

Final Project: Reader Magnet
Romance Writing
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Harmony Harper's Bucket List

"You want me to *what*?" I said.

"Help me crash a wedding," Harmony said casually.

"Who's wedding?"

"Dunno."

"Why?"

"Saw a movie about it. Looks like fun." I think I had seen that movie too. I guess I couldn't blame her. Owen Wilson did make it seem like a good time. Still, this whole arrangement we had was seriously getting out of hand. It had been a couple of weeks since Harmony came to me with her *big plan*, and even within one day I was already regretting signing on to the project.

Harmony Harper wasn't unfamiliar to me. She was one of the few people to transfer way back in seventh grade. Her bright pink ends, the bulky headphones she wore around her neck, and the yellow vest she was never seen without always made her stand out from the crowd. Still, in the four years she had been here, I had never actually spoken to her. I'd say it's because neither of our friend groups overlapped, but I didn't even know who she was friends with. She always seemed to be off doing her own thing, whether it was talking to stray cats, blasting foreign rock music without headphones on the walk to school, or turning what looked like her graded tests into origami. Honestly, she was just weird. So when my homeroom door opened with a *BANG*

one morning and she stood, casually eyeing the classroom as we all sat in confusion, waiting for someone to say something, forgive me if I was a little offput.

“Yo, is Nash in here?” she asked. Why she was asking for,

“...Me?” I had no idea. In what felt like a flash, she walked over to where I was sitting, grabbed me by the hand, and dragged me out of my chair. I could hear my classmates gossip and my Miss Elena telling us to come back as we left the room. I was honestly just so taken aback that it took me a moment to snap back to reality.

“Hey, wait, what the hell?!” I yelled. She just kept walking, not even looking back. Her grip was a lot stronger than I thought. It felt like if I tried to break free, I might accidentally snap something. Suddenly, she stopped, looked around the empty hallway, and kicked open the door to the barren auditorium. Once we got in, she locked the door, and suddenly I got way too many uncomfortable flashbacks to way too many bad porn setups.

“Okay, what the hell is going on?!” I yelled.

“Shut up. Keep the volume to a minimum, will ya?” She asked as she handed me a stack of cash. I sifted through the money and realized these weren’t ones or tens, these were hundreds!

“What the- Why do you even have this kind of money on you?!” I asked.

“I mean, it's not like I need it anymore. Geez, you people will go crazy for this stuff,” she said. “If I let you hold onto it will you be quiet?”

“You people?!” I couldn’t believe this. Not only was she insane, but she was racist, too? Granted, North Korea had been giving Asian-Americans a bad rep as of late, but it’s not like I had any say in that. “Care to explain what you mean by that?” I asked, agitated by everything that had just transpired.

“Humans,” she responded.

“...What?”

“I’m an alien.” It was too early for this shit.

“...Right,” I said.

“Believe me if you want. Doesn’t really matter to me.”

“So, Miss Alien, you still haven’t answered any of my questions,” I said, still annoyed.

“For starters, why did you drag me here?”

“Because I need your help,” she said as she slumped down, her arms spread on the backs of the auditorium chairs. “I’m here on a foreign exchange program and my time’s almost up.”

“Foreign exchange programs usually last a semester, not four years,” I said.

“They do on my planet,” she responded.

“And exchange means another student gets sent to your school also.”

“Not on my planet.”

“Are you going to use this ‘alien-thing’ as an excuse to answer all my questions?”

“Why not? You haven’t walked away yet,” she said. I guess I couldn’t deny that. On one hand, I wanted answers. On the other hand, it was either this or go back to talking about nothing with Aiden and Ben while we waited for first period English.

“You know, this is so insane you probably could’ve just told me this in front of everyone and it wouldn’t have made a difference,” I said.

“Well, that was the plan originally, but then I watched *Men in Black* last night, and it freaked me out a little bit,” she said. “I’m not trying to get found out by some secret government agent lurking in the class.”

“Harmony, that movie isn’t real,” I told her bluntly.

“It’s not?!” she exclaimed. “Damn, I knew that Will Smith guy was too cool to be real.”

“What? No, Will Smith is real, the movie’s just-” I stopped because I was not in the mood to have this conversation. “So what do you want me for?” I asked.

“You’re gonna help me live,” she said. “I’ve got one week left here on Planet Earth, and you’re gonna help me finish my bucket list.”

“And you need me specifically to do this because...”

