

*Emerald*  
*a short story*  
*Eyes*

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## *Emerald Eyes*

It's been nearly three months since I saw Sam in person last; four since I told him I loved him for the first and only time. And now, he's here, sat beside me as we make our way to a small beach just over half an hour away from June and I's apartment. There was so much still unsaid between us, but we carried on as if it were nothing. The rest of my time in New York almost feels like a dream to me now—so far in the past and, yet, so prevalent now. It's a strange place to be in with your best friend, of all people. We spoke nearly every night leading up to his visit, but nothing had been established, as far as our relationship was concerned and it's scary.

The sun is setting just beyond the water as we approach, blanket in hand. By now, most have already cleared out for fear of mosquitoes and not making it home in time to catch the evening news, but neither of those terrifying things could deter us; not after being away from each other so long. June shooed us away from the apartment after deciding to work from home after nearly a year. While not the most subtle, the excuse for alone time was appreciated, nonetheless.

It was nearly a mirror image of that first night: The two of us silent, unsure of how to carry on without addressing us, hand-in-hand as we watch the stars spring up one by one. Finally, we find an empty patch of sand surrounded by tall, ornamental grass and lay our blanket down there, nestled away from the water in a cozy corner all on our own. Alone for the first time, without work or the radio to distract us, in four months. *What happens now?*

From where we're laid down, the waves can still be heard clearly and the birds sing as they fly above us. Everything about this beach was so

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familiar—Dad and I have been going here since I was eight—and now that I’m here with Sam, it was all a new sight to behold. I pull my head up slightly and rest it just over his heart, which was beating quicker with each passing second. His finger started tracing the inside of my wrist, running it along the stem of the rose tattoo placed there two years ago.

All previous tension is broken when he speaks. “Do you remember the subway?”

Even at just the mention of it, I start giggling. It’s always been like that. At least I know that not everything has changed. “You mean the one that broke down every other day?”

“That would be it,” Sam chuckles, “I swear it was on a better schedule for that than its actual arrival times.”

We both learned very quickly to avoid the M train, especially when in a rush. At that time, though, we were oblivious to that and assumed we were lucky to have ended up on such an empty subway car. I missed a two-hour seminar that day, but by the end of it, I’d gained a best friend and a... Sam? I never know what to call him anymore.

“I was terrified to go up to you that day.” His voice lowers to a whisper, afraid to disrupt the nothing around us.

I crane my neck up a bit and pull a face. “Was I really that scary looking?”

“Not exactly,” he admits, a blush gracing his cheeks, “Kind of the opposite.”

“How so?”

“Well...” Sam lets my head gently slide off his chest and props himself up on his elbow. “For one, you were really pretty. Correction: *Are* really pretty.”

His open flirting reminds me that we are, in fact, at that point in our relationship. It's a rather unusual feeling and it all but forces me to bury my face in his arm planted on the blanket. This makes him laugh for a second time. "Shut up."

He ignores me. "Two, you had this super intense look on your face. You had this little crinkle in your eyebrow and a small frown. Made me think you were just super into the book you were reading."

"I hated it." It was on art history, for the class I missed. I'd forgotten to read the night before, so I was trying to get in as much as I could. In the end, my effort was pointless and I was mostly okay with that fact.

"I know that *now*. If not for June, you probably wouldn't pick up a book if you could help it." He's not wrong.

"Speaking of," I begin, already chuckling, "Can we talk about June coming up to us that day? Because I'm still not over it."

"The most dramatic, as always..."

When we met, my life was in shambles. It was spiralling out of control and I thought there was no way of escaping it. I saw everything in shades of black and white, but after doing serious work on myself and my mind, I found myself more open to the world around me.

And then, one day, the grey sprang to life as my eyes met his. They were beautiful. A swirl of deep greens that I'd never be able to erase from my memory. When he approached me from across the car, I was at a loss for words. As he finally stood before me, I was in awe. The way he looked at me... It was as if I was the only person in the world. Like I was all he could focus on; all he *wanted* to focus on.

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At the time, I was absorbing every word he said. That's when June stepped in. She'd been watching the situation from afar and assumed I'd been cornered by a random creep. With that information in mind, she slid into the open seat to the right of me. She declared that she'd just gotten off of a phone call that she pretended to end very loudly and gave Sam a certain look that told him to get lost before he lost something important to him. At that moment, our eyes met and we couldn't stop ourselves from releasing the most belly aching laugh. It echoed along the metal confines of our empty prison cell.

Poor June was mortified after we explained the situation to her. The three of us spent the next two and a half hours sat there getting to know each other. Partially because we didn't have much of a choice as far as company was concerned, but mainly because we had a genuine interest in making friends. Soon after, we came to the realization that June and Sam were both students at NYU. I felt a bit more discouraged, thinking that they would become closer, living on the same campus, and I would be left behind, but they always made an effort to include me. Among all of my peers and roommates, I walked away with those two and I couldn't be happier with that.

