Chapter 2

Gemini's eyes gleamed as he continued to smoke, a slight vapor clouding the space above him and making his eyes appear even glassier than before. He chuckled and pushed back his blond, greasy hair before taking another long drag. Then, he looked up to the sky and glanced at the stars above his van.

"You know what, Liet? I'm beginning to think that there's no hope for Wen," He stated simply, as if it was second nature for him to be voicing cruel opinions to his girlfriend of seven months.

"What the fuck are you saying, man?" She gasped and narrowed her eyes threateningly. He raised his arms in surrender, grabbing his beer with his free hand and bringing it to his lips, taking a quick gulp.

"It's been weeks since Rabbit died and he hasn't been taking it so well. I understood it the first month but it's about time that he continues his life. Life is for the living, not for mourning the dead."

"So what? He's allowed to be sad about it! You're such an asshole sometimes! If it was me in his place, would you be telling me the same thing?"Juliet countered as he raised his brow and took another swig.

"Guess not," He replied with a lazy smirk, "I'd go easy on you."

She watched as he threw his cigarette into the sand and went silent as it fizzed out. She took a deep breath and quickly released it. Gemini might not be the most sympathetic soul but he was the one she looked to for constant support. Wen had become an enigma for the group. After Rabbit's suicide, Wen refused to speak to anyone. The boy's family knew about the incident but they weren't very active members of his life at the moment since he had decided to go to school abroad. Wen was adamant that it was essential for him to leave his hometown but he never provided any further information.

Rabbit was Wen's best friend. No one could deny their closeness. Rabbit had introduced Wen to his circle of friends during their first week on campus claiming that Wen lived in the same apartment building as him. Rabbit lived in one of the few buildings that rented rooms to students at cheap rates. They went fast so after two weeks, there were none left. Juliet had wanted to get one at the start of the year with Gemini but he shook his head and sighed, pointing at the piece of tin that he called a van.

"Betsie will get cold without me," He murmured, tapping on the side of the vehicle, "I couldn't leave her if I tried."

Betsie was an old Dodge motor home that his parents had bought in 1978 and had preserved until roughly 2008 when Gemini had stolen the thing and took off like a bat out of hell at 21 years old. Since then, the man had been driving all over the country, living off the inheritance money his grandparents had left for him after creating a new identity for himself and a new bank account. The odd money he received from working small jobs at fast food joints and thrift shops helped as well but he was a lazy guy who believed that buying into the Capitalist system would bring about the end of humanity. Him having a sturdy job just wasn't meant to be. They met earlier last year, on her nineteenth birthday, through a mutual friend named Areti.

Areti shrugged her shoulders when Juliet had asked her why she was hanging out with a man who was ten years older than her, “Hey, he’s like, completely legit as far as I know. Besides, if he isn’t I’m totally down with having someone ‘accidentally’ stab him in the eye with a pencil.”

It seemed like the dismissive attitude was contagious when it came to Gemini, who became one of Juliet’s confidants. She also realized that the violent thoughts she had when he did something wrong were also contagious because she had been staring at pencils far too intently these days.

“Liet, let’s move away from this topic,” Gemini croaked, finishing off his beer and glancing up at where she sat on Betsie’s hood, “Wen is a good dude. He’s lost but if we keep giving him support, he’ll find his own.”

“I miss Rabbit,” She claimed sadly and it was true, she missed the idiot. She missed his smiles and his witty commentary on the horror movies they’d watch on Saturday nights in Wen’s apartment. She missed his horrible puns and the way he’d chase Wen around like a lost puppy. She wished to see him in their Ancient Civilisations class, checking his Tumblr account and spamming her with fanfiction and pictures. Before everything happened, they didn’t have a care in the world. They lived for themselves.

Had she known what was happening to him, would she have been able to stop him?

She drank a mouthful of beer and spat it out onto the dirt. The humidity in the air and the fire crackling away made her mouth and lips dry. She sucked her lips into her mouth and rubbed her tongue along them. Gemini was watching the fire from his beech chair, prodding the beast with a fire poker and watching as ashes spewed into the dark night.

“How was class today?” He asked, avoiding the topic.

“Wen left so quickly that I couldn’t confront him about Rabbit,” She replied coolly, “He didn’t hand in his assignment for class so the teacher had to make an extension for him.”

“Jesus, Liet. Everything you say lately comes back to Wen! What happened to that cool chick I’ve been dating for half a year? Hell, she went and died when Rabbit kicked the can! Rabbit returned to the Earth, do you even understand the gravity of how magnificent that is? It is fucking amazing! Not to mention, he sent himself there, Liet; if anything, Rabbit is a god damn hero.”

She watched as he kicked over the simmering log and dragged some sand over it and the remains of the fire pit. Then he promptly folded up his beach chair and took her beer from her hand. She yelped and tried to take it back, but his usual grin had completely faded when he growled, “Get the hell out of here and come back when you can be fun again.”

