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The first day, there will be something about it that takes your breath away. There's a quality to that day that seems almost magical, unbelievable, something that makes you know in your soul of souls that it is special. You feel the start of something new and that makes your veins pulse with live blood. Your stomach twists into knots that even a Boy Scout could not undo. Friends are texted and mothers are gushed to, reveling in all the small details of how they asked you out or the nuance of the way his hand moved towards yours at the lunch table (almost imperceptible, perhaps, but you noticed). Everything is excited and alive. The world burns with a fire that only you can see, the sun shines a little bit brighter, and the phone in your pocket buzzes a lot more often. Suddenly, you are no longer alone. Your person is at your side, ready to take on the world with you. It fills you up with flowers and rainbows and glitter. You are warm.

The 61st day, you celebrate. Instagram posts and Snapchat stories flash through memories of two months of you. Not "you two", not "you guys", *you*. You share private moments, stolen kisses in stairwells and hand squeezes in the middle of class. Friends coo over how great you are together and how perfectly you fit into one another like puzzle pieces. You don't need to be told; you already know. He glances at you and you at him, and faces grow flushed. Ears and cheeks burn, and you turn away. For a second, you swear you saw his eyes spell out love. They grew lighter, and his smile was tender and curved in that oh-so-right way. Your own mouth curves upward of its own accord, a product of the jitters that have yet to fade away. You are warm.

The 156th day, you have your first fight. It's angry, and ugly. There was another girl sending him messages, and he had the audacity to reply. Of course he did; he's just like the others anyway. Tears fall hot and heavy. He tries to hug you and you push against his chest, fighting desperately. You don't want

this love; you don't need it. It isn't worth the inevitable heartbreak. Don't you remember last time? As his arms grow tighter around you, the warmth of his body spreads and you melt like chocolate. You're gooey and messy, collapsing into a puddle of yourself against him. He promises never again, and though you've heard it a million times before, you take it in as if it were food and you were starving. That reassurance is enough, for now. There are words spoken, but you don't remember them. You don't need to, because it won't happen again. (Right?) You think you feel warm.

On the 313th day, he mentions marriage. It's casual, just as if he assumes it's going to happen. The word is thrown into a conversation about college and futures. He mentions you two getting married in among these other concrete plans that he has made, and your heart skips several beats. You break into a cold sweat, but a good one. It isn't nervousness or trepidation, though they are present. It's excitement and a feeling of knowing you're wanted. Someone wants you around for the rest of their lives, in sickness and in health, for richer or poorer, till death do you part. There's a security in it, something that tells you to relax. You smile at him, and when he asks you why, you say nothing. Perhaps he doesn't realize what he just said. But you did. And that makes all the difference. You feel warmer than ever.

On the 365th day, you graduate. Donned in your cap and gown, you feel more grown-up than you ever have. You see yourself, for the first time, for the adult that you are about to become. Childhood is over. Here is the rest of your life in that tassel and that diploma and that handshake. You sit together on the football field, sharing in the experience of shedding what you know for something entirely foreign. You hold hands through the speeches. The closest friend you have turns around and waves at you. You wave back at him. There is a sharp pressure to your hand, enough to cause pain and leave your tendons stinging. You gasp and meet your other half's glare. Timidly, you put your hand down, giving your friend a faint smile. He's right; there will be time for socializing after everything is said and done. Diploma in hand, you walk with him to his car, spinning your promise ring. You're not sure how you feel.

On the 1,081st day, he hits you for the first time. You never saw it coming; there's no way you could have. You had moved in together and everything had gone fine. At least for a few weeks. Today, there was yelling. From him, cries of rage and harsh words that left brands on your skin that you felt like

everyone could see. *Stupid. Ungrateful. Not good enough.* His hand makes contact with your cheek and you stumble against the kitchen counter, stunned. Tears well up in your eyes as you touch the skin, feeling it radiate heat and anger. He radiates the same rage as the mark you bear, storming away from you. Between sobs, you call your mother. She takes you home and cradles you until you no longer feel the burning handprint you know is there. It is the last day. For the first time, you feel cold.

The 4,567th day is the day you finally feel warm again. Your daughter runs around the kitchen in her bare feet, cookie dough smeared on the apron your mother sewed for her. You smile, and wipe some batter off of her face. She always wanted to be a chef, just like her mommy. The road to that moment, that precious contact between a mother and her child, had been rocky and filled with potholes. There was therapy to reverse the damage that *he* had done. (You don't say his name anymore. It isn't worth your breath.) It brought you back, restoring you to a version of your former self; you are simply more weathered, broken in. There was self-discovery, for the first time in your adult life. You were able to realize yourself without another twisting around you, pulling you to the depths of who they were and making you no more than them. You had been made into a weed, an insignificant flower with no sunlight or water. You blossomed in the years after, becoming the woman that had been trapped inside. She is fierce and independent and honest and kind, and you think you might just love her. Then along came the new him, and her, and a house of your very own that looked nothing like the apartment you left behind. The smell of freshly-baked chocolate chip cookies wafts through your kitchen and you smile. You are warm because you are happy, and nothing could be quite so good as that.