"June's a Ross, right?" Sam ponders, a serious expression on his face, "We're all in agreement on that?"

"Have you met her? Have you met yourself? The two of you *are* Monica and Ross," I counter.

"Are you calling me Ross?!" I nod slowly. "You wound me, Em!"

He clutches his heart dramatically and falls onto me. I try to push him off, with no luck. "You're... Crushing me!"

"And now you're saying I'm fat? No insecurity shall be spared tonight, apparently," he jokes, a grin lighting up his face.

We're so close our noses are brushing against each other. I can pick out individual stars in his eyes and just the sight of it leaves me breathless. The crash of the waves would be deafening were it not for our pounding hearts drowning it out as we inch closer. The faintest of breezes could push us together at any given moment...

A drop falls onto my arm, followed by another. I almost brush it off as just excess flying off of the water, but I'm very quickly reminded that we were too far away from the shoreline for it to touch us. Sam and I jump apart as a downpour of rain drenches us. I can vaguely recall the news forecast I saw earlier this week mentioned scattered showers, but I never expected anything this heavy. We gather our things as quickly as we can and, with the blanket over our heads, dusting sand over us, we race to where the car is parked.

Not wasting any time, Sam unlocks the doors and throws everything into the back seat. Before he can make a break for the driver's side, though, I grab his arm, forcing him to stay. He stares at me for a moment, confused, waiting for me to say something. Instead, I let my hand slide down into his and spin myself around. When I face him again, I have a wicked grin. He roars with laughter, now likely convinced of my insanity, as he pulls me closer.

So, here we are, dancing in the rain, giggling like idiots. Anyone who passed by likely felt compelled to call for help, but no one ever came. Our teetering comes to a stop and we just stand there, in each other's arms. A single raindrop rolls down his cheek and his hair falls into his eyes, completely soaked. *Those eyes...*

I don't stop myself this time. I jump in head first and pull his lips to mine. Pure, unadulterated magic flies between us. It takes a moment for Sam to respond and it nearly causes me to stop, for fear of making things happen too

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soon, but he immediately pulls me back to him. Without hesitation, I push my hands through his hair, bringing it off his forehead.

The rain falls freely around us as my mind races with a million different questions. I still don't know what we are—not a single clue—and I don't think he does either, but neither of us care. This moment is ours to keep, forever. Whether things go on past tonight or it ends as soon as the kiss does. None of it matters. All that does is Sam. He's here with me, right now, and I couldn't be happier. Everything that's happened to us since we've met has been leading up to this, no matter how much I've tried to push past it or deny it, but now I know. I feel it with my whole heart and I'm no longer afraid to admit it. I am completely and utterly infatuated with, enamored by, *in love with* Samuel James Reed.

## *Rollercoaster*

We only break away from each other after realizing that we were, in fact, standing in the middle of a thunderstorm and, as much as the hopeless romantic in me screamed, kissing in the rain for long periods of time was a good way to end up with a cold. Soon enough, we find ourselves back inside the car, driving around aimlessly. For once, there's no need for a destination and there was no way I was about to let some rain ruin our first *real* date.

By two, the storm finally cleared up, so we rolled down the windows and let the night take us where it wanted to go. And now, here we are, fingers intertwined, the chill of the rain surrounding us, as we fill the streets of suburbia with the sounds of our voices, singing Green Day at the top of our lungs. Nothing in the world could ruin this—ruin *us*. Euphoria takes over my entire being as we steal kisses at every stop sign. We're untouchable.

Until we're not. The car comes to a screeching halt and Sam's arm flies out in front of my chest to stop me from falling forward as someone speeding by lays on their horn aggressively. His head snaps toward me, concerned. "Holy shit... Are you okay? I'm so sorry. I really don't know what happened."

I can't help it. My shoulders start shaking and tears form in my eyes.

"I... Em?" His laughter soon mingles with mine, overpowering the guitar solo of *Holiday*.

Before I can prevent it, the words come tumbling out of my mouth. "I love you so much, Sam."

We both pause for a moment and stare at each other, mouths agape. I'd said it before and it wasn't a lie, but I never thought it would happen so casually. Not after how our entire relationship had progressed so far.

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“I love you, too.” Sam grins and, without another word, continues on. He pulls onto a less busy side road and parks, unbuckles his seat belt, and turns his entire body toward me. His elbows settle on the center console and he rests his head on his hands. “That near-miss was clearly your fault. You were just too beautiful to look away from.”

“Is that so?” He nods and I can feel heat rush to my face, but I don’t let it affect me. “Must be my evil sorcery that makes you stay.”

“Obviously couldn’t be anything else. But as long as I’m with you, I’m perfectly okay with that.”

Before we proceed with our trip to nowhere, Sam leans forward and plants a gentle kiss on my forehead. Eventually, we end up near Sam’s hotel and decide to stay there for the night, as it’s significantly closer than my apartment and has a much lower risk of facing June’s wrath, were we to wake her coming in.

