

Chapter 10

The hotel waffles were surprisingly good.

The coffee was not.

Rocky sat alone at a small table near the window staring into a mug of what the hotel insisted was coffee and what Rocky strongly suspected had once merely met coffee in passing.

A plate of waffles sat before him.

Home fries.

Bacon.

Two hardboiled eggs.

A breakfast assembled by a man who had survived both a bookstore and parenthood.

Rocky took a sip.

Still terrible.

Good.

The world deserved terrible coffee after last night.

A shadow fell across the table.

Antonio sat down.

Neither man spoke.

Antonio looked at the food. His face revealing that he had a very rough night.

Rocky looked out the window.

More silence.

Finally, Antonio spoke.

"It's a little funny, right?"

Rocky looked up. "I hate you."

Antonio nodded and shook his head at the same time.

"You say that, but you really don't."

Rocky sighed.

"No. I don't."

"You love me don't you" Antonio asked.

"Can you not?" Rocky urged "We're in public."

"Bro, you saved my life last night. I am indebted to you forever, and, I freaking love you dude." Antonio had seldom seemed more serious. "The least you could do is tell me you feel the same way."

"I, uh, feel the same." Rocky stammered.

"C'mon bro, let it out. Tell me how you really feel. What if William asked you?"

Ugh...his kryptonite.

"Then I would have to say, 'Yes, I love you too'".

At that exact moment, a waitress appeared.

Antonio did all he could not to die of hysterical laughing and ordered an avocado toast.

Rocky was mortified.

The silence returned.

For approximately three seconds.

Then:

"I still can't believe you caught me."

Rocky stabbed a home fry.

"I can't believe I caught you either."

Antonio nodded.

"Fair."

Another silence.

The smell of waffles drifted between them.

Antonio leaned back in his chair.

"You know what the weird part is?"

Rocky immediately answered.

"Everything."

"Perhaps" Antonio picked up a packet of syrup. "But, seriously."

Rocky waited.

Antonio stared at the table.

"What are the odds?"

Rocky frowned.

"The odds of what?"

"The balcony."

Rocky immediately pointed a fork at him.

"We agreed not to talk about that."

"We did."

"So don't."

Antonio nodded.

"Okay."

Five seconds passed.

"Why the fuck am I not that hungover?"

It was a question that Rocky was wondering as well.

"No seriously," Antonio got very serious. "What are the odds?"

Rocky closed his eyes.

There it was.

Not the balcony.

The question.

The thing that had bothered him all morning.

The thing that had bothered him all night.

The thing that had bothered him for twenty years.

“The odds of not being hungover?” Rocky posited, hoping to ignore the topic completely.

Coincidence.

Luck.

Fate.

Whatever people wanted to call it.

Antonio had met a woman who knew Mario.

Then somehow ended up on a balcony.

Then somehow Rocky found him.

Then somehow the coat saved him.

Rocky didn't like thinking about those things.

Mostly because he never had good answers.

Antonio did.

Antonio's answer was always:

"I don't know."

"But isn't it weird?"

Rocky hated that answer.

Mostly because it usually turned out to be correct.

Antonio buttered a waffle.

"Do you think that maybe?"

Rocky sighed.

"No."

"You're lying."

"I am."

Antonio nodded.

"I know."

For a moment neither spoke.

Outside the window, Philadelphia continued about its business, completely irrespective of the gravity of the situation inside.

Students hurried across sidewalks.

Cars moved through intersections.

Life carried on.

Rocky stared down into his coffee.

Then quietly:

"Maybe."

Antonio looked up.

Rocky immediately regretted speaking.

"Maybe what?"

"Maybe some things happen for a reason, but it doesn't happen to mean *that*."

Antonio blinked.

For the first time that morning neither of them mentioned the balcony.

Because somehow they had found something even stranger.

The shared realization that maybe it wasn't a coincidence after all.