

PIECES OF ME

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A NOVEL

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**WEDNESDAY BOOKS
NEW YORK**

ONE

W*ake up.*

I snuggle deeper into the blankets, trying to push away the voice in my head. Everything feels light and muffled, the edges of my brain lined with cotton balls. I cling to the last vestiges of a dream, holding on even though I can't quite remember what it was or why it was so good.

You need to wake up.

With a sigh, I open my eyes.

The world takes its time coming into focus. First, I hear the traffic outside, slightly muted. Daylight flickers through the fluttering of my eyelashes. Too bright. A slight ache presses against the inside of my brain. I snuggle deeper into the pillow to ease it, squishing my eyes shut, but it doesn't matter. I'm awake.

My mouth tastes like old sour wine and my throat is scratchy

in a familiar way. I don't remember drinking or vaping last night, but I must have been. The two usually go together for me. Normally I stay away from vaping or smoking, but there's something about when I'm feeling loose and free that makes me want them. Did I go out last night? The last thing I remember is going to class yesterday. It must have been one hell of a party.

I thought I'd conquered drinking. I haven't had a drink in a couple of months for this very reason—blackouts aren't a good sign, and I've had them, like, a lot.

The pillow beneath my head is soft and smells slightly spicy—like gingerbread. There's a sweetness to it, vanilla and sunshine on clean skin. I could smell it all day. Taking a deep breath, I bury my face deeper in the soft flannel.

Wait. I don't have flannel sheets on my bed.

Where am I?

I open my eyes wide. I'm at the edge of the bed, staring at a rug. A couple more inches and I'd be on the floor. I raise my head. The bookcase against the wall is filled with books that aren't mine. An unfamiliar phone on the bedside table says it's ten o'clock. As I roll onto my back, I realize I don't recognize the room, or the boxers and T-shirt I'm wearing.

Or the guy asleep beside me.

Shit.

I sit up. He doesn't stir. Confusion keeps me there, staring. I'm not afraid as I look at him. He's actually kind of cute—if you like long, skinny guys with riotous curls and angular faces. I could cut myself on that jaw, or at least sharpen a pencil. He's got an amazing profile.

I should be panicking, wondering where my clothes are.

Planning my escape. Instead, I sit here, on this comfortable but messy bed, and watch a stranger sleep. I mean, I don't know if I'm here by choice or if he brought me here while I was drunk. Did we have sex?

I'd like to believe I would remember *that*, but as I scour the recesses of my brain, I can't. I have fuzzy memories of his smile, his laugh. But no bad feelings. That gingerbread smell is all him, I think. But I don't freak out. *Not again*, I say in my head before giving it a rueful shake.

There's a knock on the door. I turn my head as it opens. There's a girl at the threshold. She's tall and willowy—like a model—with long dark hair and wide blue eyes. She looks like she should be in a tampon commercial. Or toothpaste. Something where she has to flick her hair and smile a lot. She's not wearing any makeup and her skin is perfect. I want to hate her, but when our gazes meet, I smile.

"Hey, girlie," she says. "I thought you might be up." She hands me a cup of coffee.

"Just," I say. "Thanks." I know her, but I don't—like I met her in a dream or saw her on TV. I must have been way wasted last night. I take a sip. It's good.

She smiles at the guy sprawled beside me. "Did he snore?"

Cradling the mug in my hands, I shake my head. "Nope. I think he talked, though." Did he?

"It was nice of you to let him crash with you. He really would have slept on the floor."

So, no sex, then. Probably? "That would have been ridiculous. This bed is huge."

She nods, eyeing me strangely as I take a drink. "You okay?"

I nod. "Mm-hmm. Just a little groggy, y'know?"

“Yeah, sure.” She doesn’t look convinced. “Okay, I’ll be in the kitchen if you want to join me for a vape.”

The last thing I want is to suck on a vape pod, but I don’t tell her that. She leaves the room, closing the door behind her. The second the latch clicks I’m off the bed and at the desk, pawing through the papers and notebooks to see if there’s anything that can help me figure out where I am.

This isn’t the first time something like this has happened to me, but it’s the first time I’ve come to in a place completely unfamiliar. Usually I’m at home or with Izzy. Safe, but confused and foggy. I stopped drinking last year because of stuff like this. Obviously, I forgot that last night.

There’s an envelope addressed to Connor James on the desk. I assume that’s my bedmate. If that’s true, and the rest of the information is correct, then I’m on West 152nd Street in New York. At least I’m still in the city.

The room spins a little around me. There’s a noise in my head kind of like the crackle of static—the hum of a radio station turned down so low I can’t make out the words. I still don’t know how I got here. None of this is familiar. And yet . . . it’s not exactly completely strange? These people seem to know me. They haven’t chopped me into pieces or used my skin to make furniture. Not yet, anyway. More importantly, I feel comfortable with them. I still haven’t jumped into full-on panic mode. I feel safe, which is saying something, because a lot of times I don’t even feel safe at home.

Oh, shit. Mom. She’ll be worried if I didn’t call her last night. I always try to let her know if I’m going to stay out.