She hopped off the hood of his car and kicked the piece of tin for added measure, he called after her with a ‘Not cool, man!’ but she continued walking. The fucking asshole didn’t even realize how much pain everyone else was going through.

It was either that or he didn’t care which had her heart clenching painfully in her chest.

She didn't want to believe that Gemini was like that but the tears rolling down her face and her strained breathing made her think that she was having doubts.

She tugged on her leather jacket and clasped her hands over the frayed zipper when a particularly cold gust of wind pushed past her. It had broken weeks ago but she had been convinced by Gemini to sew it back together. Unfortunately, Juliet was not the best seamstress and it seemed like those closest to her had no knowledge of the skill. To keep her boyfriend satisfied, she had decided to leave it alone.

The nights were beginning to get colder and colder. Juliet hadn't been surprised when she woke up to a coat of frost plastered over the grass that morning. Still, she forced herself to avoid bringing a hat or some mittens when she left the house to meet Gemini. Now, being without the heat of the fire and the constant protection of her boyfriend, she regretted her actions.

Most stores were closed at this time. It was too dark and far too cold for people to be outside window shopping. Juliet stopped for a second to pull on her knee high socks which were dipping slightly down her calves. The road ahead was lit by dim street lamps that crowded one side. Once and a while, the occasional car would roll past her but she hadn't seen one for a least two minutes now. She sighed deeply and continued walking forward. She cursed herself for wearing boots that were half a size too small for her feet because she could feel blisters forming on the side of her toes where the fabric was brushing against them.

She growled and unlaced her boots before taking them off completely. Under the light of a street lamp, she wiggled her toes in relief before taking off once more. Even the Wal-Mart on the boulevard was closed, its lights dimmed. In the dead of night the whole town was empty. Juliet could envision this as a scene in an apocalyptic novel, the heroine balancing herself on the edge of the sidewalk, looking into abandoned shops for extra supplies and food.

She popped a stick of gum from where it had been in her pocket and chewed it contently. The world around her was poetic in its silence. The only problem that remained with the scene was the cold wind that set her teeth chattering and her skin shivering.

In the distance, she saw a small luminous shop. In its vibrancy, Juliet saw the figure of a young man packing things up behind a counter. She rushed up to the door and banged on it with her fist. The young man shot up from his place, startled by the sudden noise. He glanced at her in surprise before opening the door.

"Can't you read the sign? We're closing up for the night," He said promptly as Juliet nodded.

"I know, but I just need a place to warm up for a bit. You know how it is, right? My boyfriend left me on the side of the road because he had a fight. Said that I wasn't worth shit. Fuck, I'll be going back to him in no time but I just need to stop for a sec and think."

It wasn't necessarily true but Juliet's lies sprouted constantly when she was faced with an issue. The man's face softened in concern and he let her in almost immediately. He must've been a young father since he had to have been at least as old as Juliet's substitute teacher for Ancient Civilisations.

“You remind me of my daughter;” Bingo, this game was almost too easy, “Please take your time and browse the shelves.”

She couldn’t believe her luck. Out of any shop she could’ve run into, she had found a book store. She grinned and dropped her bag near the front counter as the man started to count the money that remained in the cash register.

Juliet walked down the halls at an eager pace, a small smile etched across her face. The store was filled; covered from top to bottom in books of all shapes and sizes. They all had their own piece of integrity. Juliet glanced at softly bound unique editions and strongly bound mass produced ones. First editions hidden in glass compartments with small labels written in curly calligraphy caught her attention almost immediately. She wouldn’t be able to buy them without using the money she had taken from her mother’s purse. With a grimace, she turned away.

“Seems like you’re interested in the unique ones,” The young man pursed his lips and tilted his head. “Not many people can afford them though.”

“I can,” she roused but quickly shook her head. “My parents would kill me though.”

He walked out from behind the counter and joined her, gesturing with a short head gesture towards the back of the shop, “If you go in the back, we have originals that are less pricey.”

“Seriously? You have quite the collection here, man.”

Juliet enjoyed the warmth that came from the shop and sighed as she walked closer to the space heaters near the back. The man followed a few paces behind her. She could hear the shuffling of his slippers against the floor. When she reached the back, she turned to the man who walked briskly around her and whisked one of the books off of the higher shelves. He handed it to her.

“Hand bound with a leather book jacket, about two hundred pages, good storyline,” He recited before sending a jovial wink to the girl, “I think you might enjoy it.”

Juliet raised a brow before taking the book. It wasn’t in the best condition, its pages were withered and the bindings were mediocre. The support of the spine was bent as if it had been plied open several times. It was well used. The book jacket had a buckle that made it seem like antique. It has a classical sort of feeling.

“It’s not the sort of thing that I’ve seen before in a store that sells the Twilight series,” She commented, pointing towards the shelf nearer to the front that demonstrated the widely known vampire series.

“We aren’t a very normal shop,” The man laughed. “I can give you a summary of the plot if you want to see if it’s worth your while.”

Juliet shook her head almost immediately, “That’ll ruin it. I’ll buy it.”