

Writing To Reach You
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Chapter 1

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This story is based loosely on real characters, places and events, but certain details, names and locations have been altered to protect the identity of those involved.

Dedicated to Scott, without whom life would be pretty bland.

Time flies. It feels like only yesterday Ryan and I were six years old and mooning each other behind a willow tree in Evans Park. We were instant best friends and made sure everyone knew it. Ten years later, not much has changed.

We had taken refuge from the torrential rain below one of the massive willows in Evans Park. The full, drooping branches kept us dry and afforded us near complete privacy from surrounding houses. Not that we needed it. Evans had been almost void of life since Meads got a baseball diamond and play center five years ago. I liked to think of this as our park, the willows serving as our personal club house. We sat shoulder to shoulder waiting it out against the three foot wide trunk. It was cool and damp, and our soaking wet clothes did nothing to keep us warm. I shivered and cursed myself for not wearing a jacket. Ryan flicked an ash off his cigarette, a nasty habit he picked up almost a year ago.

“Do you remember the tree fort we built in Terra Cotta?”

The question had come a little out of the blue. I clearly remembered the rickety three sided structure we built the summer of 2003, deep in the woods of Terra Cotta Park. We had spent nearly every waking moment that summer building and improving the crude cabin. It reached a point where it became so overloaded, it canted heavily to one side. I had a lot of great memories of our time up there. I sat up straight and I looked at Ryan, suddenly curious as to what brought this up.

“Yeah... yeah I do. I mean, how could I not? What about it?” He studied his cigarette for a moment, lost in thought. He'd been a little... off... all day and I'd tried my damndest to understand why. A minute passed and he lifted the cigarette to his lips, taking a weak drag. It killed me to watch, the staunch anti-smoker that I am. I had been working on him to quit since I first found out, and had been successful in getting him down to four a day.

Sensing my stare, he looked up and held my gaze with sullen eyes. Those steel blue pearls were my window to his soul; painfully honest despite his best effort to convince me otherwise. Breaking eye contact, he tilted his head towards the sky and blew a faint cloud of smoke away from my face.

“It’s gone, Chris.” He whispered the words I dreaded hearing.

“How do you know? We haven’t been back there since that summer...”

“I went looking for it yesterday.” He interrupted. “There’s nothing left but a rotting stump.”

My jaw drooped slightly. Frankly I was surprised to hear it. I expected parts of the rickety shack to have collapsed, but I never imagined that old tree would rot out and die. I remember thinking it was a pillar of stability in our hectic lives, and the news crushed me. A summer of our blood, sweat and tears went into that shoddy fort. We had shared many firsts up there, from secrets to feelings and everything in between. I looked across the park at the decaying wood jungle gym that held even more of our childhood memories. Only then did I truly understand Ryan’s gloom. Our past was crumbling in thin air. I had no words to convey the pain I felt, and for the first (and only) time in my life, I caved to the dark side.

Taking Ryan’s hand, I gently pried the half smoked DuMaurier cigarette from his frozen fingers. Flicking the ash off the tip, I slowly brought the filter to my lips and inhaled the concentrated, acrid tasting smoke. My throat and lungs burned, and I felt like throwing up. It didn’t take me long to clear my poor lungs of this poison, and I’m sure my choking was heard on the other side of Timberly. A feeling of light headedness came over me, followed by shakiness in my movements. The nicotine rush had hit me after only one drag. I couldn’t understand what Ryan enjoyed about this disgusting vice. As if on cue, his arm wrapped around my shoulders pulling me close. The cigarette slipped from my fingers and I watched Ryan toy with it. He grimaced and flicked the butt into the pouring rain.

I leaned back into his chest and rested my head against his shoulder. When I settled, he repositioned his arm around me and draped it over my tummy. Even through my damp hoodie I could feel he was freezing cold. Taking his hand, intertwined with my own, I pulled it to my face and used my warm breath to thaw his cold fingers. The rain had let up a little, and I wondered if we would not be better off fighting the rain for the three blocks home. A warm shower sounded great about now. Turning my head, I looked up and admired Ryan’s smooth, defined cheeks, now red from the damp 8 degree weather. His nose had been running all day, and a drop of watery mucus hung off the tip. I let go of his hand and reached up, wiping the drip with the back of my hand. He didn’t seem to notice – still staring into the distance at nothing in particular.

