



*My Fall in Spring*

It is said that right before you die, life flashes in front of your eyes. My flashback was long enough to last the entire fall from the third floor. It is ironic how one can never tell what day will be their last. You wake up, fill your day with unnecessary troubles and doubts and when it is all supposed to be over you realize that nothing really had mattered. While I was plummeting towards the ground, the brisk March air triggered my memory. It was October 2019 when the interesting part of my life began. Those fateful 5 months flashed right in front of my eyes as the ground come rushing towards me. I saw it very clearly, the beginning of my end. The new semester had started, and all kinds of students were in desperate search for flats. They flooded the city like a swarm of locusts. At the time I did not have a roof over my head, so Chris came up with the idea to take me in as a fourth flatmate. He had already cast Noreen and Dennis as inhabitants of our new home, and they nicknamed me Greta. We did not know each other yet but we were all excited to start this new chapter of our life together.

### *Autumn*

I can still remember the first time we all sat down together in the small kitchen. Rosy cheeked and wet behind our ears we were all inexperienced flat sharers. I stayed by the kitchen window. Little did I know that half a year later it was going to be my downfall. Chris arrived five minutes early, very typical. He had everything prepared, even a list of bullet points he wanted to address this evening. Dennis was late about the same amount of time, casually striding through our door. His hands were buried in his hoodie pocket. Noreen kept us waiting for about thirty minutes. The boys had finished their first beer, when she flew through the door and apologized at least ten times and gave a dozen of excuses. It felt like a machine gun magazine of “sorrlys” unloading on us, all blanks though. “I had the craziest afternoon, I totally forgot that we had to bring our health insurance thing to the enrolment, so this lady at the office was a total bitch about it and I had to drive back home and get the stupid thing: Come on give me a break these documents are all online anyway, so if Google saves all my data why can’t they just look it up. Aaaanyway here I am.” The guys glanced at each other and offered her a beer, she accepted, and we all toasted to our good fortune. After the first sip she started to calm down a little but stayed leaning against the kitchen counter.

We started to make small talk; we did not know each other well. We were like a pack of dogs, carefully sniffing each other but keeping at a distance at first. Dennis asked if he could smoke in our kitchen. I noticed Chris’ eyebrows bounce up and he looked at Noreen. She just shrugged and said: “Whatever man, just go for it. I am a typical party smoker. Give me a glass of wine and a cigarette and I am happy.” She paused for a second then: “Mind rolling me one as well?” “Sure” he answered and looked at Chris, “do you want one too?” Chris took in a deep breath and replied, “Nah, I am good. I don’t smoke. Could you at least stand by the window?” I observed that he obviously was not cool with it, but he was not up for confrontation. When Dennis passed me by the window, he asked, “you

don't mind, do you" and winked at the others. The evening unfolded in front of our little group like a rolled-up leaf. One beer followed the other and a couple of cigarettes later the tension had vaporized into the smoky kitchen air. Chris tried to address his list, but Dennis and I were barely listening to him because Noreen was telling a story of her bad tinder date: "I am telling you the guy was mental! Really hot dude and I thought he was cool, but when we sat down to have dinner at this cute Italian place, – by the way we really have to go there together – and all of a sudden he started to talk about this doctor's appointment. Like come on it is a date, but to be polite I asked him why he had to go. Big mistake. This guy started to tell me all about his massive dumps. He went on and on about how they make his tiny butthole hurt and that he has to put cream on it. Who the fuck does that on a first date? Would you do that?" She looked at Dennis and Chris. They groaned in disgust and Dennis started laughing uncontrollably, even Chris cracked up. "What did you do then?" She shrugged, "I took him home, he was hot, remember?" Chris' eyebrows were stuck under the ceiling, but he did not say anything more about this topic. "Let's wrap this up guys, I wanted to address a few points..." "Oh shit" Noreen interrupted him, "I really have to go. I am so sorry!" She glanced at the clock "It is already past ten, time passes fast with you guys. I am really excited to move in with you but now I have places to be." She started to throw on her coat and packed everything in her massive handbag. Chris opened his mouth, but she had already flown through the door, another beer in her hand. "Great girl" Dennis smirked. "I am really hungry, should we order some pizza?"

