After All This Time

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After All This Time

by Genly

Summary

She touched the three folded up pieces of paper. Sebastian had actually made origami from his note, a small bird with its wings folded along its back. Sam had simply folded his note in half, but not before spilling soda over it, leaving it half-stained. She had tried to do something interesting with hers, but ended up with a wrinkled mess. She'd wanted to redo the note but Seb wouldn't let her, saying it would ruin the entire point, so her piece of paper actually looked worse than Sam's.

She gently pushed the notes aside, knowing what she would find underneath. A photo of the three of them, curling up at the edges, slightly faded and discoloured but not as much as she'd expected. She traced Sam's and Seb's faces with a finger. They were so young then. So beautiful. So incredibly beautiful.

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Her fingers traced the names scratched into the metal. No longer jagged like the day they'd buried the jar, the lines now filled with dirt, but still visible. Abigail. Samson. Sebastian. Sam had nearly cut himself twice with the pocket knife he'd used to put their names on the lid.

A young man had shown up at the door just after dinner, saying they'd found it on the property when they were digging a new irrigation channel. He said Mrs. O'Neill sent her regards, and it took her a moment to remember that was Trish's married name. She was often forgetting little things like that, and hated how it reminded her of her age.

She wondered if she should try opening the jar. It looked reasonably undamaged, despite spending decades buried in the soil of the farm. The rim was pocked with rust, but the lid still seemed to be tightly screwed on, and there were hardly any marks or scratches in the black ink they'd used to make the jar somewhat protected against light. It was the best solution they could find at the time.

It had been a warm summer evening. Sebastian had been complaining about the heat, as always, but it was actually a bit chilly underneath the trees. The farm had been almost completely overgrown by then, the last rays of the setting sun unable to reach them. Sam had wanted to bury their time capsule on the beach but they'd told him that it would corrode too fast, with all the moisture and salt.

She went into the kitchen to get her husband. She had to suppress a smile as she opened the drawer, thinking back to how her mother had said that even if Sam and Seb abandoned her, she would still have a husband to help her open jars, before handing her her housewarming gift. She had managed not to make a snarky remark about how she'd had her own place for three years, and how Sam and Seb were still with her. But the gift had simply been a jar opener. Her mother had kept on calling it a husband until the day she died. And her mother had been right, much as she hated to admit it. She needed a husband now that neither Sam or Seb were here.

The tool screeched against the rust, but she still managed to get the lid off. She gently shook the contents out on the kitchen table, careful not to disturb anything. She had no idea if any of it had been damaged in all the time the capsule had spent underground. But it seemed everything was still intact and free of bugs and moisture.

She trailed her finger through the contents. Sam's second favourite guitar pick. A pack of his usual flavour of bubblegum. She smiled at the memory of how much she'd always complained about the taste whenever they kissed. But they hadn't kissed yet, not when they buried the jar. A small plastic bag with a few specks of weed left in it. Sebastian had made so much fun of Sam for claiming they could still smoke that. An empty lighter with a cute cartoon frog on it.

Three small gemstones wrapped in a piece of black lace that she'd torn off one of her old bras. A tiger's eye, an amethyst, and a piece of obsidian, none of them bigger than her pinkie nail. She'd actually bought those on a rare outing with her parents to the city, at some sort of new age-y market stall. At the time she thought it was so awesome to own actual gems, but

now she realised how ridiculously overpriced they'd been, especially for semi-precious stones of that size.

She touched the three folded up pieces of paper. Sebastian had actually made origami from his note, a small bird with its wings folded along its back. Sam had simply folded his note in half, but not before spilling soda over it, leaving it half-stained. She had tried to do something interesting with hers, but ended up with a wrinkled mess. She'd wanted to redo the note but Seb wouldn't let her, saying it would ruin the entire point, so her piece of paper actually looked worse than Sam's.

She couldn't even remember what she'd written. And she'd never seen either Sam's or Seb's notes. Curiosity almost overtook her, but somehow she also felt it would be wrong to read them now, without their permission. These notes had never been intended for her, but for some future adventurer.

She gently pushed the notes aside, knowing what she would find underneath. A photo of the three of them, curling up at the edges, slightly faded and discoloured but not as much as she'd expected. She traced Sam's and Seb's faces with a finger. They were so young then. So beautiful. So incredibly beautiful.

She felt something squeeze her heart. She thought she'd forgiven herself long ago for not realising how deep their feelings for each other went, but it was still painful to see all of them in this photo, hanging onto each other, even Seb smiling and looking happy. Even though it had taken only a few years after this photo was taken for them to actually end up together, back then it felt like they'd wasted so much time, put each other through so much pain and anguish. She had always blamed herself for that. Looking at the two men she loved more than anything, she still couldn't understand how she had denied her attraction to them for so long.

