

HARVARD

I hate the way you look at me.

You stare at me more often than you did, and it's because you're not wearing your glasses. I hated those pink-framed things, but you wore them around me because you were always too tired to clean your contacts. You said that it shouldn't matter to me whether you wore them or not since we weren't as superficial as everyone else.

You looked like a sick flamingo in your glasses.

Neil comes over to me with a beer. He has that dumb grin on his face, the one that means, "Hey-hey! Old friends together at a party!" I tell him I don't want the beer. He should know that I never drink the stuff. Neil just shrugs and moves over to where you're standing. You take the beer that was meant for me since you don't mind the taste. Neil is an ass sometimes.

You still stare at me, even as Neil begins to talk to you. He's drunk and he spills some beer on your shoes, the ones that are made of black velvet. I like to call them felt. You have four pairs of black shoes that only differ in minute details. One has a buckle, another has a bow. One is a soft flat, the other is hard and heeled. They make me jealous of your parents' money.

I remember the weekend when you and I went to the Square with my new friend, Shawn. Was it fun buying everything that looked neat to you? You even bought me something after I finally gave in to your insisting. Shawn must have been laughing at us. Every time I see him I wonder if he's still laughing.

Someone turns the music up louder, making the speakers shake, so there's no use in trying to talk.

The theme of the party is "Elvis ain't dead!" Neil's roommate, Jon, has even greased his hair to look like a young Elvis. He thinks he's great because he knows the words to every Presley tune ever written. I think he memorized them over the last two weeks.

I walk over to a table where there are a bunch of finger-paints. It's an interesting idea, having people write on the wall with finger-paints. Most of the wall is covered already, and some people have already been making eyes at the ceiling. I wonder if Neil is going to have to clean it all off when the party ends.

I dip one of my fingers in a small jar of paint up to the second knuckle. I use black instead of the bright colors because it makes me think I'm evil (I once asked you to call me Mr. Sinister but you didn't, remember?) I find the last small, empty area on the wall and write "Tufts

Rules" in neat block print because I do that at every Harvard party I'm at. It makes me feel better about having to go to a school that I hate.

My mother told me not to come to Tufts. She's the only woman I know who's always right. I remember having to explain why I had to go to school in Boston over and over, saying exactly what we had planned to say to our parents. I might have convinced her finally, but I think I forgot to convince myself along the way. I think of transferring every day now, but I am afraid to be wrong. My mother would understand if I told her that I wanted to transfer to a new school, but only because she's my mother, not because she really understands.

There's a towel to clean my finger with when I finished writing, but it's dirtier than the wall. I instead wipe my finger clean on the curtain next to the window. I have to suppress a laugh because I think no one has noticed what I've done. You have, though, and I know it from the moment I turn around. Your eyes have been watching me although your mouth has been talking to Neil. There's a small smile on your face, and it's because you know I'm that kind of person: a person who wipes his fingers on curtains.

I slowly shove my way through the crowd and into the next room, irritated that you know even the unimportant things about me. It bothers me enough that I even grab myself a beer.

Sue walks in the door and saves me. She's Neil's girlfriend from Wellesley – "originally from New York but I'm an L.A. woman now" is the way she introduces herself these days, along with a giggle. I give Sue my freshly-poured beer and tell her how cool the navy blue beret she's wearing looks on her. I'm tempted to add that I know she bought it at Urban Outfitters and that it was seven dollars, but I don't. Sue puts her arm in mine and introduces me to a thin, pale girl standing behind her.

"This is Buffy," she says, putting her mouth against my ear so I will hear her. When she is done I make sure to wipe my ear because she is wearing too much lipstick. I turn and smile at Buffy and tell her my name is Edward, but she can't hear me because Jon is vigorously trying to keep up with the words to Jailhouse Rock and everyone else is trying to keep up with Jon. I try and yell my name once again over the noise, but she still can't hear me and says, "Your name is Wenderd?" I say yes because it really doesn't matter, especially since she calls herself Buffy.

The three of us push our way through the sweating bodies back into the main room, Buffy holding on to a piece of my shirt. Sue finishes half of my beer by the time we make it.

Neil sees us and comes over to say hi, dragging you behind him. I feel confident and smug because I know you're wondering who Buffy is, and why she's with me. But you just stare at me and you don't seem fazed. Sue introduces you and Neil to Buffy, which makes you laugh

inwardly at me, even though I didn't choose her name for her. Neil thinks it's a great name, and asks her to dance. Buffy seems surprised. I don't feel smug anymore. Sue tilts her head back, finishes my beer, and says she's going to get another. I nod although I want her to stay.

You and I are left alone, standing under a giant Elvis poster. I can almost smell the garlands around his neck. It used to be so difficult for us to be alone before. Why is it so easy now? All those intricate plans: telling my parents that I was going to be sleeping at Neil's house but seeing you instead. You were always too nervous about getting caught to really enjoy yourself. Back then I had to reassure you. I need some reassurance now, but all I have are your stares.

My hands are jammed into my pockets and I rock back and forth on my heels. It's one of my "Edward poses" as you liked to call them. I have about twenty or thirty of them and I go through them all in about two minutes. I feel ridiculous, and I want to yell at you for staring at me and making me feel this way. But I can't, because I know that I caused it all, not you. We both know that I'm the guilty one, and I wonder if perhaps I am evil for destroying three years of our work in one day.

Sue returns with beer in hair as well as in her hand, and asks us why we don't go and dance. I don't blame her; she still thinks you and I are one and the same, inseparable. It used to be that we could laugh at our friends for being clueless and for thinking that. We could laugh at people like Sue and Neil and Buffy, for there's nothing easier than laughing with someone about someone else's stupidity. But the jokes aren't funny anymore, though I can tell you think they should be.

The music slows down now, and the randomness of the dance floor gives way to pairs. We stand apart, and I wonder if you're waiting for me to say something, to commit myself. I wait too long. A voice much deeper than mine comes between us, breaking your gaze, and asks you to dance. There is no hesitation before your okay.

I search frantically for Buffy, but for some reason I can't remember what she looks like.

On my way toward the door I pass Jon, who's standing on a desk now gyrating his hips with a toy guitar in hand, mouthing the words to Love Me Tender. He doesn't stop to ask why I'm leaving.

I also pass the finger-painted wall. Someone has put a red line through the word "Tufts" and replaced it with the word "Harvard" above it.

I look over at you dancing and I debate whether to change it back. But I head toward the door as I finally realize that it's useless. And besides, there is no more room on the wall.