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The One That Got Away:

Richie couldn't believe that one simple sentence would shatter the future he had planned. He didn't want to wait another second on his knee. He got up, shut the box in his hand, hiding away the beautiful diamond he spent hours choosing.

The box fidgeted in his hand as Richie paced back and forth. He couldn't form the words in his mouth, unable to speak without gasping for air.

"It's okay Richie, just breathe," his beloved whispered from the booth. That made him freeze. Why was she comforting him when he should be the one comforting her? He walked up to the booth, trying to sit next to his beloved but he couldn't ignore the growing rage in his heart.

It wasn't fair.

He looked at his beloved, his shaking hand slowly grasping hers. With one squeeze, he whispered, "I'm sorry." But she only nodded her head— she already knew how he was going to react, she couldn't blame Richie.

He didn't think he could handle another moment looking at her without feeling his heart squeeze against his chest. He got up quickly, leaving his beloved in the booth alone. He felt horrible for doing that, but if he had stayed, he feared he would have done something worse.

He had been let down a few too many times in his life. But never by his beloved. With her— he felt as if he was chosen for the first time in his life.

Richie spent most of his life thinking he would be difficult to love— Autism wasn't something he had a choice in. Not many people have the patience to spend the day with him. Not many people had the patience to deal with his fidgeting and consistent need to follow a routine. Not many people understood him the way his beloved did.

Stepping out of the restaurant, he walked across the boardwalk, to the beach ahead. He had hoped that the sound of the shore would calm him down, he had hoped it would distract him from the sudden news.

He pulled out a cigar and a lighter from his pocket. But his hands were too shaky, struggling to keep still long enough to light the cigar. The first flick was a fail, the second was a fail, the third and fourth were too until finally he succeeded.

He brought the cigar to his lips, taking in a deep breath to burn away his heartache. He looked ahead on the shore, and its roaring waves seemed to quiet down the rest of the world for just a second.

He didn't choose to be autistic. No one does... but he did try to be normal. He tried to follow the ways of regular people— but it only made him realize he would never be just a regular person, no matter how hard he tried. It was his beloved who made him realize he didn't have to try so hard to be *normal*. She chose him when people failed to understand him.

She never rushed him when his words got stuck in his throat. She didn't treat him as someone who needed to be pampered, but challenged him to embrace change, even if he didn't like change. And now fate was taking her away.

He brought the cigar to his lips again, taking another deep breath. He looked up at the night sky. The stars seemed to be sparkling brighter than they ever had. Dark clouds moved along with the wind, allowing the crescent moon to appear in the dark sky for just a minute.

All he had in his life was an aging grandmother and his beloved. But his beloved could no longer be in his life. He was rejected by his mother and by his father. He heard the story from his grandmother– *they thought a child would fix their marriage*. But he happened, and it only separated them.

He remembered the day his father left, without a goodbye... and he remembered the day his mother left, with a last look of disappointment.

He brought the cigar once again to his lips, taking in a deep breath hoping this time, it would just burn him as a whole.

Sounds of heavy puffing started to get louder behind him. Turning around, back to the direction of the boardwalk, his beloved stood a few feet away from him. Arms bare and exposed to the cold air of the winter night. Her face fluttered with tears. Small hiccups escaped her mouth as she caught her breath.

Her face broke as she went down on her knees. Richie couldn't stop himself from taking her into his arms, shielding her from the freezing wind. He didn't care about the sudden news she shared with him, he just knew that he would be there, like how she was there for him. He would choose her in every lifetime.

He spoke a few words before he choked in his own tears, "It's not fair."

She chuckled as she leaned into his arms, burying herself in his warm embrace that made her feel safe. She never saw Richie as a burden but as her beloved, and she knew Richie would never see her as a burden either. Looking up at his blue eyes, she smiled as she said, "Cancer is never fair Richie."