I glance around and spot my backpack on the floor. I squat down and grab my phone out of the front pocket.

“Fuck.” It’s dead. How can that be? It was fully charged yesterday after class. Unless I recorded the entire weekend on video, it should still have *some* juice. Then again, if I did record stuff, that will help me remember.

“You okay?” asks a gravelly voice.

I look up. He’s awake, sitting in the middle of the bed with his arms slung around his knees. He’s got a wicked case of bed-head and his eyelids are heavy, dragged down by the length and thickness of his eyelashes. My fingers twitch—I want to draw him. If ever there was a face that should be put to canvas, it’s his. He’s really, *really* beautiful.

“My phone’s dead,” I say stupidly.

He lifts his chin in the direction of the desk. “There’s a charger in the top drawer. You can use mine if you need to make a call.”

“Thanks.” I stand as he gets off the bed. He moves like liquid—a combination of long-limbed grace and confidence. He’s lanky in his black T-shirt and sweatpants—all shoulders and legs.

An image of us dancing drifts across my mind, hazy and slightly out of focus. He made me laugh, I think. Or maybe I made him laugh. I don’t remember. I like him, though. I know that. He’s self-deprecating and sweet.

I knew you’d like him, whispers a familiar voice. I blink. My “internal voices” have always been pretty vocal, but this one is particularly clear.

“Are you sure you’re okay?” he asks. “You seem kinda . . . out of it.”

“Wow,” I hedge. “That’s a great thing to say to the girl who let you share the bed instead of sleeping on the floor.”

His cheeks flush slightly as he averts his eyes. “I didn’t mean it as an insult.” His gaze meets mine once more. “You just seem . . . confused.”

It’s obvious he’s a really nice guy and I don’t want him to decide he made a mistake letting me into his house. “I think I had too much to drink last night.”

He’s still for a moment. “Did you.” It’s not really a question, so I don’t answer it. “Yeah, maybe you did.”

Oh, shit. But it’s kind of good as well. At least it explains things. “Yeah. I’m sorry if I did anything stupid. I didn’t, did I?”

“No,” he says softly. “Nothing at all. And you don’t need to worry—you left me with my virtue intact.”

What? Oh, he’s joking. Right. I try to hide my sigh of relief, because I don’t want him to be offended. I mean, if I slept with a guy who looks like him, I’d want to remember it. “Good,” I say. “Because I’d hate for Mr. Darcy to think you’re of loose character.”

He grins at that. “*Pride and Prejudice*. I like it.”

I glance at my phone. Still dead. At this rate I’ll be here making an idiot of myself all day. I’m wearing his underwear, for God’s sake. I mean, it doesn’t get much more intimate than that, does it? And I’m wearing his *Cyanide & Happiness* T-shirt. I mean, I assume it’s his. It’s kind of snug, so it’s not made for someone with boobs.

I’m not wearing a bra. Where the hell are my clothes?

Connor grabs a phone off the desk, unlocks it, and hands it to me. Next, he opens a drawer and pulls out a charging cord. He gives me that as well. “I’m going to get a coffee. You want anything?”

I shake my head.

"I'll get your clothes out of the dryer, too," he says, as if he can read my mind.

"Thanks." I force a smile. My face feels tight, my eyes, wild.

He smiles slightly and leaves the room. Alone, I can finally breathe normally. First, I plug in the charger and my phone. That little charging symbol eases my anxiety so much it's almost laughable. Then, using his phone, I dial my mother's number, gnawing on my thumb as it tries to connect. It rings three times.

"Hello?"

I can't begin to describe how it feels to hear her voice. It's so freaking good I want to cry. "Hey, Mom."

Silence, then a small sound, like a hiccup. "Dylan?"

"Yeah." I run my hand through my hair—it's sticking out around my head like tangled cotton candy. Way too much product in it. "I'm sorry I didn't call last night."

"Last night? Oh my God." I can hear her breath shake as it rushes out. "Where are you?"

I frown. She sounds really freaked out. Like, *really* freaked. "The city. I'm sorry if you tried to call, my phone was dead."

"Your *phone* . . ." She has that "no excuse" voice of hers on. Come on, I'm not a baby anymore. She doesn't even blink if Mark stays out all night. Yeah, I still live at home to save money, but I'm almost nineteen.

"It must have died last night. Anyway, I'm with friends and I'm okay. I'm going to head home soon. I have that project due Monday that I need to work on."

"Dylan . . . What day do you think it is?"

"Saturday," I reply, resisting the urge to add a joking "duh."

She makes that noise again. "It's not Saturday, sweetie."

I frown. "Yes, it is."

"It's Monday."

"What?" No. "That's impossible." The world tilts around me, and I grab the desk chair to keep from falling.

"Honey," she says, her voice raw with concern and irritation, "you've been missing for three days."

This book is for everyone out there with dissociative identity disorder, including a long-ago friend whose struggle I didn't see.

It's also for Steve, because of all he does so I can live my dream. Love you.

This is a work of fiction. All of the characters, organizations, and events portrayed in this novel are either products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously.

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