

Upheaval

A terrible blizzard had blown in the day of Victor Westerly's funeral and the blustering storm kept many of the guests away from the church just outside of Westminster. Even Aunt Debra, Victor's sister, had called a few hours before to tell Devin, Victor's daughter, that she wouldn't be arriving. The roads were just too dangerous, which is why it surprised Devin so much when she heard the Oldsmobile thunder into the parking lot outside.

Devin was going over her speech when Skylar walked into the room. She had shucked the bulky, leather jacket and combat boots for a slim, black dress that cling to her hips. The engine grease was gone. Her hair was tied up in an elegant knot. She wore a silver necklace and Devin couldn't stop looking at her. Without conscious knowledge of doing it, Devin walked over to Skylar. As she came closer, Devin's teeth gritted together and her fists folded in on themselves.

"What are you doing here?" Devin asked. She didn't want Skylar there. Not there, where everyone could see her and talk about her in their country club member ways. Not there, when Devin didn't have the luxury of looking at her with so many people as witness. She didn't want her legs or her hips bones protruding out from her dress and she didn't want the things they did to her.

"I saw the memorial in the news paper," Skylar explain, narrowing her eyes. "Why?"

"You didn't even know my father," Devin all but hissed.

"Yes, I did," Skylar said firmly.

“You...” Devin blinked. The idea of this woman— who was making life so very confusing for her, who she thought about at night, who she made excuses to see every week— knowing her father, made her head swim. “You did?”

“Victor came into the shop a lot,” Skylar said. “His car was always breaking down.” Skylar ran her fingers through her hair. Devin wished she wouldn’t do that. She took a deep breath. Tears prickled at the corners of her eyes. Her father’s green, 1964 Ford pick up truck was in her mother’s garage now but would no doubt be in a junk yard somewhere by the time her mother got over the sentimentality of it. Devin gave her a week.

“He loved that car,” Devin said. “Wouldn’t give up on it.” Her voice cracked. Skylar put her hand on Devin’s shoulder. It radiated with heat despite the cold outside.

“I’m sorry,” she said, finally raising her eyes to meet Devin’s. Devin’s resolve crumbled and she slumped against Skylar, letting her mind rest for a little while, her heart taking relief in the other woman. Skylar rubbed her back as Devin grasped tightly at her shoulders.

“Devin,” Mercy’s voice came from behind her. Devin pulled away and squared her shoulders before turning to face her mother. Mercy’s face was tight, eyes flickering between Devin and Skylar as she spoke. She had a bad habit of running her fingers over one spot on her each of her thighs. Dozens of pants, skirts and dresses had two identical holes worn into them just a few inches above the knee. The dress she was wearing was a new, blue silk bought for the occasion, and probably the only thing she owned without the tell-tale holes. “Pastor Franklin wants to start in five minutes. Are you ready?”

“Yeah,” Devin murmured, wiping her eyes. Mercy looked pointedly at Skylar. She wanted an introduction. Devin turned to Skylar. “Why don’t you take a seat. We’ll be starting

shortly.” Skylar looked between the two Westerly women then nodded. She squeezed Devin’s shoulder once more then took her seat near the back of the church. Mercy pursed her lips as she and her daughter sat down in the front pew.

The funeral passed quickly and once the body had been taken away to be cremated—something Victor had insisted on despite Mercy’s objections—everyone in attendance drove to Piccolos. Piccolos was an Italian restaurant a few blocks away where Devin and her father had spent many summer afternoons when she was a girl after garage sale hunting in the neighborhood. Mercy wanted the wake to be in the church but the only room available to them was being remodeled. Devin had convinced her to rent out the restaurant’s entertainment room and with little energy to dispute, Mercy agreed.

The first thing Devin noticed about the wake was that there were far more people than there had been at the funeral. Piccolos had good food. A wake wasn’t nearly as depressing as the accompanying funeral. She pursed her lips tightly together as she stood near the window, a glass of champagne in hand. Looking outside, she saw Hannah and Alex running through the snow toward the restaurant doors. Hannah held her hands up around her head, trying to keep her hair style intact as she sprinted for the door. She ran over a patch of ice and nearly went tumbling to the ground before catching herself on the patio fence. Alex pulled his giant, puffy coat around him. He took her elbow to steady her. Hannah tugged it away from him. Devin could just barely hear her say a brusk, “I’m fine. Thank you.” Alex let go of his wife and she promptly fell onto the concrete with a loud thud. Hannah scrambled back up and walked quickly, but carefully into the restaurant. Alex, rolling his eyes, followed her. While they had hardly known Victor, the married couple had come to the funeral for moral support, though Devin hadn’t said she needed it

from them. Their car wasn't very good in the snow, which explained why they were late. Devin had been meaning to give them Skylar's number for a seasonal tune up. The card had been sitting in her purse for almost a month now.