The day of the move was messy. Cartons, boxes and bags were scattered everywhere, all of us unloading our lives into this small space. Trying to cramp stuff into every corner of the apartment. The walls of the kitchen were an ugly beige, so it was the unanimous decision to paint it in a "fun-colour" as Noreen put it, "and no, Chris, white is not a fun colour." I personally thought that white might be a good idea because it was neutral and reasonable. Dennis was eager to paint it in a leafy green because he said it reminded him of the forest and nature. Noreen rolled her eyes and suggested a bright yellow. They argued about it for more than an hour, both disgusted by the choice of the other person. Chris was quiet. I could see that he was disturbed by the show of emotion over some wall paint. In the end we "compromised" so that everybody could pick a wall and paint it in the colour of their choice. From then on, every morning I stared at a bright yellow wall to my left and a dark green wall to my right. Believe me, these colours do not match. With a look of resignation on his face, Chris painted the other two walls in a crisp and spotless white.

### *Winter*

A couple of weeks passed by and we hustled and bustled with our everyday life. Noreen and Chris kept quite busy with university while Dennis and I stayed mostly in the apartment. I really got to know him better. The kitchen was our meeting place. He sat with me, rolled some cigarettes and the

occasional joint and we let the day run by us. It felt like floating on a big river, calm and unexcited. It was a happy time, even though he would never share his weed with me. "I have my pot and you have yours Greta" he laughed with a little twinkle in his eye. When he stood next to me at the window, he used to tell me: "I enjoy our afternoons Greta, even though you are not much of a big talker." He smirked at his last remark. After the first few weeks I fell quite ill. I could not adjust as well to my new surrounding as the others. The light was different, and the humidity had changed. I think it was mostly the drafts in our not so well insulated flat. Med-Student Chris proved not to be of much help. I was a bit disappointed because he used to be my go-to guy at first. After the move he was very attentive and always brought me water. But as he got busier at university, especially when the first exams were coming up, he seemed to be very distracted. Noreen was always on the run – dates, friends, university – I felt like she had a general disinterest in me and when I was sick, she did not even seem to notice. I was lucky to have Dennis by my side. I am a lady so I will not go into details about my disposition but let me tell you it was not pretty. Dennis was quite knowledgeable about household remedies and he cooked me up some potion. He mixed it in with my water and I started to feel a lot better. He even called his mother, a biologist, about my condition. "Mum sends her best, Greta" he used to tell me. I started to really like him.

In February we had a big party. We were excited to celebrate together for the first time. The preparations, however, did not run smoothly. Dennis did not want to chip in for alcohol and food. "Just let everybody bring their own stuff" he argued. "But we are the hosts we should offer at least beer and some snacks" Noreen replied. "We don't want to seem cheap and I would rather get drunk on the good stuff" Chris added "Anyway Dennis, when was the last time you bought anything for the flat?" "Yeah I feel like it is always Chris and me buying toilet paper and kitchen stuff." Noreen was quite agitated now. I could feel Dennis getting defensive, "It is always about the money with you guys, a good party lives of its people and not of the booze." "Yeah sure that's what I would say if I drink of my flatmates and spend all my money on cigarettes and pot" Noreen shot back. "You never complained about my weed before," he snapped. I knew that Dennis struggled with his financials, he had failed to get a job and since this was his second try at university, his parents only paid his rent and the occasional extra. I had witnessed him snatching food from his flatmates before but as usual I kept to myself, nobody asked me anyway.

