

## In Seconds

The slam of my locker was a blessing. It was finally the end of the school day, and I could gladly spend my free time tonight with my best friend, Anna.

"Hey, stranger," an angelic voice said from behind me. I jumped when she spoke, and she giggled. There stood a girl with a huge smile on her face that made me smile in return.

"Oh, hey. You scared me." She shrugged as we walked, pushing open the metal doors to the outside world. I followed, holding the door for the mass of people flowing out of the building after us.

The old school was a comfort but also a burden. What kid really liked school? For me, I just do all the necessary work, and hope it ended sooner than it started.

As we left the old vine covered school, Anna sped ahead of some slow freshmen. I tried to keep up, walking past the oak tree in front of the school.

"Hey, um, where's my iPod?" I held out a hand when we both stopped, and Anna rolled her eyes. She dangled my blue iPod nano, about to beg for more time with it. She just liked the games I had because she had more music than I did.

"You're giving me the look again." I chuckled and she smiled. We waited at the curb to cross the street. By now, it was extremely overcrowded with students and cars. Luckily, all the cars were stopped right before the white line like they were supposed to be.

"Can I please just have it a little longer, Liv," she begged, holding onto it right before I grabbed it out of her hands. "I made a playlist and everything and it's coming up on my favorite song," she pleaded. I rolled my eyes and pulled my long hair out of my face.

"Fine, just because I love you," I said. She grinned and put the other headphone back into her ear. I glanced at her and sighed. If only she knew I truly meant it. Not in the way she thought.

I halted at the crosswalk sign on the corner of Oak Street and Vine Court. It was just before our little neighborhood in Oakton Estates. Anna was sporting a new summer dress that her parents bought her for her birthday over the summer. Her hair was tied back into a braid from gym class. The golden hair reached all the way down to her lower back since she let it

grow out over the summer. Her sparkling blue eyes glanced back to me with eagerness when she pressed the metal button at the intersection.

"It's finally Friday, Olivia," she mused to me for the billionth time today. She clutched her books tighter in her arms. I sighed and ran a hand through my brown hair.

I missed what she had said next. Butterflies filled my stomach as her giggles erupted through the clean air.

"Let's go!" The flashing of the walk signal at the median in the street signaled that the cars would stop for us. I followed her and cars were slowing down. Her braid bounced as we came to the stiff median. I looked to my right to check the traffic, but Anna kept going. My heart stopped for a few beats when I saw what was coming.

"Anna! Watch out!" I yelled too late as a swerving bright red Jeep Cherokee came barreling down the road as if looking to hunt someone down. The only person in the street was Anna, who had bent down to pick up her AP United States History book. She was humming along to the Selena Gomez song that was playing on my blue iPod.

"Anna!" I yelled loud enough for her to look up and freeze, unaware until that moment that there was a car headed right towards her. Her blood-curling scream shook my terrified body out of its shell as I watched as the red Jeep Cherokee skidded to a stop, hitting Anna's fragile body. My voice choked on the sob that was forming in my throat. *No, this can't be happening.*

My eyes were glued to the once happy and beautiful Anna Ruzinski, my best friend, drowning in her own pool of red.

## Fireflies

Through the little window in our living room, the darkening sunset was slowly disappearing over the lake. My mom carried my brother, Jimmy, who was four at the time. My hair was pulled into one of Mom's French braids. We had just finished our mac and cheese; our kitchen smelled like hot dogs and pasta.

My brother was dozing into a dreamy sleep, but I saw bright green flashes every so often that made me stop and stare. My mother turned around at the tallest edge of the hill. She smiled at my interest in these little objects floating around us. I was too engrossed in them to realize that I had continued to walk.

"Come on. We are going to see the fireworks." My mother continued to walk down the hill as I took in what she said, still wondering what these things were in the night sky. What glowed green and floated like the stars in the sky? I was speechless as my blue eyes traced the green lights floating in air. I reached out to touch one and it fluttered away. I was convinced they were butterflies that could glow.

My dad was waiting by the pier and waved to us. I slowly walked down the hill with my mother, holding her left hand tightly.

"What are those?" I stared into the dark sky with all the green lights floating and disappearing every so often, hoping for an answer. She smiled. She sat my brother down beside me and reached up, catching a green light from the dark sky. I couldn't help but giggle. I didn't know you could catch them.

"Fireflies. See?" She opened her hands. The little object that beamed the beautiful light was none other than a bug with wings. I touched it, and it fluttered into the sky and glowed once more. My mom picked up my brother again, and we walked onto the pier.

The smell of fish and algae made me scrunch up my nose as my dad's big hands picked me up and placed me into the boat. The boat had been cleared of all the fishing poles he'd used earlier that morning. He buckled a life jacket securely around me, and my mom handed my dad Jimmy as I sat and looked over the edge and watched the fireflies skim just above the surface of the water. My dad kissed my forehead softly and I hugged him tightly before he went to start the engine.

The water had once been very clean – you could see all the way to the bottom with all the guppies and little fish beneath the surface. Now it was blanketed by a layer of thick, green algae. My brother curled up next to me and my mom sat on his other side. His little brown eyes were peacefully shut, and his head rested on my left shoulder so comfortably I could have stayed there in that moment forever.

The boat started, and my dad's voice was lost in the monotonous hum of the engine. I watched as the fireflies danced over the water like ballet dancers. My mom's arm wrapped around us with the warm quilt she made before I was born, and I cuddled into my brother and Mom. I watched, as the shore seemed to pull farther and farther from us. Soon the green blinking lights were gone and all that was there was the warm embrace of my mom and brother and the faint memory of the little firefly in my mother's hand, unwilling to blink until it was able to fly away.

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