

## Seize the Day

'*Could this day get any worse,*' he thought. Nate squeezed the water from his hoodie as the large semi-truck roared through town. He had everything planned out, but of course, life threw him yet another curveball. He planned to go to the library and sit in his unassigned, yet assigned table, but Rachel was there with her new 'lady friend.' Watching them flirt at the table they previously shared, made his stomach churn. Even though they broke up four months ago, it still hurt to see her with someone other than him.

Nate tried to leave without being spotted but he was too slow. They called him over, trying to mask the awkwardness with painful small talk.

*Why did they call me over here? We could've locked eyes for a few never-ending minutes, gave an awkward smile and wave and left without having to endure this torture. Instead I'm rocking back and forth on my heels, counting the seconds until I can leave. Oh my gosh Rachel! Stop blabbering on about your upcoming trip! I don't care!*

"But we're extremely excited to go to Walt Disney World after finals," she said. "We wanted to go during spring break, but we thought it would be too crowded to get on any rides."

*Wait a second. I offered the idea of taking her to Disney World a year into our relationship, but she said she wasn't a fan of theme parks. I even asked numerous times afterward, but she continuously rejected my idea. Now all of a sudden, she's willing to go, after sleeping with this girl for only four months?! Wow.*

"That's exciting!" Nate said through his teeth. He could feel his face turning red with anger. "You girls must be serious."

"Yeah, we're pretty happy," the lady friend said. She continued talking, but Nate wasn't paying attention.

*What the hell is this girl's name again? We share a couple classes together and she lives down the hall from me, which is fun when we casually ignore the others existence as we pass in the halls. I know it starts with a 'T.' Or is it a 'M'? No, it has to be an 'S.' Why can't I remember her name? Maybe I've blocked it from my mind after she started sleeping with Rachel while we were still in a relationship. But I'm just spit balling.*

“Hopefully we can make this trip a frequent thing!” she finished, putting her arm around Rachel and bringing her closer.

*Your name is on the tip of my tongue.*

“That’s so sweet!” Rachel said, kissing her cheek. Nate rolled his eyes. “Isn’t Chloe the sweetest?”

*Or course! Chloe! That was her name!*

“It seems like it,” Nate said, turning to walk away. “I hope you girls have fun!”

“If you need a place to study, you’re more than welcome to join us!” Chloe shouted after him. Rachel elbowed her in the rib and whispered something Nate couldn’t make out. “You don’t have to if you don’t want to though!”

*Seriously? Of course, I don't want too! Wasn't it awkward enough to have me stand here and listen to the two of you detail your vacations plans? Now you want me to sit here, with you? You really know how to pick em, Rachel. Well done.*

Nate shook his head. “I appreciate the offer to let me join you at *my* table, but I’ll have to pass. Being in the same room with you both hasn’t exactly provided me with many fond memories.” Rachel’s face turned red from embarrassment and looked away. Chloe scratched the back of her head, unsure of what to say. “Anyway, I’ll let you two get back to studying. I’ll find another spot.”

Nate walked away, unable to hide his smile, and exited the library. He zipped up his jacket as a cold breeze pushed his hair up and sent goose bumps rippling across his body. Nate's teeth chattered and his nose and ears turned blue.

*Who the hell came up with this dumb idea to go to school in Boston? It's fucking freezing! We've been outside for one damn minute and slush has already seeped into my shoes. We got a full ride to go to southern California, but Rachel wanted to come her for the culture. SoCal has culture. Sitting on a beach, watching the surfers' silhouettes ride the waves against the setting sun while listening to the Beach Boys and Red Hot Chili Peppers. That's the culture I want to experience!*

Nate braved the cold and drudged through the shin high snow to his dorm. He hoped his roommate wasn't there so he could get work done, but as he approached the building, he could hear music blaring from one of the windows. Nate looked toward his dorm. Red, blue, green and purple lights flickered through the closed curtains. Of course, his roommate decided to throw a small party with his fraternity brothers instead of studying for their upcoming finals. Nate's shoulders slumped.

*Figures.*

Nate contemplated going back to the library, but the thought of running into Rachel again made his stomach queasy. He scrambled his brain for any remaining spots on campus that were suitable for studying. The student union was too loud, and the large patch of grass outside the dorm was nice on a warm sunny day, but today hell had frozen over so that was a no go. He recalled the engineering lab he frequented every other day, but there were still people working on their projects. He couldn't concentrate with so many people conversing.