“Hey...” I whispered. Our eyes met and the tension he carried in his face softened.

“You ok?” I asked. He took a moment before nodding. His eyes were glassy, and I could tell he’d been holding off tears. Crying was also out of character for Ryan. I’m the tear shedder in this little group. I smiled and wiggled a finger under his chin in a valiant attempt to cheer him up, but it was met only with a gentle squeeze. Hey, it’s a start.

“Come on, let’s go home.” I jumped up and reached for his hand. The nicotine buzz made my limbs feel full of Jell-O and I stumbled against the trunk for balance. Ryan snapped out of his daze and shifted as if to catch me but I waved him off.

“I’m ok, really.” He finally answered, standing up without my help. I kept on his eyes, searching for confirmation. I wasn’t convinced, but we needed to get out of the cold.

“Let’s go to my house, you can take a hot shower and get a change of clothes on.” He nodded, and we picked up our bikes to head out.

We pedaled in silence, each deep in thought. I tailed Ryan by a few feet and couldn’t help myself from admiring his soaking, jean covered bubble but wiggling just out of reach. I don’t remember not loving Ryan. Even when we were six, I felt something for him that was beyond friendship. I didn’t understand it of course, but it was there. One of the secrets shared at our beloved tree fort involved my coming out to him on my eleventh birthday. I just up and said it, ‘Ryan, I’m gay.’ I was terrified it would be the end of us, but to his credit, Ryan wasn’t fazed in the least. He said he always knew – I guess the same way I always knew I love him. It didn’t change anything between us, and any remote doubts about our friendship turned to dust. Unless Ryan has one, there’s only one remaining secret yet to be told. The big one, the queen mother of all secrets. Yeah, it’s mine... the one about confessing my eternal love for him. I’ve almost said it twice now but chickened out at the last minute. You see, Ryan never admitted being gay. Ryan never admitted being straight either. And he certainly didn’t admit to being bisexual. Maybe it’s because it never really came up. Even though we talk for hours about anything under the sun, the topic of sex has only come up twice between us. The first involved my sexuality, and the second admitting we jacked off. I guess all I can do is wish, wonder and wait.

When we reached the house, my sister’s sunburst orange Cobalt was idling in the driveway. Miranda was nineteen, and worked as a flight attendant to save money for school. My parents offered to pay her tuition, but she had always been immensely independent and would have none of it. I skidded my bike to a stop outside the garage door, and Ryan did the same. He smiled at me and looked to be in better spirits. We were truly drenched and I couldn’t wait to get inside. .

“Fuck the bikes man, let’s just get inside.” I said, pulling him along the landscaped walkway leading to the front door. We had just climbed the steps when Miranda tore open the front door in frenzy.

“Oh my God Chris, thank God. I can’t find my parking pass! I need you to drive me to the airport. I’ve got two back to back five day pairings and I don’t want to...” She stopped and took a step back, finally noticing we were dripping wet.

“Jesus, what happened to you guys?” She moved out of the way and ushered us inside away from the cold rain.

“We got caught in the rain and decided to wait it out in the park, but it got cold so we said fuckit and came home.” I answered. I turned to Ryan.

“Go shower kay? You know where everything is.” Ryan spent so many nights and weekends here he knew the house as well as his own. Hell, he had a stash of clothes here too. He nodded and kicked off his shoes.

“Have a good flight ‘Mir.”

“Yeah thanks. Go get warmed up, you look like you’re frozen.” Ryan scurried up the stairs and I turned back to Miranda.

“So you need a ride?”

“Please? I don’t want to have to pay thirty bucks a day to leave the car there. That way you can also drive it while I’m gone.” I nodded slowly. There were perks to driving big sis to the airport – she could never find that damn pass. Looking down at my soaked clothes, I asked...

“Umm, can you give me like 2 minutes to towel down and get changed?”