“Because I’ve been here for four years and haven’t gotten a lot done, but you’re the only one in this boring-ass school who’s lived here your entire life. If anyone’s likely to know this town like the back of their hand, it’s you.” For such an insane set-up, her logic wasn’t too farfetched. On the other hand...

“Yeah, I’ll pass. Have fun in space,” I said as I started to walk away. As I was leaving, I heard the rustling of paper in Harmony’s bag.

“This town can burn in hell for all I care,” I heard her say. Those words stopped me dead in my tracks, creating knots in my stomach.

“...What did you just say?”

“The thought of having to spend one more year with fuck-ass Aiden and Ben makes me want to kill myself.” I turned around, and sure enough, Harmony was reading out of a dark-green journal. Specifically, my journal.

“Where did you get that?”

“And if I have to listen to Miss Elena vent about her love life one more time, I might burn this place to the ground myself.”

“I said, where the fuck did you get that?!”

“Gee, it sure would be a shame if I had made enough copies of your lame writing to give out to the whole school,” she said, looking at me while shaking her bag as the sound of paper shifted around inside. She then resumed reading. “But more than anything, I hope my mom-”

“All right, fine! I’ll help you out!” I yelled. She shut the book, got out of her chair, and walked towards the door before stopping behind me. “Meet me after school by that weird-looking tree,” she said before leaving. That was the day I decided to start using my phone for journaling.

“So, this is where *The Wedding Singer* was filmed?” Harmony said as we stood outside the Ridgeveil hotel.

“Not to my knowledge, no,” I responded. I was wearing a dusty black suit I had found in my mom's closet, and felt confident I could blend in. Harmony, on the other hand, would be a bit more trouble.

“No offense, but was the eye-bleeding red dress really the best idea?” I asked.

“Why?” she asked in response. “Do I not look good?”

“I mean, the idea is to not get caught,” I said, trying not to answer her question. Even I can admit she did actually look pretty. The shade of red complemented her pink hair well, and though the frilly hemline was certainly different from her usual silhouette, I can’t say it didn’t give her an interesting look.

The two of us walked through the hotel lobby and eventually found the ballroom. Judging from the vibrations of music coming from the other side of the door, I assumed the reception was already well underway. Sure enough, we were greeted to a raging party. I’d say the ages of the guests were pretty evenly split between elderly relatives sitting lethargically at the tables and

drunk adults in their mid-20s grinding up against each other on the dance floor. I didn't think I'd be able to walk anywhere without stepping in a puddle of spilled wine. It was like God came down from the heavens to spite me, not just with the idea that he was real, but also by putting me in a room full of all the most annoying people I could think of, while a playlist I had heard at way too many school dances rang in my ears. A man can only listen to *Cotton Eye Joe* so many times before he snaps.

“So, what do we need to do to make this a successfully crashed wedding?” I said. For once, I heard nothing from Harmony. It was strange. She was always raring to go for whatever adventure she had planned, whether it be crazy, mundane, or borderline illegal, so having to wait for her to take the initiative felt off. I looked over to her and saw her entranced by the scene. It was like she had never seen a party, let alone a wedding before. Actually, judging by her supposed history and lack of a social life, that might actually be accurate. How anyone could find fascination in something so obnoxious was beyond me. I snapped my fingers in her ear to get her attention.

“What?” She said as she snapped out of her trance. “Oh, right! First off, we gotta blend in. That means we gotta get drunk off our asses.”

Step 1: Get Drunk Off Our Asses.

“How exactly do you expect us to get away with this?” I asked as we made our way over to the bar area.

“Relax. I made sure to bring a fake ID,” Harmony said with a sly confidence. Once we got to the bar, Harmony casually leaned on the counter.

“Two margaritas,” she said to the bartender, trying to sound as smooth as possible.

“Gonna need to see some identification,” the bartender said, suspiciously eyeing the two of us. With that, Harmony slowly slid a fake ID over the counter with two fingers. I couldn’t see the photo clearly, but I could tell it was inaccurate. The person on the ID had short, black hair and glasses, and was clearly a man. From the angle I was standing at it actually looked like McLovin’s fake ID from *Superbad*. Then I looked a little closer and realised it *was* McLovin’s fake ID from *Superbad*, rainbow pattern and everything. I had never openly face-palmed myself before, but it seemed like today was going to be filled with many *firsts*, so I might as well get started.

After the bartender turned us away and I realized I’d have to listen to *Hit the Quan* sober, we wandered the reception a little more.

“I don’t care if you’re an alien,” I told Harmony. “In what way did you think that would work?”

“It seemed like it worked in *Superbad*,” she said.