After quite the argument Dennis gave in and they settled on buying two crates of beer and some crisps together. Noreen bought six bottles of wine and with stern face she hid them in her room. Chris got some Gin and tonic, red cups, and ping pong balls. We were still getting ready when the first people arrived. As usual the party started slowly, and everybody was standing around beer in their hand chit chatting. I overheard some distasteful comments about our distasteful paint job. Half an hour later and more people were swelling through our door. When the first game of rage cage commenced it started

to get wild. During the second or third game I was hit rather hard by an elbow and for the first time Noreen came to my defence. She scolded the culprit, "Hey be more careful with Greta!" At midnight there were way too many people crammed into our small flat. It was damp and the air was pregnant with the smell of cheap alcohol and smoke. I became a bit claustrophobic and started to feel uncomfortable. Dennis was getting absolutely shitfaced. He probably had too much of Chris' gin and as I recall one of Noreen's wine bottles had gone missing. Since the other guests had brought their own alcohol there was plenty to choose from and no one had to stay sober. Suddenly, Dennis came up to me with two shots of tequila. The kind and chill Dennis was gone and before me stood an obtrusive drunk. Even Chris and Noreen, who usually drink one over the thirst, were baffled by this transformation. I had an involuntary shot after which Noreen rushed over to us and confronted him: "What the hell Dennis? You know this is not good for her. You of all should know that." "Ohhh come on it is a party loosen up a little bit", he replied and she raised her eyebrows, "Get your shit together we don't need you puking all over the place." "I can handle my booze!" "*Your* booze?" "Oh, just get back to your hundred boyfriends" he slurred while pouring himself another shot. "Come on drink one with me" he offered her one. "No thanks, you can be quite an ass and you are just jealous because you are not getting any. Just leave Greta alone!" with these words she turned around and went to greet an arriving guest. She could not resist playing the host and very much enjoyed being the centre of attention. Dennis looked after her, shrugged his shoulders and since he had two shots in his hands, he basically poured one over me. I do not remember much after that the party became quite blurry. I just recall people dancing and laughing to loud and in the end, somebody was puking violently, probably Dennis. I guess at some point the police showed up and the party started to dissolve itself and everybody left the kitchen – Noreen to her room with some guy she had met, Chris after cleaning up most of the glasses and bottles and Dennis was passed out in the middle of the hallway.

The morning after I was feeling like shit and our kitchen was trashed. When Noreen and her companion entered the kitchen, their feet stuck to the ground like insects to a fly trap. She made coffee for the two of them and then politely asked him to leave because she had a massive headache and nothing to eat. I had watched Noreen working through the morning awkwardness countless times and by now she was some sort of expert. Her voice filled the morning silence with meaningless chatter until the guy had collected his things and left. A couple of minutes later Chris came in and his expression dropped when he saw the state of the kitchen and Noreen throning in the middle of it. "Morning" he muffled and made himself coffee. I had observed that he was very particular about his favourite cup and Noreen and Dennis knew better than to use it. It was one of those quirks that Chris had brought with him to the apartment. He disliked it for example, when people entered the flat with shoes. He also arranged our spices alphabetically once a week because Noreen and Dennis kept messing up his system accidentally.

## *Spring*

Corona hit us like a bird hits a glass window, lots of ruffled feathers. We were one of the first groups that had to go into quarantine. We were locked down and locked in with each other. Every annoyance that had floated around like plankton started to surface. A friend of Chris' had come over for a couple of drinks. He tested positive for COVID-19 the day after. We got the call from the health office in the afternoon and since everyone in our flat had been in the kitchen with him, we all had to stay in for the next two weeks. The first days were filled with anxiety that somebody had caught the virus, but no one showed any real symptoms. However, we all became massively hypochondriac and imagined all kinds of discomforts. Our usual conversations sounded a little like this: "Chris, I swear my nose was runny and I coughed a little this morning. Do you think I have it?" After a while he just shook his head or shrugged. These days were still alright. Netflix was watched empty and a lot pizzas were ordered. After a while though boredom set in and it hit Noreen first. She kept pacing through the apartment and randomly entering rooms, throwing herself on the beds, trying to make conversation. Chris on the other hand started to clean the apartment obsessively and when it was finally spotless, he created all these "useful" projects and began ordering Dennis and Noreen around. When he dug up the white paint the discussion about the kitchen's colours re-emerged, still without any productive outcome. Dennis reinvented his smoking habit to the extreme until it seemed to be his only occupation. During the second week everybody became unbearable to everyone else. I caught myself being annoyed by the way Chris cut his food into ridiculously small pieces and chewed them at least a hundred times because it was supposed to be healthier. I could not hear another of Noreen's anecdotes and if Dennis would have smoked one more joint right next to me, I would have loved to smack it right out of his mouth. We became caged dogs slowly building up a lurking aggression towards each other, growling and gnawing.