“Yeah, be quick about it though, I’m running really late.” Running late to my sister was being there forty five minutes earlier than the posted check-in time. She’s a worry rat, but I can’t hold that against her.

“Are not, you’re probably like 2 hours early!” I chided. She slapped me playfully on the arm.

“Oh shut up. Get going, I’m going to load my stuff in the car.” I kicked off my shoes and bounded up the stairs. Reaching my room, I peeled off my hoodie and tossed it on the computer chair. Ryan wasted no time jumping in the shower; I could already hear the water splashing against the glass enclosure. I rooted around in my closet for a pair of jeans and a long sleeved shirt, and grabbed a pair of boxers from a drawer. I knocked on the bathroom door and walked in. The outline of Ryan’s naked body was visible through the steamy shower glass.

“Ry... I’m going to drive Miranda to the airport. I’ll be back in 20 minutes, take as long as you need kay?” I heard him snuffle lightly over the trickling water.

“Kay. I guess I’ll see you in a bit.” I grabbed a couple of fresh towels from the cupboard and left one on the counter for Ryan. I turned to leave, but he sniffled again and just had to check on him. I opened the shower door and stuck my head in.

“Ry? You ok bud?” His back was to me, and I let my eyes roam over his perfect body. Those twin globes looked good enough to eat, and I wanted nothing more than to bury my face between them and go to town.

“Yeah, fine. My nose is running, that’s all.” He half turned to face me and I quickly shifted my eyes to meet his. Those eyes of his... they’re begging me not to worry about him but I can’t help it. He’s my best friend, and the love of my life, I have to worry for him. I could feel a blush coming on, so I smiled, and looked to my feet.

“Ok... well... I’ll see you in a few. There are snacks downstairs if you’re hungry; we’ll order a pizza or something when I get back.

“Kay, cya.” I closed the shower door and stripped off my wet jeans, boxers and socks. I towelled down quickly and threw on the dry set in record time. Racing back to my room, I grabbed my phone and my wallet and ran out to the car.

“That was five minutes Chris, not two!” I laughed and put the Cobalt in reverse.

“Two, Five, what’s the difference? We’ll get there, don’t worry. And you’ll be way too early, as usual.”

“How dare you tease your sister like that?! You should be ashamed of yourself!” I loved it when she tried to act stern. My defense? I stuck out my tongue and wiggled. She cracked, it gets her every time. I love my sister. She’s such a doll. We always have fun together.

“So where to this trip?” Being an airplane junkie, I always loved hearing where my sister was jetting off to for days at a time.

“Toronto and Ottawa tonight, then make my way out west tomorrow. Tuesday it’s a Calgary to Cuba return. More west coast stuff on Wednesday, then back to Montreal on Thursday. You’ll come pick me up right? I’ll call you from Vancouver to let you know the flight number.”

“Cool. Yeah I’ll pick you up. Or maybe I won’t... muahahahaha!” She smacked me for the second time that day. We relegated to making small talk the rest of the way to the airport while she got her passport and ID’s in order.

I double parked on the departures level, and got out to give her a hand with the bags. “Thanks Chris. Say by to Ryan again for me ok?” I nodded and leaned in to give her a hug and kiss on the cheek.

“I will. Have a good flight Miranda. Call when you get to the hotel ok?” I let go of her, but she continued to hug me longer than usual.

“You know if you tell him you’ll hear it back.” She whispered. I pulled back, confused.

“You’ll make a cute couple. He loves you too Chris. He’s just scared to tell you, like you are to tell him.” My jaw dropped for the second time that day, and my eyes felt as though they’d pop out of their sockets.

“Oh come on, you didn’t think I’d figure it out sooner or later? Give me some credit, I’m a pretty observant chick! You’ve been in love with each other for years. Don’t you see it? He looks at you the same way you look at him.”

“But..... I mean, How....”

“Look, I’ve got to go sweetie. Just relax, it’s all cool. Just tell him how you feel. It’ll be fine. Take care of my car ok? Luvya!!” And as quickly as she turned the tables on me she was gone, lost among the crowds of travelers at Pierre Elliott Trudeau International Airport.

To Be Continued...