

Q2 Independent Writing Project
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“Hey! Um.. wait!”

I’m literally just trying to get home with my groceries. And yet there seems to be a girl in a hotdog costume chasing me down the street. I turn my head and keep walking.

“Hey! Please!” She shouts. I hear a scuffle and some grumbles from other people on the sidewalk behind me. “My bad, sorry! Ma’am, wait!”

God, this is embarrassing. People passing me start to stare. I can see the edges of their mouths twitching, trying to hide their laughter, or just outright laughing, like the teenage girl with frizzy pink hair just did. The slap of her shoes on the sidewalk get closer and closer, until I can tell she’s almost right behind me.

I spin around. “What the hell do you want??”

She almost crashes into me. The bun of her foam hotdog brushes my arm as she tries to stop and nearly topples over backwards, narrowly grabbing the wrought-iron fence next to her.

The hot dog costume is comically large, taking up the entire sidewalk and giving her an extra two feet of height. It looks like it’s been in use for too long - there are a few mysterious stains, and what seems to be a *bite* taken out of the foam at the top.

“I-” she gasps. She bends over a little, breathing hard. Little bits of fuzz fall to the ground like snow around her shoes. She looks like a cartoon character, her arms hanging awkwardly at her sides, the hot dog bun preventing any attempted movement.

I press my lips together, attempting and failing to stifle my laughter.

She straightens up with a slightly embarrassed smile on her face. “Hey, I know I look absolutely stupid, okay? I’ll do anything to pay the rent-” She trails off. There’s a beat, and we stare at each other. I wait for her to continue, but she doesn’t. She’s still, looking at me with a strange expression. A familiar expression.

And then I realize.

My stomach twists instantly, like my insides know before my brain does. The sounds of the street get louder - the muffled whirrs and crashes of a garbage truck, two men shouting from opposite sides of the road, and crunch of dead leaves underfoot reduced to tiny fragments. My chest is tight - I’m holding my breath.

And then I’m back there, to that stupid camp in the middle of nowhere. The light filtering through the trees, making patterns on her face. The smell of wet earth, decaying leaves, the sharp pang of pine needles that blanket the ground. Smiling at her a bit too long, a bit too much.

But she’s not smiling now.

“Sofia?”

“Yep.” I don’t know what else to say.

“Wow, I-Did not recognize you,” Noa stammers. I attempt to keep my face motionless. Unbothered. Indifferent. It was almost two years ago.

Her face is bright red and framed by the hot dog bun, her eyes huge. It's almost hilarious. "Yeah, you too," I mumble, motioning to her costume. I look at the ground.

"Ha, yeah." There's a beat. People are streaming around us, unbothered by two women standing motionless in the middle of the sidewalk, one of them dressed as a seven-foot-tall hot dog. "Well-um... How are you?" She shuffles her feet, her weight shifting back and forth, the top of her costume wobbling slightly when she moves.

"Um. I'm good?" I look back at her, and she attempts to mold her face into something more acceptable than eyes wide and mouth agape. She smiles a bit, but she just looks lost.

"That's, uh, good," she mumbles. "It's been a while." There's a beat.

"So why did you chase me down the street in a hot dog costume again?"

"Oh! Right! Uh..." Noa holds something out to me. "You dropped this." It's a bag of Werther's caramels.

"Oh. Thanks?" It must've fallen out of my pocket.

"And um, these fell out of the bag," she says as she hands me a handful of wrapped candies. "It was kinda funny, actually. They started dropping out of your pocket like a little trail of breadcrumbs or something. And then the whole bag fell out," she says quickly. She takes a breath. "Anyway, yeah. I think there's a hole in your pocket?"

I stick my hand into the pocket of my jacket. Most of my fingers fit through the hole and come out the other side. "Oh wow, that's really embarrassing. Thanks," I say, and I reach for my groceries on the ground and turn away from her.

"Wait," she says quietly, her voice so small I barely hear it.

I freeze. I'm facing the street, a moving truck blocking the brownstone houses on the other side. Three taxis are stuck behind it, one yellow, two black. The groceries weigh my arms down, and I realize my stomach does also - it's heavy and twisted, taking up more space than it should. My breaths feel forced - quick and shallow, attempting to soothe something inside me. My back is almost completely turned to Noa. I don't move when I notice it.

"It was good to see you, Sofia."

My stomach twists when she says my name.

I need to get away from her.

But I turn my head to look at her, in her ridiculous hotdog costume and beat up Converse, her lowered head unable to hide her flushed face. "You too, Noa."

She glances up quickly when I say her name, and we lock eyes for a moment. Her face is so familiar. The clump of freckles under her left eye that she hated. Her faint eyebrows that turn up slightly at the ends. The small scar across her nose from her childhood that I secretly loved. And that expression.

Too familiar. Her usual smile gone, replaced by what seems to be sudden, slightly offputting seriousness, but the softness in her gaze, and that dazed, almost yearning look in her eyes gives her away.

And that's too much.

I take a step away from her and then quickly spin around, the groceries hitting my legs painfully, my heart beating too loud in my chest. I don't look back, I *can't* look back, as I walk away, slow at first, and then faster as the adrenaline in my body catches up to me. I walk away from her and her stupid hotdog costume, and that stupid expression that I hadn't seen for almost two years until today, that somehow made me feel exactly like it did when I was 19 and in love with her.

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