We could have easily been mistaken for a pair of sex-crazed teenagers ready to get it on as we rushed through the lobby, when, in reality, it was race to see who could make the best pillow fort the quickest. Sam had the clear advantage, with access to the sole room key, but in the end, I was the victor. Though it lacks preferred decoration, I was able to steal Sam’s laptop to set up a mini-theater, decked out with crappy room service hot cocoa, to warm us up after our fun in the rain, and two large plates filled with fries, to fill us up, as it was nearing five in the morning and we’d been previously too occupied to stop anywhere for an actual meal.

A shared disdain for *Friends*, which we’d discovered at the beginning of our friendship, and a need to make fun of something before we became that sickeningly sweet lovey dovey couple, which June absolutely despised when we

did, brought us to season five, episode sixteen: *The One with the Cop*. While we argued constantly about the quality of the show, we can all agree on three things: 1.) The “pivot” scene is stupidly funny. There’s no explanation as to why, but it easily can make us all fall to the ground with laughter. 2.) Ross is a jerk, ninety percent of the time. Sam shares some of his better qualities, but will never lose the bickering with June/Monica bit, no matter how hard he tries. 3.) *Smelly Cat*, though annoyingly catchy, is one of the best songs of our generation.

Even with the *riveting* content that follows our favorite scene, Sam and I still succumb to sleep before the episode is through, still inside my beautifully built pillow fort, Sam’s collapsed a mere two feet away.

There couldn’t be a more perfect way to end the night.

A few hours later, I awake to Sam rustling beside me. Around us, most of our pillow walls had fallen over and the sheet roof, at some point, was pulled from the desk chair above us. I can feel the coarse grains of salt scraping against my back as I sit up. I glance at the clock hanging above the doorway and realize that June and I have a meeting later this afternoon. No matter how much I wish I could stay and lay in bed with him all day, I know it’s not possible and I need to leave now if I want to shower beforehand, which I desperately do.

I don’t have the heart to wake him up, though. He looks so peaceful and I wouldn’t dare disturb that. Instead, I leave him a note before gathering my things. Short, simple, sweet. Nothing too elaborate, but more personal than just a text.

*Sweet dreams, my love. To be continued...*

Cheesy, cute, and straight from a soap opera. Perfect. With that, I sneak away, calling an Uber so Sam isn’t left stranded. It also just so happens that it

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gives me another guaranteed excuse to see him later, which I wasn't completely opposed to.

June's still asleep when I get home, so I take the free time I'm given to shower and prepare myself for the rest of the day. It takes all of my willpower not to just crawl back in bed and ponder last night's happenings. There are things to do today. Things that need done. Then, and only then, will I allow myself to daydream and squeal like the thirteen-year-old inside of me wants to.

*Oh, who am I kidding?* I think about it as I get ready, as June chucks a pillow at my head for waking her up, as she pesters me about why I was out all night, as we drive to work, as we give the presentation. All of it. Sam consumes my every thought for the entire day and I can't keep it from happening. June would notice my far-off look from time to time and kick me from under the table so I could remain engaged in the conversation. She's always so unnecessarily violent, but it was effective, nonetheless.

After two hours sat in a conference room, negotiating budget increases for our project, June and I are finally out the door and on our way home. About halfway there, my phone dings with a message from Sam saying he was headed over to the apartment to drop the car off. We manage to catch him just as he's leaving and I nearly run into him, head-on.

"Hi."

"Hi." Caught up in our own little world, Sam and I just stare at each other in silence for a moment.

Said moment is then ruined by June clearing her throat as loudly as she can, glancing between the two of us suspiciously. "What is wrong with you two today?"

*She knows.*

“Nothing!” we yell in unison, jumping away from each other. I scratch the mark at the base of my neck nervously, looking everywhere but at him.

“Uh huh, sure...” June mutters, unconvinced, “Dirty liars...”

“So,” Sam begins, voice shaking slightly, “I, uh... I’m gonna go. I’m supposed to meet Mom for lunch in twenty minutes and I think my ride’s here.”

“Yeah, you—you go do that.”

“See you later?” He looks straight at me.

I nod, a bit too enthusiastically. “Bye.”

“Bye.”

Before I can say anymore, June yanks me inside and as soon as the door closes, she’s on the floor in a fit of giggles. “*You go do that?* What the hell was that, Em?”

“Shut up!” I call, speed walking down the hallway. She’s quick to follow, though, making kissy noises and laughing the whole way, like the child she is. My cheeks are bright pink at this point—I can feel it. I slam my bedroom door on her and use my body to barricade it shut. “I hate you! I hope you know that!”

“That may be true,” she counters, “But you *love* Sam!”

She’s mocking me, singing the K-I-S-S-I-N-G song all the way to her room, but I can’t help smile because she’s *right*. And I couldn’t be happier about that.