

Genevieve

by Maylin Guida

It's the summer between my junior and senior year of college, and I'm back home in San Diego working at Target. I'm happy where I am; I'm set to graduate in a year with a Dietetics degree, and I had an internship working in a hospital last semester and loved it. Being a cashier is kind of tedious, but I need the money because my parents only pay for every other semester's tuition. It's nearing five o'clock, so my shift is almost over. I am more than ready to go home and spend some quality time with my parents and younger brothers making dinner and playing board games.

After I ring up the last customer from the big line that had formed, there's a lull. I tie my strawberry blonde hair up into a bun with the elastic from my wrist so it will stop falling into my face. I use this time to unwrap more sticks of coins from their brown paper packaging and dump them into their respective sections of the register so I don't hold customers up when giving them their change. I hear the sound of someone setting things on the belt, and I turn around, preparing my Customer Service smile.

"Hi, how are--" The words die in my throat when I see who is standing on the other side of the counter.

It feels like that time I fell flat on my back on the asphalt during recess in 5th grade, and the wind got knocked out of me; it's that kind of shock, because I never, ever thought I would see her again. Actually, I had kind of counted on it for my sanity. After high school, I deleted her number and removed her from all of my social media; I wanted her out of my life. And it worked. Freshman year of college was hard, especially in the beginning. But then my classes got more time consuming and I started working, and I didn't have time to think about her anymore.

It was almost like she ceased to exist, but now she's here, really here, standing right in front of me. Countless times, especially during my first year of college, I would see someone who looked just like her, at least from the back, with her hair and build. My heart would stop, but then when they turned around, I would see that they actually looked nothing like her at all, and I would realize how stupid I was for thinking it could be her in the first place. But now it's really her--there's no doubt about it.

Her eyebrows knit together for a few seconds before her dark chocolate eyes widen in recognition.

"Hailey?"

I had forgotten what her face looked like--especially all the little details, like the spray of freckles on her

nose and her wide mouth. Her hair is shorter than it was when I last saw her--it had always been down to her waist in high school--but it's the same caramel color, and she's wearing the same chic style of clothing she always used to wear; she has on a white lacy top and dark blue jeans.

"Hi, Genevieve," I finally manage to say once it feels like I can breathe again. I quickly look away and focus my attention on ringing up her things so I don't have to continue making eye contact with her.

You hear a lot about your first love: how blissful and wonderful it is, that you'll never forget that person or stop caring about them, that you will never feel as strongly for anyone else as you did for them, and that you lose your innocence when it's over and become more mature because of that first heartbreak.

I have found almost everything I've heard about first loves to be true, except the part about it being blissful and wonderful. And I suppose that would be true, if you and your first love fell in love together. But it isn't that way when you fall in love with them alone.

"How are you?"

"Pretty good. Just doing some summer work. How are you? How's school going?"

It's just like it always was in high school; my heart is pounding so fast it feels like it's about to fly out of my chest at any second, and I'm talking too fast, tripping over my words.

"Great! I'm majoring in Communications, and I'm going to graduate next year. What about you?"

"I'm graduating next year too, with Dietetics."

"Wow, that's awesome! You should teach me how to eat healthier," she jokes.

"Would you like to buy a bag for ten cents?"

"Yes, please."

"That will be \$40.11," I tell her.

She hands me the money with a flawlessly manicured hand, and I give her her change.

"It was nice to see you, Hailey," she says.

Now I have to look up at her, and God, she's doing that *thing* with her eyes like she always used to back in high school where whenever I talked to her, it was like she was staring into my soul. It was how she talked to everyone. She made you feel important, like she cared about nothing else in that moment but you.

It hits me right in the heart, and it *hurts*--it hurts so much, because I had moved on. I hadn't gotten over her, but I had moved on. There's a difference between moving on and getting over someone; moving on is a choice you make--a choice to stop thinking about that person, a choice to stop letting them define your life. I had made that choice. It wasn't easy, but I did it. But getting over someone? That's something that just happens with time ... or it

doesn't. And now I know I wasn't over her at all, because if I was, every single stupid feeling I had for her in high school wouldn't have come back and hit me at full force.

"Babe, you ready?" A man's voice yanks me back to the present moment. A guy with close-cropped sandy hair wearing a navy blue t-shirt and khaki shorts is standing next to her now, one of his tanned, muscular arms around her waist.

"Yeah." She looks over at him and smiles. "Darling, this is Hailey. We went to high school together. Hailey, this is Blake, my fiance."

"Hi." I clasp his outstretched hand and shake it, but it's like I'm on autopilot. The word "fiance" just keeps playing over and over in my head like a broken record, and the reality slowly sets in. Genevieve is engaged, and she is going to get married. She's probably going to have one of those happy little nuclear families, too. In a couple of years, she'll be walking around with a screaming baby in a stroller and a toddler pulling on the hem of her shirt, trying to get her attention. I hadn't noticed the ring before, but now I wonder how I could possibly have missed it. It's huge and glittering and garish.

Of course I had known I never had a chance with her, but now it's official, like it's been stamped with a red seal or something.

"See you around," she says, grabbing her bag in one hand and holding Blake's hand in the other.

There's the eye thing again.

"See ya." My voice barely reaches above a whisper.

My eyes are glued to her back as they start walking towards the exit of the store, knowing this may very well be the last time I will see her. Maybe we will see each other again, but I certainly hope not. This was painful enough.

"Ma'am?" an impatient voice says from the other side of the counter.

"Oh!" I jump. "I'm so sorry."

I quickly start ringing up the woman's things, trying to shake off the weight of what just happened and focus on my work. It's time to move on--to start that process all over again. But I know I will never, ever be over her.

As I hand the woman her receipt, I take one last glance up to see Genevieve and Blake walking out of the store, the sliding doors closing behind them.