

Some Things Never Change

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Colt is a good kid.

His mom is dead and his father is in the slammer, so he takes care of his brother, Angie. But, one snow day when Colt has to be at work, a gang takes things too far and Angie and Kohl, Colt's boyfriend, get into major trouble.

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1 - Prologue

My name is Colt Tremelo.

This is my story.

It is not a happy story. It is a sad story full of loss and pain. It is a story of tenderness and family, and always saying I love you before you leave.

It is the story of the Tremelo boys, plus Kohl and Ming-Shi.

It is my story.

My cross to bear.

&

My entire fault.

2 - An Accident

“Oh, Coltie!” a voice cried. I pulled my pillow harder over my head and grunted.

“Five more minutes,” I moaned.

“School today! Get up, get up!” trilled the Pollyannaish voice. “Breakfast is on, Colt!”

“FIVE MORE MINUTES, DAMMIT!” I yelled as my overly bright little brother, Angie, flicked my light on.

“No, Colt!” he countered, pulling the black comforter off me. “Roxy may not mind you being late to work, but I have a tardy policy!”

I groaned and slung my legs over the bed. My hair was a mess, as always: long hair did that in the morning. I pushed my glasses over my nose and gave my brother a disdainful look over them.

And there he was, bright as always. He had on a pink tee shirt and baby blue jeans, plus the big grin plastered across his face. “Get dressed and get some granola.” And with that, he skipped out of the room. Yes, skipped. I pulled on a pair of black jeans and my steel-toed boots and clomped down after him.

Angie sighed. “Colt, honestly, put a shirt on.”

“Why d'you care?” I asked, pulling up a chair.

“Because I can see that gross tattoo,” he replied, tossing me my emotricon shirt. The tattoo in question was the Japanese character for 'rain' and it wasn't gross, it was cool.

Nevertheless, I tugged the shirt over my head and took my black trench coat that I practically lived in off the back of my chair and pulled myself into it. I withdrew the pack of Marlboros out of the pocket.

“Colt, don't,” moaned Angie.

“Oh, deal with it,” I groaned, pulling a cig out of the pack. I lit it and took a long drag.

Angie sighed, giving up. “Just...don't drop it in my granola,” he pleaded.

“Fine,” I muttered, annoyed. He'd caught what I'd planned to do.

Abruptly, a box of Krispy Kremes fell on the table. “And he said, ‘Let there be donuts.’ And there was, and they were good,” said the slightly accented voice above me. I smiled: I recognized that voice.

“Hey, babe,” I said, reaching up to hold my boyfriend's hand. Yeah, I'm gay. Should I've told you that before?

Anywho, I turned to look at my Latino man who, I might add, is a god. "Hi, sweets," he said, kissing me on the cheek and snagging a donut at the same time. His name's Kohl. Y'know, like the eyeliner? "So y'all are stuck with me today," he grinned, taking a bite of his donut.

"What d'you mean?" asked Angie, forsaking his granola and opting for a donut.

"You haven't looked outside?" demanded Kohl unbelievably.

Angie stood up and threw open the curtains. Since it was late November, outside it should've been brown, cold...and dead. However, instead it was coated with white. A grin slowly spread across my little brother's face. "SNOW DAY!" he screeched, running into his green coat.

He was about to run out the door, but fortunately I caught him around the collar in time. "What are you, crazy?!" I demanded, wheeling him around so he faced me.

"But, Coltie, snow day..." he pleaded.

"You must be out of your mind," said Kohl, making me let Angie down.

You must be wondering why I flipped out. We live in a... bad neighborhood, to be lenient. Gang fights and drive by's are not uncommon occurrences around here. Angie's still real upbeat and everything, and I keep telling him to toughen up and get street smart, like me. Or...or he'll end up like mom and dad.

Dad's been in the slammer for almost a year now, both for driving while intoxicated and vehicular manslaughter. Mom...I don't like to think about Mom. Suffice to say we live in a bad neighborhood. When Dad got put away, the court almost put us apart. I was 17 (still am) and I had a job, so they let us stay together. I dropped out of school and I now work full-time at 7-11. Which is where I had to go now.

I handed Angie off to Kohl and said, "Watch him, will ya? I got work."

"Sure," he replied good-naturedly.

I kissed him on the cheek and rubbed Angie's head. "Be good, y'hear?"

"I hear," he replied, hugging me.

"You're almost as tall as me now," I said. He may annoy me, but I do hold a soft spot for him. He's my only flesh and blood.

I stepped out the door and sucked my breath in through my teeth. It was a heck of a lot colder than I thought it'd be. I slung myself into my Gremlin and turned the key, pleading, 'Come on, baby, don't die, don't die when I need you!' Praise be, it started with just four turns.

As I said, I work a dead-end job at 7-11. It has good benefits, and the pay's okay, but the girls make me a tad uncomfortable. One in particular, Josie Collins, loves messing with my hair. She loves the fact that I grew it out to cover one eye and that I can pull it off since I'm a redhead.

I remember the day.

I was standing by the slurpee machine, mopping up something sticky and trying to dodge Josie when my boss, Roxanne Delli, came up and tapped me on the shoulder. She was a delicate, refined black woman who was a snappy dresser and had dyed bright red hair that looked fabulous on her, and none of us could see for the life of us why she managed a 7-11.

“Colt, will you come with me?” she asked, beckoning me.

