

Forgive And Forget

By Courtney Snider

Prologue

Shawn Alan Mason

Andie isn't going to college.

That's the only thing my parents cared about at that moment.

Five little words.

"I'm not going to college."

Instead of five much bigger numbers.

Forty.

Forty-Five.

Fifty.

Fifty-Five.

Sixty.

MPH.

"Andie?" I tried to call out to my older brother.

But the screaming is too loud.

"What do you mean you're *not going to college?*" my mom demanded.

"We spent a lot of money so you could go to the University of Chicago!" my dad complained.

"But now you don't have to!" Andie screamed. "Isn't that a good thing?"

"Andie!" I tried again. Still, to no avail.

“It’s not about the money, Andie…” my mom muttered.

“Then *why* did you bring it up!” Andie yelled.

“We just want you to have a stable future, which comes from a stable career, which comes from college!” my dad explained.

“ANDIE!”

...

The next thing I remember is waking up in a place I’ve never seen before.

I thought it was a lab at first.

People in white coats.

Wires.

Strange liquids.

Screens displaying things I didn’t understand, like a foreign language.

I still wish I had spoken a foreign language at that moment.

“Oh good, you’re awake,” one of the people in the white coats told me.

She didn’t look scary.

She didn’t look like she was about to turn me into a rat via a science experiment.

She didn’t look like the mad scientists that all the boys wanted to be in kindergarten.

She looked sad.

Guilty.

Dreadful.

“Where… where am I? I asked.

“You’re in the hospital, dear. Do you remember what happened?”

Something happened?

Something happened.

Andie isn't going to college.

We were going too fast.

The world went black.

Silent.

Peaceful.

Chaotic.

“We crashed...” I spoke. It wasn't a guess. I knew. I didn't have to be a genius to figure it out.

The lady nodded solemnly.

“How do you feel? Do you need anything?” she asked me.

“Is there anything to watch on TV?”

The nurse chuckled. It wasn't happy though.

It matched her expression.

Sad.

Guilty.

Dreadful.

I soon found out why.

She didn't change the channel fast enough.

The first thing I saw was a picture of my family.

I was ecstatic.

Of course I was.

I was young.

Naïve.

Oh, what I would give to be that again.

I was on TV.

I thought I was famous.

In a way, I was.

Until people stopped caring.

But I never did.

I couldn't.

“Christian and Andrea Mason were found dead at the scene of the crash, leaving behind two sons: eighteen-year-old Andie and fourteen-year-old Shawn.”

You don't move on from that.

...

The court gave Andie custody of me.

Of course they did.

He's eighteen.

He's a legal adult.

I didn't want to get in the car.

For more reasons than one.

I was scared.

And angry.

And I never stopped.

“Shawn, please just get in the car,” Andie said, holding my squirming body.

“*No!*” I cried. I tried to hit him, bite him, scream so loud his ears would blow.

“Shawn, please. I'm not going to crash,” he tried to comfort me. “I've learned my lesson.”

“Murderers don’t learn their lessons!” I screamed. “I hate you, Andie Adonis Mason!”

Erin Alexandria Harper

Every person is insecure in their own way.

Your stomach is too big.

Your nose is too big.

Your shoulders are too small.

You’re too small.

But no child.

Ever.

They should think that their parents don’t want them.

I never thought that my parents didn’t want me.

I know they would prefer *him*.

Caleb.

The baby they never had.

His due date was May 21st.

He didn’t make it past October 14th.

My parents made that a holiday of sorts,

Which I never understood.

Why would you celebrate the death of someone?

Every October 14th we would do something my parents think he would like.

Eat at McDonalds.

Watch some sports on television.

Go to the comic book store.

“We’re just trying to honor him, Erin.” My mom said.

Was making up delusions about your dead son honoring him?

“He was your brother.” My dad said.

Was he my brother if I’ve never seen him?

But I never said any of that.

I was supposed to be grateful.

They didn’t know if I was going to make it either.

So, I sit there

And smile

And pretend they wouldn’t prefer.

That I was Caleb Micheal Harper.

And I’ll spend the rest of my life trying to prove that I’m worth it.

Chapter One

3 years later

Shawn

I didn't know you needed good grades to play football.

I don't need to know how to use a semicolon to throw a football.

I don't need to know comma rules to tackle people.

However, according to my coach,

I need a tutor.

"I'll see if Erin can tutor you," he tells me.

Erin.

Erin Harper.

I know who she is.

Most of the school does.