*There has to be one spot on this campus we can study. Hold up.*

He recalled the small coffee shop, called the Speckled Ax, that he stumbled upon when he first moved to Boston. It was a fifteen-minute walk through downtown near the port, but it was worth it. The coffee shop was quiet and created a soothing ambiance. Dark wooden walls swallowed the dim lighting and soft music playing in the background, keeping customers relaxed. Photos ripped from National Geographic and various maps of the world littered the walls. Nate loved going there to study but tried to leave his wallet whenever he did. The smell of freshly brewed coffee and straight-out-of-the-oven pastries made his knees buckle and his mouth water. Whether he was hungry or not, money flew from his wallet and rested comfortably within the register.

*Just don't spend money and we'll be fine. How hard can it be?*

Nate pursed his lips.

*I'll get one coffee and that's it!*

Nate sprinted into the building, climbed four flights of stairs and jogged down the hallway to the last door on the right. He simply needed to grab his wallet and get out. The less time he talked to his roommate, the better mood he'd be in.

He opened the door to find dozens of empty beer cans erupting out of the trash can, pools of beer forming a ring around the trash and a three-foot mountain of Totino's pizza rolls sitting on the small coffee table. Four guys sat on the couch, each with a beer gut resting over their belt buckle, nodded at Nate.

*Now, I'm in a bad mood. This is disgusting. Nice to know I officially live in a pig sty.*

"Nate, bro!" his roommate, Chris, belched. He got to his feet and stumbled forward before falling backwards onto the couch again. Chris was a nice guy but susceptible to peer pressure from his fraternity brothers. They loved to get him drunk and watch him stumble around

the room. When drunk, Chris became oddly good at beer pong and did a great impersonation of Steve Irwin. While possessing the patchy facial hair of Seth Rogen and the frizzy hair of Jonah Hill, Chris's body oddly resembled Violet Beauregarde's. Chris rolled over to Nate, shoving a Bud Light in his face. "Grab a beer and chug one back with me! I'll even give you a five second head start!"

*No.*

Without waiting for Nate's response, Chris flicked off the top and chugged his beer in less than ten seconds, receiving a standing ovation from his friends. Chris took a bow, but almost fell on his face. Luckily, Nate caught him and stood him upright.

*Gez Louise, this guy needs to lay off the beers. He's one beer away from being confused for the giant hamster ball fraternities and sororities use when they go to the lake upstate.*

"Thanks buddy," Chris said, following with a revolting burp in Nate's face. Nate tried to steer clear of the fumes, but they had already entered his nose.

*C'mon man seriously?*

Nate gagged and snagged his wallet off his desk. He opened the door to the hallway, allowing fresh air to filter the room. "Thanks for the offer, but you guys have fun," Nate said, slowing backing into the hallway. "I need to study for my finals."

"Sounds good dude!" Chris plopped onto his bed and opened another can of Bud Light. "See ya tonight!"

*Will you still be hammered when I get back, or actually be coherent enough to get into bed without my help?*

"See ya." Nate closed the door and gagged. How he lived in that room for five months, he didn't have a clue. Nate shouldered his backpack, walked out of the dorm and headed downtown.

It was still freezing outside, but the walk was surprisingly pleasant. Typically, he had to maneuver his way through thousands of tourists and locals, but today the sidewalks and roads were empty. No cars barreling down the street. No one was honking or cursing at the person in front of them. Nate inhaled the smell of rain and smiled. He loved that smell.

As he approached the coffee shop, Nate passed two homeless guys. He fished his wallet out of his pocket, grabbed a couple singles and dropped a dollar into each into their hats. They thanked him graciously and Nate continued his quest to find a quiet spot to study.

The sign for the coffee shop came into view. Soon, he'd be bathing in the warmth of the Speckled Ax with a cup of hot chocolate melting the icicles on his fingertips. Things were beginning to look up, but of course, the universe threw another curveball in the form of a large semi-truck. The truck barreled down the street at top speed, unknowingly driving through a large puddle, completely soaking Nate. A tsunami swamped Nate, drenching his coat, two shirts, pants and new white Nikes. Nate wiped the water out of his eyes and sighed.