“Sure,” I said, relieved to be away from Josie. I threw the mop at the aforementioned and followed Roxy outside. “Thanks for rescuing me, Rox,” I said, grinning at her.

She wasn’t smiling. Gently, she laid a hand on my arm. “There’s been an accident.”

Her words seemed to swim around me. I didn’t quite understand her. “There’s been an accident?” I asked dumbly.

“It’s your brother,” she said, scrutinizing my gray eyes with her brown ones. There’s been an accident. It’s your brother. Words I didn’t understand.

All I could tell was that something bad had happened to Angie, my only flesh and blood.

“Rox, where is he?” I asked, trying to get my keys and cigarettes out of my pocket at the same time. “Where is he?!”

“St Mary’s,” she said, leading me to my car.

I scrambled in, got the car to start, and sped off, hoping I could get to St Mary’s in time.

3 - Not-Angie

I made it to St. Mary's in record time.

I hopped out of the Gremlin, hitting my head pretty hard on the way out, ran in and asked the receptionist where I could find Givanni Tremelo.

"The ER, but he's in surgery right now," said the helpful nun behind the counter. She was giving me a strange/alarmed look.

"Thanks," I told her, running off to the ER. I felt something wet on my head, but that was forced out of my mind as I stepped in and saw Kohl, his head in his hands, sitting next to an Asian boy who was chewing his nail and had a large piece of gauze over half of his face.

"Kohl," I said. He merely sagged some more. I walked over and sat next to him. He looked up and his eyes were red, swollen, hurt and afraid. He had a black eye and his eyeliner had run.

"It's all my fault!" he cried, throwing himself into my arms. "I didn't mean for it to happen, I didn't, I'm sorry, Colt, it's all my fault!" he sobbed. "One minute we're making a snow man, the next minute, I'm slashed up and Angie's been shot!"

"Angie's been shot?" I asked hollowly.

I felt him nod into my jacket. "I'm sorry, it's all my fault," he replied, his voice muffled.

I lifted him off me. "Where were you slashed?"

He held his shirt up. He was bandaged all across his stomach. "They already took care of me," he said, letting his shirt fall. "You might want to have them look at you." He touched my head and when he retracted his fingers, they were red.

"Musta started bleeding when I banged it on the car," I muttered, holding my scarf up to it.

"They will take care of you, too," said the Asian kid. "Kohl should not be talking. It is my bad that Angie is hurt now."

"Who exactly are you?" I demanded.

"Ming-Shi Ran," he sighed, slumping against the seat. "I am new here from China."

"It was the ProC's!" said Kohl.

"Damn," I muttered. The ProC's were a gang in our neighborhood, the name was short for ProCreationists Think of them as the extreme catholic republicans. They prey on gays, foreigners,

women who've had abortions, Jews, Bhuddists, and anyone who stands in their way. They were, essentially, Nazis. They were the ones who'd hurt Kohl, Ming-Shi, and, most importantly, Angie.

We waited a long time. Kohl and Ming-Shi had to go home eventually, but I stayed. With no one to talk to, I was left with the memories. Last Halloween, I was a devil and he was an angel. I remember how he used to ride on my back, and how I always teased him about the fact that he was 15 and still played with plastic planes in the bath tub. The thing that stuck out the most, though, was that I had never said I loved him. Before I'd left to go to work, I hadn't told him to be safe, and that I loved him.

It was a long night.

At around three AM, the doctor (whom I'd been pestering relentlessly every time he came out) told me he was out of surgery.

"We managed to remove the majority of the shrapnel from his chest, but we had to graft some skin from his leg onto his wound."

"But he'll be okay?"

"I...yes, he'll be fine," said the doc reluctantly.

"Can I see him?" was the next thing I demanded.

"He's sleeping now," said the doc hesitatingly.

"I'll be real quiet, I promise!" I pleaded.

The doc sighed. "I suppose so." He laid a hand on my arm, much in the way that Roxy had earlier today. "You get some rest too, son. You must not be a day older than nineteen."

"Seventeen," I corrected him. "Almost eighteen."

"Seventeen, but it lists you as the primary caregiver," said the doc, looking over his notes. Recognition clicked in his eyes. "Were you two part of the Tremelo case last year?"

"Yeah, Colt and Givanni Tremelo."

"You probably don't remember me, but I'm Gustav Hark. Your mother was a friend of mine. I paid my respects at the funeral, but you were ten. You've gotten so big since then. And your brother...your brother..." He seemed to remember my original question. He cleared his throat. "Yes, you can see him." He opened a swinging door and led me through to Angie's room.

Angie looked awful.

He had tubes in his arm, stomach, and nose. He had a heart monitor and several more beeping machines that I couldn't recognize.

He looked dead.

“He’s...” I started. I had to stop because I was tearing up. My heart ached to see Angie like that. “That’s not Angie,” I said thickly. “Angie’s full of life, always telling me to stop smoking or smiling his freakin’ face off.” The kid in the bed might have had red hair and freckles, but he wasn’t the brother I took care of. He wasn’t Angie. “That’s not Angie,” I repeated.

“I’ll leave you alone,” said Dr. Hark. I heard the door close, but I didn’t see him: my eyes were still focused on Not-Angie.

“Angie, Not-Angie, whoever you are, listen,” I started, taking a seat in the hard hospital chair. “I know you probably can’t hear me, but...but I want my brother back.” I began to cry. “I just...I just want my brother back.” I fell asleep like that, crying and pleading for my brother back.