She's known.

She's on the debate team.

She's in my math class. Sits in the front row.

I don't talk to her a lot.

But she seems cool.

"Fine."

Erin

“Are you doing anything after school?” my English teacher, Mr. Gregson asks me.

I grip the small pepper spray can attached to my keys.

“No...” I answer, taking a small step back.

“Mr. Hillcox asked me if you’d be willing to tutor one of his players.”

I didn’t know I was smart enough to be a tutor.

I know I’m smart.

I’ve never had a grade under an A.

I’m on the debate team.

I’ve never had a missing assignment in my life.

And I think I’m too humble.

My grip on my pepper spray loosens.

I reverse my step.

“Who?” I ask.

“Shawn Mason.”

Shawn Mason

Shawn.

I know who he is.

Most of the school does.

He's known.

He's on the football team.

He's in my math class. Sits in the third row.

I don't talk to him a lot.

But he seems cool.

“All right, I can do that.”

Chapter Two

Shawn

I didn't think that tutoring sessions would start at once.

I only have a D in English.

I'm not failing.

My phone was the most interesting thing until she walked in.

Erin.

Air in.

Heaven.

Harper.

Harp.

Angel.

That's the only way to describe Erin Harper.

You don't see much from the third row.

Her hair matches her eyes.

Dark. Like dark chocolate, which I never found more appealing.

It goes with her dark green sweater.

Which goes with her jeans.

Which goes with her simple white tennis shoes.

Which goes with her glasses.

Which compliments her eyes and her freckly nose.

She's like the finished product of a puzzle.

Put together.

No imperfections.

Simple but admirable.

“Shawn?”

I didn't realize how close she was.

She isn't even that close.

But the third row suddenly felt like a lifetime.

Erin

“Erin!” he finally responded after a minute.

He's acting weird.

I've never liked football boys.

I think they smell.

I also think I'm stereotypical.

“Mr. Gregson told me you needed help with English...”

“And Coach Hillcox told me *I* need help with English.”

“Do you?”

“If I want to keep playing football.”

I take the seat across from him.

“They do that for college purposes.”

He tenses.

“Then go on,” he says.

His posture straightens.

He grips his pencil.

He looks at me.

But his eyes aren't focused.

Chapter Three

Shawn

It's been two weeks now.

Tutoring has been going well.

But my grade hasn't gone up.

Because I haven't been listening.

Because of her eyes.

They're too distracting.

Two small pools of chocolate.

So sweet Willy Wonka couldn't even devise the perfect recipe for them.

So rich that the wealthy and the poor would come together

To get a small glance

At Erin Harper.

Her voice is so gentle but fierce

When she spoke, I thought she was conducting the Angels of Heaven

But all she said was

“Can we have our next session at your house?”

Cupid's arrows are extra sharp today.

The Beatles said love can be suicide.

Not murder.

“No,” I say quickly.
Love can’t be murder.
Andie is the murderer.
She can’t ever see him.
Over my dead body.
She can’t.

Erin

I didn’t persist.
That’s not my job.

“Okay, that’s fine,” I say.
“We can go to my house instead.”

Salt looks like sugar.
Words can be deceiving.
I didn’t say that we could go to my house.
I can show my parents that I’m a good tutor. I said.
I can show my parents that I’m smart enough. I said.
I can show my parents that I’m good enough. I said.
I’m not Caleb, and that’s okay. I said.
But I didn’t.

I said we could go to my house.

Chapter Four

Shawn

If Erin is an Angel
Her home is Heaven
And they seem to serve a god that was never there.

“Erin,” Mrs. Harper says calmly.
Though she’s anything but calm.
“Do you know what day it is?”

What day is it?
October 14th.
What’s so important about today?

If Erin’s home is Heaven,
She just disappeared into the clouds.

“Mom... it was unavoidable,” she says.
“So was Caleb’s death,” her father interjects.

Death...

I turn toward the door. “I should go.”
And suddenly the world becomes a tightrope,
Because her parents say yes
But she says no.

“It won’t take that long,” she insists. “Just give us an hour.”

The false god the parents serve granted the hour.

The false god is Caleb.

The god that never answered.

The god that was never a god.

“Sorry about that,” Erin says, sitting on her bed.

I can’t help but wonder if this was meant to be Caleb’s room.

I can’t help but wonder if Erin was never supposed to be alive.

I can’t help but wonder if my parents were there for Caleb in Heaven.

“It’s fine,” I say.

I get loss.