*I hate everything.*

Nate sped to the coffee shop and immediately bolted to the bathroom, removing his backpack and the wet clothes clinging to his body. He yanked dozens of paper towels from dispenser and patted down his body. Nate stuffed his clothes into his backpack, while muttering a plethora of curse words and put on the clothes he was hoping to save for the gym later. He left the bathroom wearing a pair of black sweats and a thin polyester shirt with the Detroit Lions logo displayed proudly on the front. Nate spotted a small wooden table tucked in the corner and immediately took it. Nate unloaded his laptop, notebooks and pencils and settled in.

*Finally! Now I can study for a few hours, head to the gym and I catch the remainder of the Tigers-Red Sox game. We're up two games to one, so we need to win today and tomorrow and we advance to the World Series! I just need a few hours with no distractions, and I'll be-*

Nate's thoughts went blank once she walked in. She casually walked into the coffee shop, but his eyes fell on her immediately and his mouth hit the floor. She was the most beautiful girl he had ever seen. Her golden-brown skin complimented her dirty blonde hair that extended past her hips. She had a long thin red streak of hair, running from her scalp, to her few split ends. Tiny light freckles were sprinkled across her nose, with most hidden behind her glasses. Her misty green eyes fell on him and stunned him. She walked toward him.

*She's looking at me. Holy shit! She's walking this way! Stay calm and play it cool! Don't stare at her you idiot! What part of play it cool did you miss? It's alright you can come back from this! Oh, damn it Nate, what the hell is wrong with you! Stop sweating!*

Nate gulped and looked down at his papers as the girl took a seat at the table across from him. He peered over his laptop, watching as she pulled out her own. She reached into her bag, retrieving a Hydro flask, a stack of thick textbooks with worn yellow pages, and a composition book with hundreds of post-it notes sticking out of its pages. She opened her laptop and began to type.

Nate fiddled with his pencil nervously. He really wanted to say something, but what should he say? He opened his mouth to speak, but it was drier than the Sahara. His eyes shifted to the back of her MacBook completely covered in stickers. He noticed a Beach Boys sticker next to a sticker featuring a woman's silhouette surfing. On the bottom corner was an arrangement of sports teams' stickers. The Minnesota Twins, Vikings and Timberwolves stickers formed a triangle and in the adjacent corner were a variation of Marvel stickers.

As Nate finished scanning her stickers, he looked up to find her staring at him. When their eyes met, a swarm of butterflies fluttered inside his stomach.

*Say something you idiot! And close your mouth!*

Nate tried to speak, but no words escaped his lips. He looked back at his notes and cleared his throat, but when he tried to say something, Nate croaked and further slumped in his chair from embarrassment. Of all days, why did the universe choose today to beat him to a pulp.

*Of course, the universe continues to mock me by having a cute girl sit across from me. Sure, she supports the Twins, but I can look past that. Unless the Tigers advance to the next round and the Twins beat them in the championship, then I'm pissed.*

Nate continued to occasionally glance over his computer, catching her watching him but quickly darting her gaze back to her computer screen.

*Is she looking at me because she likes me, or is she catching me constantly looking at her? Great, she probably thinks I'm a creep. How does one tell a pretty girl, that he was simply admiring her features? Alright yeah, that was creepy.*

Nate pushed his hair back and nervously rubbed the small scar on his chin shaped like a crescent moon. He always rubbed it, like he always did when he was nervous. Nate turned his wrist over and read the small tattoo: Carpe Diem.

“Seize the day,” he whispered. Taking risks was never his strong suit, so he got this tattoo to help him get out of his comfort zone. “Gather ye rosebuds while ye may.”

Nate looked up. The girl slowly met his eyes. “Hi,” he said.

The girl looked up and smiled shyly, revealing two dimples. “Hi.”

*Say something!*

“Sorry, I didn’t mean to interrupt,” Nate croaked. “I just thought I would say hi.”

*That's it? Nice way to introduce yourself.*

“Don’t be sorry,” she said, leaning forward. “I’m glad you did.”

*She's glad I said hi? Is she flirting with me? Should I flirt back?*

“What are you working on?” he asked, trying to read the spines of her textbooks.

“They’re so worn I can’t tell what they say.”

