

## Strawberry Blonde

Her name was Elizabeth Greene, and she always sat in the same seat. Strawberry blonde curls cascaded down her pale face. She wore a t-shirt with some band name I couldn't read, blue jeans pockmarked with holes, and a pair of cream colored sneakers. Her sneakers were scuffed and dirty, but it was almost like that was on purpose. A stack of textbooks towered next to her small frame while she poured over another one on the table in front of her. She came to the library every day to read. About what I didn't know, but sure as the sun rises, she was in that library every day.

Mrs. Roberts, the librarian, had asked me to help her with some sorting weeks ago. She looked like she was nearly seventy and wore her snow-white hair in a ponytail. A thin gold chain connecting her glasses to her person swayed while she spoke. I had always seen her shuffling around with large books in her arms, sorting them here and there. I had been in the library for a while already and had nothing else to do, so I obliged. That was the day I saw Elizabeth. Something about her made me want to see her again. I had gone back to the library at the same time the next day with the excuse that I'd like to help Mrs. Roberts once more. Excited that I seemed to have an interest in the library, the kind old woman made me her official assistant outside of my class hours. While I surely had no particular interest in the position offered by the college library, I agreed after I saw the small blonde woman was there again, buried in another book with a concentrated look on her face.

She seldom glanced up from her book while I sat back lazily in a wooden chair, precariously leaning on two legs. I watched from across the large array of tables and over the heads of a few other students skimming books and notes in preparation for midterms. Frankly I

was supposed to be studying too, but I didn't usually have to worry about grades; most things came naturally. In fact, I never really understood why people stressed so much about their education. Realistically, I wasn't going to need to know complex trigonometry in the real world, was I? I was sure I would just look up the answers to most problems I might be presented with. After all, it was the twenty-first century. The thought drew me to another idea. Why did Elizabeth read so much? What career path was she following that made her so inclined to stare holes into these stacks of paper. What information could possibly be so important that she felt the urge to sit here for hours? Maybe I could work up the nerve to ask her...

Something stirring in my peripheral vision drew my attention away from my thoughts. I glanced around.

"Ahem..."

There she stood. The first thing I noticed was that she wasn't as short as I thought she was. I didn't know for sure, as I was still leaning back in a thick wooden library chair. But other things about her started to come into focus. She was certainly pale, but freckles dotted her face. And although she *was* blonde, there was a hint of red when the sun's rays shot through the window, reflecting off of her like a solar panel. She was incredibly bright, and only became brighter when she flashed a blinding smile at me. She leaned in and whispered:

"Pardon me..."

I only then noticed her motioning to the shelf behind me with a small book in her hand. I almost fell out of the chair. How long had I been staring at her? Standing up quickly, I noticed I

*was* a little taller than her. Her mouth made a tight pleased smirk as she slipped the book onto the shelf, like she had caught me in some act.

“You're Eric, right?”

How did she know my name? I nodded. She breathed a little puff of air through her nose as she revealed her bright teeth again. Not quite a chuckle, but she was amused by something. Maybe it was me. Just then I started to feel really self-conscious. I rubbed my hands together nervously.

“I'm Elizabeth, I think we met last year in Professor Corde's class?” She said it like it was a question. Surely, I would have remembered meeting someone like her. I nodded. “I guess I'll see you around then.” she said quietly before striding away.

Gathering my bearings, I managed to get one word out.

“Cool.”

Cool? I mentally face-palmed myself. I'd have to remember to work on my people skills. She giggled. “You should give that book a read,” she said motioning to the one she had just returned to the shelf, “it's pretty good.” She kept her smile as she turned and walked down the aisle of books.

I wondered what she was reading. I turned to where she had placed the textbook on the shelf. As strange as it was, I noticed she had placed it between two different books that looked nothing like this one, and backwards at that. I also noticed that it definitely wasn't a textbook. Maybe I had spent a little too much time in the library. I was starting to think like a librarian.

Carefully tugging on the sleeve, I pulled out the book and read the cover. It read 'Pride and Prejudice' by Jane Austen. Curious, I opened the front cover. Something slipped out of the book and floated to the floor before I could catch it. I reached down and picked up the slip of paper. On it were ten single digit numbers. Something outside of my vision moved. With the same feeling as before, I looked quickly. I only caught a glimpse, but it was that same flash of strawberry blonde.