When the two weeks were finally over Noreen and Dennis busted out of the apartment door before Chris could say, "that is not what you are supposed to do during a lockdown." He stayed in with me jealously looking out of the window. Dennis was back in the evening and Noreen came back late at night and not alone. The next morning, she entered the kitchen smiling, last night's visitor had already left. She made herself some coffee when Chris came in. There was a "good morning" mumble when he went straight to the cupboard. He opened it, looked startled and asked, "Somebody take my cup?". Noreen rolled her eyes but answered, "You now I wouldn't, it probably is around here somewhere." Christ just stood there for a few moments and then decided to go on a scavenger hunt around the apartment. When he left our kitchen, Noreen mindlessly scrolled through her phone. Dennis came in: "What's wrong with Chris? He just woke me up to ask me about his stupid cup." A couple minutes later Chris busted through the door, red faced and heavily breathing. I had never seen him this way,

he was visibly upset but did not say a word at first. In his right hand he had clutched his favourite cup. He stared at Noreen intensely. When she looked up from her phone, he slowly turned the cup upside down and after a second *it* slid out like a creamy white slug. A used condom dropped on our kitchen floor. There was complete silence for a moment, and you could have cut the tension with a knife. Then a girlish giggle escaped Noreen's throat. "Oh shiiiiit" she stretched the last words and mumbled a few more. "It was in my room, wasn't it?" she tried to put innocence into her voice. "Oh, you are in for some trouble" Dennis said while he lit his breakfast cigarette at the open window. "This is beyond disgusting, Noreen", Chris had found his voice again. "Do you think this is funny somehow? I have tolerated everything so far, but this tops it all. You don't have any respect for anything or anybody", he was close to shouting now. Dennis looked down but I could tell that Noreen marched for battle. "Oh man I am really sorry... but it is just a stupid cup. I told you I didn't take it." "Why was it in your room then?" Chris fired. "The fuck you were doing in my room anyway?" she replied standing up. Chris stepped closer "That is not what this is about. If your one-night stand likes to jizz in my cup I have all the right to be! And who does that anyway, bringing a stranger home the first night after quarantine? Are you that desperate?" Noreen's eyes narrowed and in dangerously calm tone she asked, "Why do you think it was a one-night stand?" Dennis threw his cigarette out of the window and stepped in, "Oh come on Noreen, we know you." Turning to Chris he added, "The quarantine wasn't our fault, Chris, it was yours. We can do whatever we want, Mr super-responsible." "Are you guys fucking stupid?! The quarantine was not my fault, there is a pandemic, in case you haven't noticed." Noreen was still staring at Dennis in disbelief: "Know me? You don't know shit about me. I went to see my boyfriend. After two weeks with you freaks it was nice to see a normal person again." She pointed at Chris, "Obsessive" and then at Dennis, "Slacker". "*Your* so-called boyfriend put *his* used condom in *my* cup! Bitch." Chris never had sworn before. This was a declaration of war. Accusations were dropped like little hand grenades and insults flew like shrapnel through the kitchen, piercing each and everyone's egos. At one point Noreen – or was it Dennis? – was even holding Chris' cup out of the window, threatening to drop it. Chris stormed forward. This was when it happened. A quarrel in front of the kitchen window broke out: An arm, a push and I fell.

The last thing I saw was a blur of bright yellow and leafy green. Three surprised faces were staring down at me. My pot shattered when I hit the ground and black soil splattered all over the cobble stones. My beautiful green leaves broke like the bones of a real body. And my last thought regarded my little unborn bud that was never to open and experience the joy of photosynthesis. No sunshine no rain.

*Summer? There was never going to be a summer for me.*