

Excerpt from Breaking The Cycle  
Written by Rachel Ruttenberg

On what seems to be a very an ordinary Tuesday evening the sweet hum of the espresso machine fills Jack's ears. Steaming coffee insulates the shop with a certain aroma and warmth that keeps the customers cycling in again and again. Like Corrine. There she sits all nuzzled up in the corner booth. Her golden, blond hair reflecting the window light as it squeezes through the cracked blinds. Her tortoise glasses sliding down her nose every few minutes. Jack can't help but watch her work every day as he brews shots of espresso and steam pitchers of milk. He finds himself peaking over the top of the espresso machine just to be amazed at her in her creative process. She's a wonderful screenwriter, Jack truly is in awe of her creativity and work ethic. But nothing ever manages to get sold. It's such a crazy, competitive market. Every day or so Jack finds her stopping by on her way to work for a morning snack. Then she finds her way back to the shop on her way home. She usually writes here until the shop closes. Then they start they're favorite activity of the day, their walk home together.

Today Corrine ordered a honey vanilla latte. Jack always tries his best to make a design in the foam but some days it goes better than others. A week or so ago his flower turned out a little bit more like a worm with a hernia. She also ordered an almond croissant that Jack so graciously warmed up for her and she didn't even have to ask. That's just the loving friend he is. And who wouldn't want their pastry warm? Like c'mon now.

Jack steams yet another pitcher of oat milk for the next customer. He eyes Corrine through the crack of the espresso machine and the bean grinder. She looks up, gives him a wave to come over. He nods. Little does he realize this milk has been steaming for far too long and has

almost overflowed. Jack quickly turns the steamer off and puts the hot pitcher down. He finishes the latte and as he walks it out to the customer, he just keeps going over to the corner booth.

“Okay so this is what I was thinking,” Corrine starts saying, pointing to her script.

“Mhm,” Jack adds.

“The mom, Anita, trusts Carla like her own daughter and still is close with her even though Carla and Alex, Anita’s son, broke up years ago and Alex hasn’t been home from New York in over 10 years and returns to help free his father from prison! Huh? How about that for a crazy family dynamic?”

“Oh, now that’s dynamic!” Jack replies.

“Jack c’mon, I’m serious,” she says with a smile.

“So am I. Sounds like good family conflict to me.”

Corrine stares at her computer, deep in thought. She must be so tired writing and rewriting every day after her time at the office. Jack stares at Corrine, thinking to himself.

“How’s work going?” Corrine inquires.

“Same stuff different day but honestly, it could be worse,” Jack replies. “We’re only open for one more hour so I’ll just have to clean the machine and then we’ll get to leave soon.”

“Yay, I’m starving.”

“I can give you more pastries?”

“I wish but if I eat another one I might just hurl. They’re good but I’ve already had 3 today if you count this morning,” Corrine declines.

“Suit yourself Miss Starving,” Jack says while heading back behind the counter.

Corrine smiles as she heads back to revising her script. Jack blushes. As much as they are just friends, he wishes so much they weren’t. He’s so proud of her. They get along so well and

tell each other everything. They trust each other, something neither of them have good luck doing with other people.

As the night at the coffee shop comes to a close Corrine and Jack are the only ones left in the shop. Jack slowly starts to do all the typical closing procedures. Cleaning, mopping, putting food away, and of course dishes. Jack hates dishes. The thought of drowning himself in dirty dish water makes him want to gag. Corrine still sits in the corner, longingly awaiting their exit. She lays on the bench of the corner booth, the smooth leather brushing up against her cheek, frizzing her hair. Luckily, she has a hat for the cold to cover her messed up curls.

Jack comes out from the kitchen, wearing a rubber apron, goggles, and rubber gloves.

“What in the world are you wearing?” Corrine shouts in between her laughs.

“it’s not funny, okay? You know I can’t stand the dishes,” Jack yells back.

The two can’t stop smiling as they both know it’s obnoxious. Corrine rises from the corner booth and makes her way back into the kitchen.

“Move over,” she says as she motions him to step away from the sink.

“What are you doing? You don’t have to—”

“I know I don’t have to, I want to,” she replies. “And besides it pains me to see you go through so much trouble to just wash some coffee mugs and plates with crumbs on them.”

“Okay but doesn’t it gross you out to think your touching like hundred people’s saliva?”

She whips her head back to Jack. “I didn’t need that picture in my head.” She turns back to the sink and looks down with disgust where she now holds 2 wet coffee mugs. “And now the picture’s on my hands.” Corrine mentally clears her head and goes back to washing the dishes.

“Just finish up the espresso machine so we can head out?”

“Sounds good, thank you,” Jack says with a gracious smile.

The dark coffee shop rests with the sweet melody of the kitchen faucet and scrubbing brushes paired with the harmony of the low-pitched hum of the espresso machine. Soon the sounds turn to silence and Corrine and Jack are heading out the door for their walk home. The streetlights illuminate the dark city roads like fireflies in summer. The snow gently falls and starts to collect on the knit fabric of Corrine's winter hat. Jack locks the shop and makes his way over to the side of Corrine closest to the street. They begin walking.

"It's about time we got out of there," Corrine says.

"Here I grabbed you these on my way out," Jack replies as he hands her a to go box filled with pastries.

She opens it. "Jack, you didn't have to."

"I know, I wanted to. Save them for breakfast tomorrow. It'll save you a trip to the shop in the morning before work. Should get you about 20 minutes of extra sleep."

"I really do appreciate you, even when I give you a hard time," Corrine explains as she puts on her gloves. "Thank you," she says with a smile.