“I know!” she exclaimed. “I tried buying better versions, but the bookstore only had these left! I’m in this English class and we’re focusing on fairy tales, so I’m re-reading *The Wind in the Willows* and *Alice in Wonderland* to get ready for my final on Friday. I’m nowhere near ready for it.”

“I feel you on that one,” Nate said, beginning to relax. “I have my engineering final on Thursday. My team and I had to build this ridiculous hovercraft using Styrofoam and small fans and get it to one side of the table and then back.”

“That sounds fun!”

“We thought so at first, but it’s more aggravating than anything. At this point I don’t even care about the A; I’m just hoping to pass.”

“I’m hoping for the same thing!” She picked up *The Wind in the Willows* and *Alice and Wonderland*. “Can I tell you a secret? I actually haven’t read either of these books. I bought the Disney movies off Amazon and watched them instead.”

“Disney made a *Wind in the Willows* movie?”

“Yeah; it’s called the Adventures of Ichabod and Mr. Toad, but the *Wind in the Willows* part is only about Mr. Toad. Ichabod isn’t in it.”

*What the hell is an Ichabod?*

“What’s an Ichabod?”

“I don’t know; I skipped that part.”

Nate shook his head and laughed. “How do you skip half a movie?”

“If it’s not part of my final, I’m not watching it!” she exclaimed. They laughed and looked away from each other. Nate scrambled his brain, trying to think of another topic to discuss.

“So, what brings you to the Speckled Ax?”

“I just needed a quiet place to study,” she said. She pushed her laptop aside. “I tried to find a table at the library, but every table was full. The journalism school has a nice lounge, but there’s a group of students working on a project and they were pretty loud. Plus, my roommate brings her boyfriend over a lot and they claimed that space. I don’t know of any other quiet spot on campus, so my roommate recommended this place!”

“Well I’m glad she did!”

*You, moron. What did you say that for? Now she’s onto us! You idiot!*

“Really?” she asked, her cheeks becoming flushed. “Me too.”

*You genius!*

Nate felt the tension leave his shoulders and his muscles relax. He smiled. “You’re going to think I’m stupid, but journalism is the news, right?”

*Of course, it’s the news!*

She smiled. “Essentially, yes. I wouldn’t mind entering the news world, but I’ve always wanted to be a baseball announcer. I’m a huge Minnesota Twins fan, but if the Milwaukee Brewers offered, I wouldn’t decline.”

*Damn that’s cool.*

“And just when I thought you were cool. The Twins? Do you enjoy putting yourself through 162 games of misery every year?” he teased.

She flicked her hair back, shaking her head and pursing her lips. “Says the one wearing a Tigers shirt! The only worthwhile player on your team is Miguel Cabrera and he’s five years past his prime! I will say you guys have the strongest team in the American League Central though.”

Nate was taken aback, confused by her statement. “I’m pretty sure we’ve been at the bottom of the central for three years straight. We barely won the wild card this year.”

“Exactly! Do you know how strong you have to be to hold four teams above you for three straight years? You’re the Atlas of the American League Central!”

Nate chuckled.

*Alright, that was funny. Wait. Was that flirting or playful banter? How is it that we’ve gone through four years of high school and a year of college and we still can’t figure out if a girl is flirting with us?*

“I’m not sure why I’m laughing at that!”

“You know its true! But in all honesty, I was sorry to see you guys get swept in World Series a couple years ago. My family and I were hoping you’d beat the Giants.”

“Yeah, my family and I were hoping the same thing, but the Giants were the better team. We’ll get back there this year and take home the trophy.”

“You’re going to have to go through my Twins first!”

“You make it sound like it’s going to be a challenge,” he replied, a little smile curling on the edge of his lips.

“So, he’s cute and funny,” she said. “I know this is asking a lot, but would you mind if a Twins fan joined your table?”

*I'm funny? And cute? And she wants to join us? Oh shit! Alright, don't freak out and for the love of everything that is holy is this world, don't you dare start sweating again! I mean, she has to be flirting! Right? Or is she really nice? Why is this so complicated? Answer her you moron!*

“Of course!” He motioned to the seat across from him. His hands were clammy, and he could feel droplets form on his underarms. Nate gulped and shifted nervously in his seat as she gathered her things and took the seat across from him. She smiled and extended her hand to him.

*Stay calm! Relax, don't overthink.*

“My name is Emily.”