Especially when they'd both looked that breathtakingly gorgeous.

She found herself crying softly. She missed them so much. The house just wasn't the same without the sound of Sam's guitar, or Sebastian shuffling into the kitchen to get another cup of coffee, his hair a mess and his eyes bleary. Without Sam stretching his entire body every time he got up from the sofa or a kitchen chair, groaning with a mix of pain and pleasure. The way they bickered over little things like who ate the last bit of cheese or who didn't put their socks in the right laundry basket.

Had they ever actually fought? They'd said some hurtful things to each other, sure, but somehow their entire dynamic had always been based on trust. Even when she had suggested opening up their relationship to others, and Sam couldn't take it, they'd worked things out. And that had lasted maybe a few hours? She couldn't remember exactly. Or the time when they'd talked about having children, and both her and Sebastian had said no, although Seb a bit more forcefully than she had. Sam had been devastated, but he had accepted it nonetheless, even though afterwards they'd all spent a fair bit of time just holding each other and crying.

They'd always done a lot of that. Crying and holding each other. To an outsider, maybe that would have seemed like they weren't happy together, but to them, it was comfort, it was safety that allowed them to be so open and vulnerable.

Right now, she would give anything to feel their arms around her again. This wasn't the first time she'd cried alone, and it probably wouldn't be the last. She rubbed her hands across her face and put the photo back in the jar, screwing the lid back on tightly. She took a deep breath, thinking of where to put it.

The kitchen table felt too impersonal. Too far away. But thinking of putting it on her night stand also felt wrong. She couldn't put her finger on exactly why that was. Maybe like she was claiming some part of their past that had never belonged to just her, but to all three of them. Which place in their home had always belonged to all of them equally? Even the studio had always been more Sam's domain, even though Seb and her also spent plenty of time there.

In the end, she wedged the jar in the corner between the armrest and the back of the sofa. It was barely visible, its black exterior blending into the black covering. She smiled, remembering how Sebastian had even wanted their shared bathroom to be tiled in black. She'd made fun of him so often when they were young, for being all edgy and emo, but as it turned out, it genuinely made him feel calmer to have a mostly monochrome interior, and Sam and her had learned to appreciate the aesthetic, even if they did add their own more colourful touches here and there.

She felt the tears welling up again, and quickly went upstairs to get ready for bed. It had been a nice gesture of Trish to make sure that the time capsule found its way back to her, but she'd wasted almost the entire night wallowing in memories, and that wasn't healthy. Tomorrow, she would think of what to do with the capsule. She didn't want to dwell on it any more this evening.

As she pulled the sheets up over her shoulders, she wondered how much longer she'd lie awake. She decided to turn the main light off, but leave the string of fairy lights burning. It felt less dark and alone that way. She turned towards the screen on the wall. Just past midnight.

Almost on cue, a small icon started pulsing in the lower left corner. A video call.

"Answer incoming call."

"Hey pumpkin. How was your day?"

She smiled, seeing how tired Sam and Seb looked, lying in bed with their arms wrapped around each other and their faces pressed close together. "I'll tell you later. I missed you so much. How's the hotel? And how did the concert go?"

As Sam rambled away about the size of the crowd and how the organisers had fucked up their rider, and Seb yawned against his shoulder with the occasional one or two syllable interjection, she couldn't help but reach out her hand and trace their faces on the screen, the same way she'd done with their photo. Of course they looked older, much older. But that same beauty was still there.

"You're very quiet, pumpkin. Everything okay?"

They were always so in tune with her moods. "Yes. I love you so much. I'm glad you still managed to call, despite it being so late. I can't wait until you get back."

Both of them smiled back at her. Sam nodded. "We miss you too. Come pick us up at the airport on Tuesday? I don't want to spend any longer without you than I have to."

She let out a soft sigh. "As soon as I retire, I'm coming with you for every tour. I don't care if it's two days or two weeks. I can't believe I'm actually getting more clingy in my old age. If you'd told me 40 years ago that I'd be more in love with you now than I ever was before, I wouldn't have believed it. Because I already loved you so much back then. But you've grown more beautiful and more desirable with each passing year. I can't believe how lucky I am to have you two in my life."

Sebastian reached out his hand to the camera. "Same here, Abby. Love you. Wish we were back home."

Sam turned towards him and pressed a kiss to his cheek, then winked at the camera. "Go get some sleep, Abs. I need to tuck this guy in before he passes out. Talk to you tomorrow, okay?"

She nodded and blew him a kiss, then ended the call. She lay back against the pillow and closed her eyes, thinking of the time capsule again. Maybe they should update it. Let that future discoverer know that their dreams had come true. How they'd created their own future from the scraps they'd put in that jar. How they'd learned to love.

Love wasn't something that just happened. They had made it happen. They had chosen it.

And thinking back, she knew she'd choose to do it all over again.

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