"I'm so sorry we're late," Hannah said as she tossed her coat to Alex and hugged Devin tightly around the waist. Alex hung both his and his wife's coat up near the door before walking over to them. He gave Devin a hug as well, his hands laying just a little too low on her back. Hannah didn't seem to notice.

"You spoke beautifully," he said.

"Thank you."

"You had me crying. Truly wonderful," Hannah chimed in. Devin smiled weakly.

"I'm glad you think so," she said. Across the room, Skylar was sitting alone, poking at a plate of spaghetti. She pushed it away and rested her forehead against the wooden table. Devin looked back at her two friends. "Will you excuse me?" she asked and parted from them. She could hear the couple bickering quietly as she left.

Devin walked toward Skylar, intending to sit down next to her, to ask her if she was alright. As she neared her, however, Devin's heart pounded in her chest and she took a slight left turn, finding her way outside onto the abandoned patio. Devin downed the rest of her champagne and placed the empty glass on a nearby, snow blanketed table. She leaned her elbows on the short, metal fence and hung her head, staring at the ground while she took in deep, shaking breaths. *Too much*, she thought. *Too much, too much, too much*. Devin closed her eyes, hot tears streaming down her face and dripping into the snow. *She's here. Alex is here. Hannah is here. Mom is here. Dad's not. Too fucking much*.

“You alright?” Alex’s voice came from beside her. He lay his large, cold hand on her shoulder. Devin shrugged it off.

“My dad died.”

“I know,” Alex said with a sigh.

“Then why would you ask that?” Alex was quiet for a while.

“I don’t know,” he murmured. “It’s... I didn’t know what else to say.”

“I’d rather you not say anything, then.” Alex took a deep breath. Devin could hear him rubbing his chin, a loud scratching noise as his nails brushed against his stubble.

“Alright.” The sound of footsteps crawled near the door, then stopped. Alex turned around.

“Hey, so... Later, do you want to go to your place or-”

“I can’t believe you!” Devin shouted, turning quickly around and stomping up to him. She jabbed her finger into his chest and glared up into his face. “My dad just died and you want to fuck?” Alex rubbed his chest with a grimace and took a step back. He put his hands up in surrender.

“I just thought it would get your mind off of-”

“It won’t. Go away. I don’t want to be around you anymore,” Devin snapped and turned around again. She ran her fingers through her hair and puffed out an irritated breath. “Fuck your wife for a change. Jesus.” Alex opened his mouth to say something, then shook his head and left with a mumbled, “Fine.” Devin brushed some snow off of a nearby chair, sat down, pressed her face into her knees and cried.

A week later, Devin took her motorcycle into Rick's Automobile Repair. She'd backed into a pole a few days before and dented the metal. The dent wasn't that big but she decided to get it fixed anyway. Devin spotted Skylar as she pulled into the parking lot. Skylar rolled out from under the car she was working on and sat up, holding her hand above her eyes to shield them from the sun as she looked at Devin approaching. Her other hand rested on her bent, grease covered knee. Skylar had her hair cropped short and while she'd tried to gel it into place each morning it was hanging in her face again by noon. Her cheeks were dotted with little splatters of grease. Her leather gloves had once been a light brown but were now completely black. She took them off and placed them on the ground next to her before getting up. Skylar wiped the sweat from her forehead and walked over to Devin as she was getting off her bike.

"I heard your baby growling from a block away," she said. "What's wrong with it now?" Devin pulled her helmet off and held it between her hip and elbow.

"Dented it. Just needs a little work," she said. Skylar walked over to the bike.

"Let me take a look," she said. She looked the bike over and frowned. "Sorry, where is it?" Devin came around the other side of the bike and pointed out the small, metallic blemish. Devin had a big, green, Indian brand motorcycle. She took meticulous care of it, bringing the bike in every time it got scuffed or dented, which was often. As much as she cared about it being in good condition, Devin didn't ride the motorcycle gingerly. She didn't really have the money to take the bike in as much as she did, but there were things in her life that she considered worth her paycheck on and the bike was one of them. Alex had given it to her on her 26th birthday, six months into their affair. When Hannah had asked about it, she told her she'd gotten a big tax break and decided it was cheaper than a car and that she was tired of taking the bus to work

everyday. Now that Devin and Alex weren't speaking, she considered getting rid of it. It was a nice ride, though. Perhaps she'd keep it and give it a paint job to make it feel like another bike. Devin wondered if that was a service the shop provided.