He quickly wiped his hands on his pants, hoping she didn't notice, and shook her hand.

“I'm Nate. It's nice to meet you.”

“You as well.” She spread her materials in front of her. “I'm not sure what to start with first. Do I study for my Journalism Fundamentals final on Friday, or do I finish my major news story that's due next Monday?”

Nate mulled over her dilemma. “How close are you to finishing your news story?”

“It needs to be five pages, and I'm only on the second.”

“I would study for your final then. You'll still have the weekend to finish your news story and the rest of the day Friday to finish it.”

Emily nodded. “That makes sense. I think I'm trying to put off studying. I'm getting senioritis as a freshman.”

“Well, if you don't want to study, you can always talk about me!” Nate exclaimed, a little too cocky.

“Talk about you?”

*What the hell is wrong with you Nate? She wants to sit at your table, and you say let's talk about yourself? No! Get to know her!*

Nate ferociously shook his head. "No! Sorry, I meant to say you can talk *to* me! I misspoke."

Emily smiled. "I actually liked that idea. Tell me about Nate. What's he like?"

*Don't brag.*

Nate blushed and played along. "He's a cool guy! He's a big sports guy excluding soccer. He gets bored while watching that over-sized game of foosball. He loves going to the movies, hiking and he likes the beach as long as he brings a ridiculous amount of sunblock. He tends to turn pink whenever he's in the sun too long or talking to a pretty girl."

Emily raised her eyebrow. "When you're talking to pretty girls?"

Nate nodded. "Yeah. Thankfully his face isn't too pink while he's talking to the pretty girl in front of him."

Emily blushed and brushed her hair behind her ears. "Well I haven't known him for too long, but Nate seems like a cool guy. And he isn't bad to look at either."

*Oh, stop it you.*

Nate smiled and turned away, trying to conceal the pink in his cheeks. "Thanks," he muttered. "You know, I galivanted all across campus, trying to find a quiet spot to study. I tried the library too but I ran into my ex so I got out of there as fast as I could. I tried my dorm, but my roommate was throwing a party and the smell of beer while I study isn't my cup of tea. After striking out twice, I came here hoping it would be quiet enough to do homework, but then you walked in. Suddenly, studying doesn't seem so important anymore."

"It really doesn't," she cooed.

Neither opened their books or laptops for the rest of the night. They talked for hours, without either of them completing a single assignment. The sun was hovering over the shop when their conversation began but was now disappearing behind the mountains to the west. Nate didn't want the conversation to end, hanging onto every word Emily spoke. They discussed their majors and the absurd electives they had to take. Nate had to take Economics 101 while Emily had to take Chemistry 101, but they discovered they would share the same Anthropology 102 class on Tuesdays and Thursdays next semester. Nate went out on a limb and asked if she would want to sit by him. She happily agreed. He glanced every so often at his tattoo, reminding himself to stay confident.

Emily told Nate of her dream to become an announcer for the Twins, so she asked him what his dream was. Nate detailed his desire to use mechanical engineering to become a roller coaster designer.

"I want to build the craziest coaster in the world," he explained. "I want to make ones that make Cedar Point look like a kiddie area!"

"That's cool!"

They changed topics constantly, discussing boring and insomnia inducing professors, cities they've explored, places they hoped to go throughout the world and their odd siblings. Emily's sister was a vegan and yoga enthusiast, while her brother was an outdoorsman with a knack for hunting his own meals. Nate's older brother was fascinated with Serena and Venus Williams and his younger brother was a huge Disney fanatic. Nate detailed his younger brother's walls filled with movie posters ranging from Pirates of the Caribbean to Monsters Inc. and his bookcase filled with history books on Walt Disney and Disneyland.

Throughout their conversation, Nate couldn't wipe the smile off his face. Everything about Emily was perfect. When she talked about her love for baseball, she couldn't suppress her smile and when the conversation meandered to surfing, her eyes sparkled. He could stare into them all day, if she allowed him.

They then exchanged stories about their roommates' lack of personal hygiene (Emily's roommate preferred to never wear deodorant and only wash her hair once a month. Nate trumped Emily by citing Chris's mount of dirty clothes oddly resembling Mt. Kilimanjaro and the pile of food to-go cartons on the floor that almost reached the ceiling.