“Harmony, have you ever actually *watched* that movie?”

“I stopped after they got the fake ID. That shit was too funny.”

“For an alien, you seem to know a lot about movies.”

“It’s the easiest way for me to learn about Earth customs.” I mean, I didn’t like talking to people either, but something told me that 2000s comedies were warping Harmony’s perception of reality more than her interstellar delusions. “Well, I’m not letting that setback stop us. Next up, hitting on sad women!” Harmony said.

Step 2: Hitting On Sad Women.

“No,” I told her bluntly.

“Come on! That’s the whole point of crashing a wedding! We gotta find someone depressed that she just watched her friend get married and try our luck!”

“I’m... not really the flirting type,” I said. “Besides, we’re high schoolers, and not even the kind that look old enough for pedophiles to say ‘officer, I swear they looked 18’.”

“What’s a pedophile?” she asked. Damn it.

“Don’t worry about it,” I said, trying to change the subject as fast as possible.

“Well, whatever,” Harmony said. “I’m sure there’s someone here around our age.” She looked around the reception, scouting out every table, crowd, and clique, until finally, she found someone.

“There!” she said, pointing to a short girl in an autumn-colored dress with auburn hair. She must have been around our age, maybe a year younger. She looked incredibly anxious as she aimlessly wandered the dance floor, stumbling through people and apologizing repeatedly, not that anyone responded.

“Maybe we should leave her be,” I said. “She looks like she has her own thing going on-”

“No way!” Harmony yelled as she grabbed my wrist and dragged me to not only my doom, but this girl’s as well.

“Hey, girl! My name’s coffee! You smell like Harmony!” Harmony exclaimed with complete confidence. The girl turned around, but I don’t think she heard Harmony’s flubbed attempt at a pick-up line.

“Excuse me,” the girl said. “Have either of you seen Claire? I’ve been looking for a while, but I can’t find her.”

“Who’s Claire?” I asked

“Uh... the bride?” she responded. Crap! How is it that I was the one to slip up first?

“Wait!” Harmony said. “So you’re telling me the bride has gone missing the day of her wedding?”

“Well, maybe not missing,” the girl said. Harmony looked back at me and gave me a thumbs-up.

“Looks like we’ve got a runaway bride,” Harmony said, her face lit up with excitement.

“Don’t look so happy saying that,” I said.

“Don’t you see? We help find the bride, and we’ll go from wedding crashers to wedding saviors!”

“You two are wedding crashers?” the auburn girl said.

“Come on!” Harmony said, dragging us both by the wrist.

The three of us walked through the hotel, searching for our runaway bride. The lobby was mostly empty, not because of the wedding, but because who would be taking a vacation here? It at least narrowed our search down a little bit.

“I hope she’s still here,” the girl said. I could recognize the anxiety in her voice.

“So, what’s your name?” I asked. I then realized I may have blown our cover again with that question. I could feel Harmony’s glare piercing my soul, as if to say, 'You fucking hypocrite.' I tried to pivot. “I mean, we’re distant cousins of the groom, so I don’t think we’ve met.” That actually seemed to get a small laugh out of the girl.

“It’s Wendy,” she said. “And don’t worry, you’re not the first people to try and crash the wedding. I don’t even know how I’m related to most of the people here.”

“That’s a relief,” I said with a sigh. “Sorry about this. My associate dragged me here for reasons I’ll never understand,” I said as I gestured to Harmony.

“Harmony Harper: space exchange student,” Harmony said, offering her hand out for a handshake. I guess she wasn’t afraid of Will Smith anymore. Still, Wendy seemed to find that amusing.

“Nice to meet you, Harmony,” Wendy said, shaking her hand. “And you are?” she said, turning to me.

“Nash,” I said.

“Good to meet you, Nash,” Wendy said. “You know, it’s actually nice to see someone around my age here. It’s a little hard to talk to most of my sister’s friends, let alone my brother-in-law’s.”

“I can imagine,” I said. “Plus, I doubt getting dragged all the way out here is the best way to spend your weekend.”

“Holding the wedding here was actually my sister’s idea.”

“Wait, really?”

“Yeah. We’ve lived here for most of our lives. I think she wanted to say goodbye to everyone before she left to live with her husband.”

“All those people live in Ridgeveil?”

“Well, maybe not all of them, but the most important ones do.”

“...Huh,” whoever Claire was, she had to be a total social butterfly.

“Well, I’m sure she’ll at least be happy to live somewhere with better reception,” I said, trying to break my own self-inflicted tension.

