

burns on my fingers

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by [empressearwig](#)

Summary

When they meet again, it's in New York.

When they meet again, it's in New York, because that's where all stories start or end. When they meet again, it's a little bit of both.

Erica is the one that issues the invitation, the one that says *the next time you're here, we should get coffee or a drink, maybe*, because she knows that's the way that grown ups are supposed to act. You offer to have a painfully awkward meeting with the person who revealed your bra size on his blog and who's become one of the most important people in the world. You offer, because you both know that the other person is never going to say *yes, that sounds like a great idea*.

Somehow, Erica forgot that Mark never knew anything about the way that people are supposed to act.

But she's not going to take back the invitation, because that's not what people are supposed to do either, and so they make plans to meet at a Starbucks in the West Village. She's already there when he walks in the door, and she's struck by just how the same he is; three years and however many million or billion dollars later, and he's still wearing a ratty Harvard hoodie and those damn flip flops. He still looks like Mark.

She half stands up out of her chair, raising her arm to wave him over, when she sees him spot her in the crowd. He raises a hand, in a hello, and smiles, just a little, albeit in an incredibly nervous kind of way. He weaves his way through the crowd and stops when he gets to her table.

"I made sure that I looked at your most recent pictures on Facebook," he says, sounding pleased with himself. "I wanted to make sure I recognized you."

Erica blinks. Somehow, the way he holds conversations is another thing she'd forgotten, although she has no idea how. "Hello, Mark."

"Hello," he says. "I'm sorry, I forgot to say that, didn't I?" He takes a step forward, half leans over as if to hug her and then steps back. "Is hugging you okay? I thought that's what people did after they hadn't seen each other for a long time, but if it's not okay then we can just forget about it."

"It's fine," Erica says, standing up and wrapping her arms around his shoulders, just enough to meet the definition of the word hug and nothing more. She doesn't want to get too close. It's still close enough for her to be able to tell that he still smells the way that he did back then, too. She didn't know she still remembered that. "Did you want to sit?"

He nods his head, once. "Yes." He doesn't move.

She frowns at him, not sure what the problem is. "Were you waiting for an engraved invitation?" She pushes the chair out with her foot. "Sit."

"I was going to ask if you wanted something first," he says. "Coffee? Weren't we getting coffee?"

"I have coffee," she says, picking up her cup and taking a drink to make the point more clear. "See?"

"Right," he says, finally pulling the chair back and sitting down. He's instantly fidgety, practically vibrating with the same manic energy he's always had. That she does remember. "So you're living in New York now."

"I am."

"Do you enjoy it?"

"Yes," she says, staring at him curiously. Of all the ways she'd expected this to go, and there were many, this hadn't been one of them. She'd never expected Mark to want to talk about *her* life, to be polite or courteous, or offer to buy her coffee. Okay, maybe she'd expected the latter, but that was just because he had more money than God now. The rest was wholly unfamiliar. Mark never cared about her life. "Is everything alright?"

He blinks, rapidly. "What?"

"Is everything alright?" she repeats, trying to read his face. It's as impossible for her now as it was then.

"Of course," he says.

"Okay," she says, shaking her head. She won't press the issue. "So what are you doing in New York?"

He shrugs. "Meeting with investors. Visiting my parents."

"Right. Your parents live where again?"

"Westchester."

"Right," she says again, feeling the awkwardness that she knew would come already falling over them. There's only so much you can say in conversations like these, which is why people, normal people who have normal relationships, they try not to have them. She wishes, not for the first time, that Mark were normal.

Her phone rings, and she fumbles through her purse for it, even though she knows who's calling. Because she knew this was going to happen, knew it was going to be awkward and impossible and that she'd want to leave; because she knew it was going to happen, she arranged for a way out. She answers the phone.

Her roommate, Sarah asks, "Is it terrible?"

"Yes," Erica says, trying to look appropriately worried about something.

"God, I told you that you shouldn't have gone."

"Oh no, really?"

"Are we done now? Tell me we're done now."

"I'll be right there." She stands and shoves her phone back into her purse. "I'm sorry," she says, and she's surprised to find that she means it, just a little. "I have to go."

"Is something wrong?" Mark asks, standing up too. "Can I --?"

She waves him away. "No, it's just a problem my roommate's having. But thank you."

When she hugs him this time, she actually means it. He's stiff with surprise, but then his arms go around her and just for a second, she remembers why she started dating him in the first place. Then the second passes and she steps back. "I should go."

"Right," he says. "It was -- it was nice to see you, Erica."

"You too," she says. "Goodbye, Mark."

"Goodbye, Erica."

She walks out the door. He walks back into her life.

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