’s Diner, “I ordered two milkshakes each with one straw, but instead they brought us one milkshake with two straws.”

I sat down across the table expecting to see a disheartened boyfriend and instead noticed the yellow flecks in his eyes still somehow dancing. I leaned in for a quick peck on the cheek and told him he had played a good game.

“Some of the seniors are throwing a party after Joe’s, I think it’d be fun if we went,” he told me, with a look so hopeful I couldn’t say no.

Chase seemed perfectly fine at the diner. We talked and laughed with the other players as usual; Chase even led jokes about the look on Coach Watson’s face after the interception. Charlotte gave everyone a ride to the party and when we got there Chase’s mood seemed to improve even more. Charlotte and Annelise wanted to grab some snacks, so we beelined our way through the crowd of people to the kitchen. We never really got into the habit of drinking, so to keep people from bothering us, Charlotte thought it might be a good idea to hold cups of punch. You know, “for looks.”

After a while standing in the kitchen, I heard a loud crash outside. Peering through the window over the sink, I could see Chase trying to pick himself up from the ground. Bits and pieces of the white lattice fence surrounded him. He could barely stand on two feet. Panic raced through my mind as I thought about what Chase would do if he were injured and couldn’t play football. Shoving people out of my way, I ran outside as fast as I could. The closer I got, the more I realized that Chase wasn’t shifting his weight from foot to foot because he was hurt, but that he was wobbling because he was drunk.

“See! No one could’ve caught that pass Jacobs! First you threw it to West Gunner, then you threw it to the fucking fence,” Chase slurred.

I looked over my shoulder to see Charlotte running towards me. I asked for her keys and help getting Chase in the car. After a few minutes of coaxing, and a lot of manpower from another lineman, we finally got Chase buckled into the seat. I hugged Charlotte and got into the driver’s seat, promising to bring her car back as soon as I got Chase home. It was about a ten minute car ride to Chase’s house, during which time I could tell his mood had changed drastically from his composure at the diner.

“I know everyone fucking blames me Lizzy, stop trying to say they don’t.”

“Maybe you will feel better in the morning. You played a great game, the final score can’t take that away from you,” I offered, placing a hand on his knee.

When we pulled into the driveway, I suggested we walk through the backdoor of the house to avoid any drunken run-ins with Chase’s parents. Thankfully he agreed, taking my hand as we walked through the yard.

“Thanks for trying to cheer me up tonight babe,” he whispered as he pulled me close.

I could feel his hand sliding down the small of my back. I didn’t stop him. Maybe a little butt-grab could help lift his spirits a little. He kissed me, but not in the soft manner he usually says goodbye in. I felt his teeth grasp my bottom lip and pulled back a little.

“What? You don’t want to kiss your boyfriend?” He asked, the yellow flecks in his eyes dimmed with frustration.

His hands shot up and grabbed me, pulling me back towards him. The more I tried to break free from his grasp, the tighter he squeezed my arms. The kisses got more forceful, and soon my bottom lip was back between the hold of his teeth. I could sense blood seeping into my mouth, the taste of copper overwhelming the taste of beer.

“Chase, stop. You’re drunk,” I pleaded.

He pushed me to the ground and fell on top of me. I couldn’t believe his aggression. I tried to calm him by telling him we could hangout in the morning, and attempting to hold his hands. When I pulled his hands away from my pants I felt a slap against my face.

“I’m not going to lose twice tonight Lizzy,” he said, his breath hot with anger and alcohol.

I screamed for help. Another slap. The weight of Chase’s hand fell over my mouth as the other finished removing his pants. Helpless, and unable to move under the weight of 215 pounds of muscle, I laid in the grass silently crying as my boyfriend forced himself on me.

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“All rise,” the bailiff exclaimed.

I stood, sweating and awaiting the verdict. Looking to my right, my eyes locked into Chase’s. They were dark. The yellow specks no longer held light. Instead, they’d retained the anger I had seen last year on Black Friday. That was the last football game Chase had been allowed to play. Turns out, schools don’t like letting rapists play on their football teams. Unfortunately, schools also don’t like losing football games when the rapist happened to be their star player. Somehow, despite being the only one who knew what it was like to be truly helpless, North Point seemed to be putting *me* on trial.

“The court finds the defendant guilty,” stated the judge.

I barely heard the sentencing. I was too busy watching vengeance over take the yellow specks in Chase’s eyes one by one.