"Chris hadn't taken the boxes to the trash yet and he realized, if he ate out for the next week or two, he could get it as tall as the ceiling," Nate explained. "I didn't mind at first because it didn't smell, but after a week, I couldn't take it anymore, so I kinda snitched on him."

Emily covered her mouth in shock. "You didn't!"

*Yeah we did!*

Nate nodded proudly. "I did. I told our resident assistant, Addison, about the stack and he stormed down the hall, pounded on our door and told Chris to throw those away immediately!"

"No way! Is he still mad at you?"

"That's the best part! He doesn't have a clue it was me! Addison said he was getting a ton of complaints from our neighbors, saying that could smell it in their rooms!"

"You're kidding!"

"Nope! I've never seen Chris so upset. He was more pissed about throwing away his leaning tower of to-go boxes, than failing his midterm the previous week."

Emily chuckled. "Well he really seems to have his priorities straight."

“For Chris, I think stacking those boxes and achieving the record for most beers drunk in an hour are his only priorities! I’m making him sound like a disgusting slob, but he’s genuinely a nice guy. He’s just missing a couple brain cells.”

“I’m sure he is! A nice guy that is, not a disgusting slob.”

They laughed and Emily looked out the window. Nate stared at the school materials scattered in front of him. He wasn’t sure what time it was, only knowing the sun had disappeared behind the mountains and the stars above were slowly awakening one by one. He didn’t want this conversation to end, but what should he do next? He really wanted to ask her out, but his thoughts wandered to Rachel. They were high school sweethearts and they started dating their sophomore year. They had their first date on All-You-Can-Eat-Pancake-Day and were voted cutest couple their senior year. He smiled, remembering how Rachel was extremely upset at prom because Ben and her best friend, Penelope, won prom king and queen over them. She was the first person he loved, and even though they broke up four months ago, his heart still ached. They vowed to be together forever. That ended of course when he found her in *his* bed with her best friend, Chloe. He thought it was innocent at first, but as he scanned the room, he saw scattered clothes across the room, blankets kicked to the floor and the closing notes to Marvin Gaye’s *Let’s Get it On*, fading in the background.

Nate never felt so betrayed. His friends told him to perk up or go to a frat party and see where things went to get him out of his rut. Others consoled him, but nothing worked. He didn’t want to perk up or go to a party and fool around, he wanted Rachel back, but she clearly didn’t want him. Was he ready to dive into another relationship? He didn’t want to take this girl out, realize he wasn’t ready for another relationship, and break her heart. He knew the scars heartbreak left.

Nate rubbed his tattoo and looked at Emily.

“The stars are beautiful tonight,” she said, gazing through the window.

“They are,” he said, not taking his eyes off her.

Emily smiled and brushed her hair behind her left ear. “Nate, I really want to stay and keep talking to you,” she said, gathering her textbooks. “But it’s late and I need to actual read my books this time or else I might fail.”

Nate abruptly stood, looking defeated. “Of course.” He put his hands in his pockets and rocked back and forth on his heels. “I understand.”

*Ok, this girl is amazing. You were hurt, but that’s in the past. Don’t let Rachel ruin this moment. Ask her out. Ask for her number. Just ask her something before she walks out of this shop and you don’t see her till next semester in class. Be casual and don’t seem too eager.*

“I d-don’t know if you would want too,” Nate said, scratching the back of his head and bracing for the worst. “But I have two tickets to this weekend’s game between the Tigers and the Red Sox. I know you’re not a Red Sox or a Tigers fan, but my dad got them for me as a gift to celebrate the end of the semester and I’d love for you to go with me.”

She looked up and smiled. He stared into those beautiful green eyes. Suddenly, all thoughts of the past were forgotten; all that mattered was her.

“I’d love too!” she exclaimed.

“Great!” he beamed.

*Way to be subtle.*

“If you want, I can walk you to your dorm,” he continued. “I should probably get back and make sure Chris hasn’t passed out in the shower again.”

Emily smiled. “I’d like that.”

Nate smiled from ear to ear. He gathered his things, crammed them into his backpack beside his wet clothes and accompanied Emily back to campus. The pain of the past left him scarred, but he hadn't felt this way in a long time. He walked on air beside her and couldn't remember a time he felt this happy. Although he was apprehensive to jump into another relationship, something told him he needed to take this leap of faith. He needed to gather his rosebuds while ye may and seize this day.