

Rennillia 1

by M. Sembera

Walking away not knowing what was more overwhelming the pain in my chest or the sudden absence of reason. I struggled not to turn around. How had this happened? I scanned through memories drawing blanks on the answers that should be there. My feet seemed to move by themselves. Shuffling down the path I knew all too well, I wondered for a moment, would he come after me? I glanced back to look at the house one last time, sending a shot of pain through my heart and tears to my eyes. I swung open the door to my car. It shook as I flopped down into the seat. I tried wiping the tears away. It was a lost cause. Shaking, taking deep breaths, I forced the key into the ignition.

Forty minutes later, I was pulling into The Better Valley Inn. I paid for my room and staggered down the long hallway. Past tired and feeling dizzy, it became harder and harder to keep my eyes open. I slid my room key into the door. Open, shut, and I was on the bed. The day swirled around in my head until finally, it all went dark.

Chapter 1

I woke with the sun shining through the thin beige curtains hanging on the tiny motel window. There was a knock, followed by a familiar voice on the other side of the door.

"Deep breaths." I whispered, dragging myself out of bed.

Another loud knock startled me just before I opened the door.

"Tell me something good!" He said with a bright smile.

I rolled my eyes, threw myself back onto the bed and covered my head with a pillow.

"I brought coffee for you." He shared as I slid my head out from under the pillow.

His smile quickly faded to a thoughtful gaze as he sat down on the corner of the motel bed.

Sitting up, I mumbled, "Thanks, Em."

Emerson was once my best friend. We met when I was fifteen and he was without a doubt the sweetest guy in the entire world. Most everyone called him Roberts but I had always called him Emerson. He was very handsome. So handsome, you would expect him to be a little dumb. Tall and muscular with brown hair and big thoughtful brown

eyes, Emerson was a guy that made your heart melt when you saw him. The guy you instantly loved just because. I couldn't help forcing a little smile as I took my cup from him.

"Do you want to tell me what happened yesterday?" He questioned, appearing sympathetic.

Shaking my head silently, I couldn't have made the words come out of my mouth if I had wanted them to.

He looked down at me with his soft brown eyes. Eyes that you would swear could see down into your soul.

"You need to tell me, Ren." He pressed.

My eyes filled with tears. Em wrapped his arms around me as I began to sob beyond control.

He held me, resting his cheek on my head before saying, "Come on, you can't stay here."

Shaking my head at him, I wasn't ready to make another move.

"You can't stay here." He repeated, pulling me off the bed and onto my feet.

Standing there, I glanced around feeling lost.

"I'll help you get your things."

"I don't have anything just my bag." I replied, reaching for the small black duffel at my feet.

"I got it." He insisted.

In the ten years I'd known Emerson, I couldn't think of one time I opened a door for myself or carried something in his presence. It was all part of the 'Roberts Charm'. I never understood why he couldn't keep a girlfriend. Maybe he was too nice. Girls were more in love with the idea of Emerson Roberts than the man himself.

We didn't talk at all on the way to his house. Ridiculous in size, it was the biggest in the county. Emerson came from a wealthy family. He never worked. He had people who cooked and cleaned and did just about everything else for him. It wasn't that he was lazy, he just did not see the point in working for things he already had.

Finally inside the house, he said, "The guest room is made up just in case..."

Nodding, I glanced away from him.

Many times I had stayed with Emerson. His parents moved to Spain our junior year of high school and set up a permanent residence there. Emerson never liked being alone, and I liked being with him.

Making my way up the marble stairs, I heard Emerson holler, "Shower! You will feel better!"

"Doubtful." I mumbled before taking his advice.

My shower did nothing in the way of better feelings. It did, however, make me sleepy again.

Startled, when I opened the bathroom door and he was standing right there, I griped, "What the hell?"

"What do you want to do?"

"Sleep." I snapped.

Scowling at me, he fussed, "Haven't you wasted enough of your life on..."

Irritated, I quickly cut him off saying, "Don't say his name."

"Okay, Ren, do you want to stay in my room?"

I could see in his eyes that he was trying to understand. Emerson always tried so hard to be understanding about everything.

"Well?" he pressed.

I nodded.

"Do you want to be alone?"

I shrugged, feeling a little sting at the word alone.

His room was no different than I remembered it. Trophy covered shelves, black and gray striped sheets. I pulled the comforter back and felt instant relief as I slid into bed. My pillow was so soft, softer than I remembered it being. Emerson sat down slowly on the bed next to me.

"I'll stay here with you. If you want me too," he offered.

All I could get out as he lightly brushed the damp hair from my face was, "Yeah."

I barely felt the bed move when he got up and walked to his side of the bed.

The moment I felt him lying beside me, my thoughts turned to nights spent laughing and planning our futures. His future never changed, only the girl he would marry. Mine changed all the time. Married life never sounded good to me. It was, however, all Emerson ever wanted. I think it was because it was the only thing he didn't already have. He wrapped both arms around me, pulling me close to him. It felt nice. After all, it was our sleep-over routine. And it had never gone farther than sleep.

"Thank you." I whispered.

Emerson tightened his grip on me a little and replied, "I've missed you."

After adjusting myself a little closer, I drifted off.

It was dark and quiet when I woke around four in the morning. Feeling an instant triumph, I had made it almost two days. At the same time, my heart hurt at that thought.