Skylar bent over to look at it more closely. Her breasts swung forward. Devin focussed her eyes on the dent. Skylar laughed. "Seriously? It's not even that big," she said. "You could just buy a kit and do it yourself."

"I'm not good with that kind of stuff," Devin said. "Can't you just do it?" Skylar shook her head incredulously.

"I mean, yeah, but if you want my opinion, you're wasting your money," she said. Devin shrugged.

"I'd rather have it done right than screw it up myself." Skylar looked at Devin silently, her mind clicking a thought into place. Then she spoke.

"Why do you keep coming to see me for stuff like this?" she asked. "This isn't that big of a deal. Most people would just let it slide. Save themselves the dough."

"I just like her to look nice," Devin said, looking at the floor. "Is that a crime?"

"No, but I just don't get it." They were silent for a while. Skylar worried her bottom lip between her teeth. Devin stared at it and then the words were out of her mouth before she could think about the ramifications of them.

"I guess I just like seeing you." Devin was looking at the floor when she heard a snort. She looked up. Skylar was snickering. "What?" Devin crossed her arms.

"You scuff up your ride on purpose just to see me?" Skylar asked with a smirk.

“No, I don’t,” Devin said quickly, then blushed and looked back at the floor. “I just... I don’t know. Forget it. I’m sorry I wasted your time.” Devin swung her leg over the bike and revved the engine.

“No, it’s fine.” Skylar put her hand over Devin’s on the throttle to stop her. Devin looked up at her, trying to decide whether to flee or not. Skylar met her eyes. “I’ll fix it.” Devin felt her chest swell but then Skylar was pulling her hand away, her arms crossing over her chest. “I need the money.” Devin let out a held breath and nodded, turned the bike off and stepped away from it.

It took Skylar only a few minutes to fix the dent. Meanwhile, Devin looked around the shop. Rick’s Automobile Repair dealt mostly with older models. A 1967 Pontiac convertible was hoisted up a few feet from her. A burly looking man was crouched under it. Another man, thin and dressed in a suit, was standing over him. The bigger man rolled out from under the car and reached his hand up. The thin man grabbed hold of it, lifted him up and kissed him lightly. The two of them smirked against each other’s lips. Devin looked away.

“So what’s up with you? Anything interesting?” Skylar asked over her shoulder. Devin racked her brain for something. It had been a terrible week. Despite her father having just died, her roommate had decided to break their lease.

“My roommate is moving out.”

“Good thing or bad thing?” Skylar asked. She ran her fingers over the bike, her eyes level to it as she searched for any other scuffs. Finding one, she quickly set to work on it.

“Bad. I can’t afford the place without…” Devin trailed off. Skylar seemed preoccupied. The mechanic noticed the silence and waved her hand in the air, like she was trying to bat the quiet away.

“I’m listening. Go on.”

“I can’t afford the place on my own,” Devin continued. “I’m kind of…screwed.” Devin sighed. She had considered asking Hannah if she could live with her and Alex for a while, but immediately decided against it. She had enough trouble with Alex calling her so much, asking her to reconsider breaking their affair off. Living under the same roof as him and his wife would be a nightmare.

“Did she say why?”

“Her girlfriend proposed,” Devin said. “They’re moving in together.” Skylar smiled as she rubbed some sort of liquid over another scratch.

“That’s cute. Sucks for you, though,” Skylar said, giving Devin a sympathetic look. “So what are you going to do?”

“Well, the rent’s paid for the next month, so I’m good for a little while. I’d live with my mother again, but her house is so far from work, it would be a nightmare.”

“I think I saw some apartments available on Franklin Street.”

“Really?” Devin asked. “That’d probably be close enough to work. Are they nice?”

“Eh… They’re okay,” Skylar chuckled. “Cheap, though.”

When Skylar was done, Devin handed over her credit card. Skylar walked into the office. Devin snuck one last look at the two men, entwined in each other’s arms, the mechanic’s greasy hands ruining his partner’s suit, then slipped into the room after Skylar.

