

# The Messenger

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P.S.

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P.S.

They're the only ones walking on the street a block in front of us. Their legs weave through the misty night air. She leans on his shoulder, and he twirls her golden hair with his fingers. Turning to him, her face glows with the deep rose color of the street light. The uneven sidewalk trips his feet, and she throws back her head, tossing her curls, with fits of uncontrollable giggles. He fakes a proposal as a save, and her hand lightly brushes his chest. Fingertips just barely push him away. He stands up and brings her close to him to tell her that he missed her. She tells him that she's already here, and he tells her that the six-foot trip he took was too far from her. She bites her lip, hiding her smile. You're gorgeous, he says while she puts her finger to his lips. They don't see us.

We've rented Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory, and you're humming to yourself with your head turned away and swinging the plastic bag from the video store. You tease me for my choice while we're still in the store. I lie and tell you I've never seen it.

I remember the book. I was in a funeral home, which is a place that I remember better than my actual home. It's where my brother threw my favorite ball onto the roof as I watched it roll into the gutter. My family suffered from a string of six or seven deaths before I made it to the age of ten. A few cases of cancer. A heart attack in a diner. An overdose. This time, my grandfather is in the casket. A natural death. Everyone is murmuring around me. Outside, a thunderstorm throws water on the windows. My mother comes over to me. She asks what I'm reading, and I show the book to her. She asks if I've ever seen the movie. I shake my head no, and she tells me we can rent it on the way home. I know my mother is worried about me. I like funeral homes. They're always clean and have a never-ending supply of hot chocolate. I'm allowed to take my magic tricks and books with me. My father gives me a pile of starlight mints. I cry when my parents tell me it's time to go.

On the way home, my mother tells me that I'm experiencing an unusual childhood. She tells me that most children have never been to a funeral home. Most children know their families. Most

children don't go once a week to talk to a man who wears glasses and holds a pen at all times. I ask her why do I then. She smiles and tells me it's because I'm not like other children. We watch the movie that night while it's still raining, and I have nightmares about Gene Wilder for a month.

I turn to tell you this because I have never told anyone else. Ahead of us, he throws a soda bottle in front of the back tire of a tractor trailer. The light glows green, and the bottle is flattened. She watches with childlike fascination as the remaining soda spills on the glistening road. He kisses the top of her head, and they continue on. I open my mouth to speak as we cross the street, and you tell me you're glad we're nothing like them. I want to tell you about the funeral homes, Gene Wilder, and how I love you, but you run ahead, absently picking up a penny. It glimmers like an ember on the dark street, and you don't care to check for heads or tails.

—*Janmary Stewart*

### *East London*

— darling do you see that boy  
 — the heavy-set one  
 — the one with his hands clasped high behind his  
 — reddish buzz cut? yes  
 — a minute ago he was watching those two  
 — two? I only see a girl, she's putting on her coat  
 — yes but there was a boy with her and they were right across from Buzz-Cut  
 — oh were they maybe I noticed earlier. cigarette  
 — in a minute. they were having what some might call  
 — a 'moment'?  
 — yes a moment  
 — an apt way to put it  
 — yes, and he was watching and so happy  
 — watching, so happy?  
 — the buzz-cut boy, just smiling and watching  
 — I don't think he even knows them, he's not leaving and they're not saying bye  
 — from his face I am absolutely sure he doesn't  
 — my. how wrong  
 — oh yes. now a cigarette,

—*Meg Hurtado*