Pondering the possibility of sleeping another day away, I was surprised to hear Emerson inform, "Jackson is coming over today."

"Uh." I whined.

Sleeping another day away was clearly not an option now.

"Does he know?" I asked, hoping for a different answer than the one I was sure to get.

"Yes."

Who was I kidding? He knew. It's a small town everybody always knew everything here. I propped myself up on my elbow, resting my head on my hand, looking over at Emerson.

"So?" I questioned.

"He wants to make sure that you are okay."

I glared at him, asking, "Can't you tell him how I am?"

"I could if I knew." His voice sounding a bit panicked.

Squeezing my eyes shut for a moment, I suggested, "Tell him I'm fine."

"I'd rather not lie."

I wanted to argue but it would have been in vein. Even though I had purposely avoided looking at myself in the mirror, I knew what I looked like.

The thought of facing Jackson after all this time upset me. He was an old boyfriend whom I remained friends with after our short 'together' status parted on good terms. That was until my total devotion to one man pushed me to lose touch. How was I supposed to face him?

"I can't..."

Sitting straight up, he proclaimed, "Yes you can." Then with a big grin as if he was a motivational speaker he continued, "Think of this as the first day of the rest of your life."

Pulling the covers back over my head, I said, "Right," muffling my sarcastic response.

I didn't have to see his face.

The disappointment in his voice was clear as he scolded, "You are not sleeping all day."

"I won't, okay." I pouted before pleading, "Can I at least sleep until daylight?"

"Sure Ren." His voice was soft again.

Without being able to fall back to sleep right away, I laid there thinking. My stomach turned at the thought of Jackson's smiling face. He would be so smug with an 'I told you so' attitude. I could almost hear the words ringing in my ears.

Suddenly, I felt sick. I sat up and pulled my knees into my chest, taking slow deep breaths. In a matter of seconds the sick feeling turned to anger. Not the mild irritation brought on by my thoughts of Jackson. True anger over what I had allowed myself to become took over. My face grew warmer as I felt the bed shaking.

There was a quick jerk before I heard Emerson shout, "Ren!" As he flung his arms around me, holding me tight.

Unable to fully understand what was happening and hearing the fear in his voice, I blurted, "What the hell?"

"I thought you were having a seizure or something!" He shouted, still fearful.

At a loss, I started to cry.

"Don't cry." He pleaded before sharing, "You just scared me. You were shaking and...and I...you..."

I could tell he was trying to be calm.

“You. Just. Scared. Me.” His voice and eyes were softer now, less frantic and more sorrowful.

I started to feel sick again.

It was unfair of me to be here doing this to him. Agreeing to come here, all unraveled and broken. Truly, I was on the edge of a breakdown. It was wrong of me to be here. I wondered for a moment, how easy it would be to stay, forever. No reality to set in, only Em’s protective arms to keep me in this unrealistic bubble. I felt his grip on me tighten again as if he knew what I was thinking.

“Rennillia.” As I cringed at his use of my whole first name, he assured, “It will be okay. We will make it okay.”

Not knowing if I would make it, I grabbed my pillow off the bed and ran to the bathroom.

The cool floor tiles did wonders for my now churning stomach. I curled the top half of my body onto the pillow, stretching my lower half so my legs could lie against the wonderfully cool floor. I allowed painful thoughts to surface. Letting memories take hold and consume me, until I heard a light tap on the door.

“Can I come in?”

I didn’t answer.

“I’m coming in.”

Curling into a ball, I pushed every bit of the pillow around my head.

“Awe Ren.” he whispered.

Emerson hovered over me before he gently picked me up off the floor. I felt like an addict withdrawing from some impossibly strong narcotic. Lust laced with anguish and self-loathing had been my drug. Withdrawal is painful.

“It’s killing me to see you like this.” He whispered in my ear.

Really? He was the one hurting? I wanted to scream. How could he compare what I was going through to caring for a friend? I was the one in agony. I barely felt alive....And this was killing him? If I could, I would have hated him for just hinting that he knew what hurt was.

Furious, I turned toward him, not realizing how close his face was to mine. Staring into those soft brown eyes, nose to nose with him, I saw his eyes filling with his own painful tears. How could I be this selfish? How could I hurt him like this after all of our years of devoted friendship? Instantly, I was sorry for being the person I had become. Hurting him hurt me and I knew at that moment no matter how much I did not want to face it, I was no better than all the others; his parents who abandoned him, the countless girls that got bored and left him and now me. So many old promises broken, we would always be there for each other and after everything I had done, he was keeping his promise. Where was mine? How could I keep my promise? I could not be anything for

him. Even so, I wanted to kiss him. It had never been a thought of mine before that moment but I wanted to. Maybe if I wrapped my arms around him and kissed him, really kissed him, I could make it better, better for the both of us. Take his hurt away. Make us feel better...needed...loved.

“I’m sorry.” Was all I could say as I tucked my head under his chin. Emerson didn’t say anything. I thought about what it would be like to kiss him. Would it really be better for the both of us? Or would it be another bad decision on my part? I tried to reposition myself so that we would be face to face again, hoping he would decide for me. When he held me tighter, I gave up, knowing it was for the best and knowing it wasn’t what either of us needed.

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