The office was a dingy, tobacco infused one. King Crimson played in the background. *“Poets' starving children bleed. Nothing he's got he really needs. Twenty first century schizoid man!”* The far wall was lined with framed photos of Joan Jett, The Kinks and a band called “Psychotic Blurr” that Devin had never heard of. A large bulletin board that was hung up near the exit held polaroids of the shop’s customers. While Skylar was ringing her up, Devin wandered over to the wall. The customers smiled out from the photographs, some sitting on the cars, others leaning back against the office countertop. Devin’s eyes trailed higher up the wall and stopped on one photo in particular. Victor, years ago when his hair was full, before he got sick, was leaning against his truck, laughing. His gaze was on the hood of the car where a little girl sat, no older than five. Her tiny legs were spread over the car hood, her palms pressed against it as she grinned at the camera. Her blonde hair was wispy in the grainy, old polaroid. Victor was laughing at her.

“Do you want a receipt?”

“Huh?” Devin asked, turning to look back at Skylar. Skylar looked from the wall to Devin and back again. She hoisted herself up and over the countertop before walking over to the bulletin board. The two of them stared at the photo.

“Is that you?” Skylar asked. Devin nodded and closed her eyes, willing the tears not to fall. When she had given up on not crying in front of her, Devin turned her watery gaze to Skylar.

“I don’t even remember that day,” she said with a choked, bitter chuckle. “He looks so happy.” Skylar smiled sadly and nodded. They both looked back at the photograph. Skylar leaned forward and plucked the thumbtack out of the board, freeing the photo from the wall. She handed it to Devin.

“You won’t get in trouble?”

“Rick won’t notice it.” Devin took the photo and tucked it into her purse. Her hands shook.

“Thank you.”

“My pleasure.”

The two of them walked back over to the counter. Skylar printed Devin a receipt, scrawled something on the back of it and handed it over.

“Come by if you need to talk,” Skylar said. Devin frowned and looked down at the paper. On the back was an address.

“Is that a one or a seven?” Devin asked, squinting. Skylar snatched the paper out of her hand, gave it a once over, then grabbed the pen again and quickly made the ambiguous number into a clearer seven. *7800 S. Grant St.*

She came to her in the middle of the night. It was windy and hailing. Skylar opened the back door to find Devin standing there, her hair wet and body shivering. She let the Devin in, made her a cup of tea, and sat in the arm chair across from the couch the other woman had curled up on. A blanket was pulled tightly around her. Her long hair dripped damp, dark drops onto it. Skylar left the room briefly and came back with a towel. She handed it to Devin who took it, her eyes on the floor as she dried her hair.

“Thank you,” she said, her voice just above a fragile whisper.

“What’s up?” Skylar asked. Devin sat still, staring into her mug like maybe it held some solution she was looking for. Skylar shifted uncomfortably in the silence. She let a while pass before prompting Devin again and when she did, it all came tumbling out. Her father’s cancer.

How desperately she wanted to buy the truck from her mother but didn't have the guts to ask nor space for it. The affair with Alex. The fear of Hannah finding out. Her inability to find an apartment she could afford. How scared and confused she was about everything now that Victor was gone. The doubts she was having about her sexuality and Skylar listened patiently until Devin had finished then took the mug gently from her hands, placed it on the coffee table and kissed her.

With shaking hands, Devin cupped Skylar's cheek and tugged her closer. Skylar ran her fingers over Devin's neck. After all the chanced glances and held back affections, Devin finally let herself slip into the comfort of being close to someone she cared about. When the kiss broke, Skylar carded her hands gently through Devin's hair.

"There will be a day when you'll be okay again," she said softly. Devin blinked back another onset of tears.

"It just-" Devin's words retreated back down her throat. She swallowed, trying to dislodge them so they might come back out. "It just feels so pointless... without him."

"It doesn't have to be," Skylar said carefully. "He'd want you to keep going, wouldn't he?" She rubbed Devin's left shoulder with her thumb. "He'd want you to find some other point now that he's gone."

"I don't know where to look for that," Devin breathed out and wiped her eyes. "Everything's just so fucked up." Skylar pulled her close and Devin rested her head against her collarbone.

“I know,” Skylar told her. “I’m sorry.” Devin took a shuddering, deep breath. “I can’t tell you it’s going to be okay but it’s going to be something easier, someday.” Devin was silent for a long time, then nodded and buried her face in Skylar’s neck.