The loss of parents and a sibling.

And, apparently, she does too.

“This would’ve been so much easier at your house,” she mutters under her breath.

“No, it wouldn’t,” I insist.

“Why not?”

Why not?

Why?

“I don’t have any less family drama than you do.”

Why couldn’t Andie just go to college?

“What’s wrong with yours?”

Why did Andie have to be driving?

“I’d prefer not to talk about it.”

Why didn’t he realize his speed?

“Are you sure?”

The speed limit was thirty.

“Yes.”

He was going sixty.

“You can talk to me if you need to”

“I SAID I DIDN’T WANT TO TALK ABOUT IT!”

Erin

I shouldn’t have persisted.

That’s not my job...

I shouldn’t have persisted.

That’s not my job.

I shouldn’t have persisted.

That’s not my job.

It's never enough.

It's always too much.

It's always too little.

It's always too early.

It's always too late.

I'm never enough.

“Okay, that's fine...”

I can show my parents that I'm a good tutor. I said.

I can show my parents that I'm smart enough. I said.

I can show my parents that I'm good enough. I said.

It's always *said*.

Never *did*.

Chapter 5

Shawn

She's like the finished product of a puzzle.

Put together.

No imperfections.

Simple but admirable.

But if one piece gets removed,

She falls apart.

I haven't seen her since that day,

That I removed that puzzle piece.

But I'm still naïve enough to think

That I can put it back.

But I just ended up removing more.

"Yo, Mason! How's tutoring going for you?" Player 7 asks.

"Please. You could hit him in the head with a dictionary and he'd still be as dumb as before."
Player 38 retorts.

"I'd probably want to be hit in the head if I had to work with Erin Harper, too!" Player 56
snickers.

"Yeah," I blurt.

"She's awful."

"Not even her parents love her."

That gets them laughing.

But it wasn't worth it.

Because she is crying.

Her dark chocolate eyes
Were flooding
And being washed away.

Erin

Not even her parents love her.

Her parents love her.

Not even.

Love.

Her.

Me.

...

“Erin!” he calls to me.

She’s awful.

“We’re not meeting today.”

Not even her parents love her.

“Why not?”

“I have a debate team meeting.”

I’m debating punching him in the face.

Chapter Six

Shawn

It's been two weeks now.
Tutoring has not been going well.
My grade hasn't gone up.
Because I haven't been attending.
Because of her eyes.
They're too distracting.
And too sad.

And I know
That it's my fault.

But I can't stop picturing her.

Her hair matches her eyes.
Dark. Like dark chocolate, which I never found more appealing.
It goes with her dark green sweater.
Which goes with her jeans.
Which goes with her simple white tennis shoes.
Which goes with her glasses.
Which compliments her eyes and her freckly nose.

Erin.

Air in.

Heaven.

Harper.

Harp.

Angel.

She has a debate match tonight.

I'm debating on going.

She doesn't want to see me.

But I need to apologize to her.

Erin

“Erin Harper, you’ll be debating on if the term ‘forgive and forget’ is a standard by which we should live.”

He is in the audience.

Shawn Mason.

Forgive and forget.

I adjust the microphone.

I adjust my posture.

But I don't adjust myself.

“I believe that *forgive and forget* are great words to live by.”

“But I can't say that I think we should do so.”

“Forgiving is a wonderful thing.”

“But I don’t think people’s actions should be forgotten unless they prove they changed.”

“Authorities can’t just let bank robbers or felons free just because they said sorry.”

“Salt looks like sugar. And words can be deceiving.”

“You never know what words mean.”

“Until people show you their definition.”

...

I won the debate.

I did it.

I’m enough.

“Erin!” his voice snaps me out of my thoughts.

“I’m sorry,” he says.

“Forgiving is a wonderful thing.”

“But I don’t think people’s actions should be forgotten unless they prove they changed.”

“I forgive you,” I say.

“But I need to show you that I am...”

“Erin, please give me a chance to show that I’m sorry...”

“We can go to the movies, I’ll buy you popcorn, candy, all of it!”

“I just don’t want to lose you.”

“You never know what words mean.”

“Until people show you their definition.”

“Are you asking me out?” I ask warily.

“Erin, please just give me a chance...”

I swallow.

“Forgiving is a wonderful thing.”

“But I don’t think people’s actions should be forgotten unless they prove they changed.”

“You never know what words mean.”

“Until people show you their definition.”

“I’m sorry, Shawn,” I say. “But my answer is no.”