“Yeah,” Wendy said, giggling. “Maybe I’ll have to move in with her, too.” As the two of us shared a small laugh, I couldn’t help but notice she was actually kind of cute. However, the minute that thought came into my mind, I felt a malicious intent behind me. They say that if

someone's desire to kill is strong enough, that presence can be felt. At the time, I didn't know what it could be, but looking back, it was pretty obvious. Suddenly, Harmony gripped both of our shoulders and looked at me with an aggressive smile.

"If you have time to chat, you have time to look," she said. That day, I think I stared into the face of death.

As we continued to walk through the hotel hallways, I started to hear something: a voice. It almost sounded like someone gasping for air. I followed the trail, and there it was: the door to the supply closet. Coming from the other side was the sound of deranged sobbing. If that wasn't a bride regretting her life's choices, I don't know what was. Clearly, Wendy had made the same assumption I had, as she immediately knocked on the door.

"Claire, is that you in there?" she said. Suddenly, the crying was halted by a series of gasps and sniffles.

"...no," the voice said guiltily.

"Can I open the door?" Wendy obviously wasn't gullible.

"...okay." The door slowly opened to reveal what would have otherwise been the most gorgeous woman I had ever seen. She looked to be in her mid-late 20s, with hair like her sisters, and an elegant, flowing wedding dress. Sadly, her beauty was a bit hard to notice by the fact that she was lying in the fetal position on an incredibly dirty floor. Her face was red, and her eyes were redder. I always thought that tears causing someone's eyeliner to leak down their face was just a bit you see in comedies, but now I have all the evidence to know how accurate that trope was. Wendy slowly approached the human mess, knelt down by her, and placed her head in her lap, slowly stroking her hair. If it weren't for the obvious age difference, I could have easily assumed Wendy was the older sister, or hell, even her mother.

“What’s wrong?” Wendy asked.

“I think... I think I’ve made a mistake,” Claire said, her voice struggling to pick a clear emotion. You could almost hear the lump in her throat.

“But why?” Wendy said. “You love Marco.”

“I know, it’s just...” Claire hesitated. “I don’t think I’m ready for this.” A little late to be realizing that, but okay.

“No, no, I know you are,” Wendy said softly.

“No, I’m not! I’m such a fucking wreck! Look at me! He’s gonna realize how annoying I am and then he’ll stop loving me and leave me and take the kids-”

“You don’t... You don’t have kids.”

“See?! This is what I mean! I’m delusional!” She wasn’t wrong. Not only was she delusional, but everything she said rang eerily familiar. As I continued to listen to her rant, both sisters were too concerned to ask either Harmony or me to leave and give them space. All I could think about was how everything Claire had just said was something I saw happen to my own mother. She poured her heart out to Evelyn, but a year of attention is enough to make anyone sick of you, let alone ten (plus child).

As I continued to think about that piece of shit Evelyn, Harmony walked closer to them. This whole time, we had just been standing awkwardly outside the closet, trying not to interfere with the sisters' therapy session, but still staying to watch. It was like a car crash. We couldn’t take our eyes off it. By the time I had realised what was happening, that being, “*Oh crap, Harmony is about to try and console someone. I need to stop her,*” it was already too late.

However, instead of saying, or doing something absolutely deranged like she usually would, Harmony knelt in front of the two of them, placed her hands on Claire's shoulders, closed her eyes, and took a deep breath.

"...Your color is yellow," Harmony said. Her voice was softer than usual.

"...Who are you?" said Claire.

"The color of your aura. It's yellow. Pure yellow. It's a nice color. It says you're as bright as the sun, always ready to face the next day with a smile. You're energetic, excitable, and full of childlike joy."

"Um... thanks," Claire said, confused, if not a little flattered.

"Yellow also means danger," Harmony said.

"Excuse me?"

"You feel yellow a lot. Both sides. You keep your guard up a lot, so when somebody is able to see you happy, it scares you. You see both kinds of yellow in not just everyone around you, but yourself too."

"I'm just... terrified. What if he sees the... *other* yellow?" Claire said, about to burst back into a sobbing wreck.

"Because, they're both still *you*," Harmony suddenly took her hands off and stood back up. "If he's decided to marry you, it means he's willing to see any color," In this world, there are some things that feel like once in a lifetime opportunities. At the time, I thought Harmony showing sympathy for someone was one of them. Even if I didn't agree with what she was saying, I could tell it meant a lot to Claire. "Besides, if he ever goes colorblind, I can always beat the crap out of him for ya."

“You don’t... have to do that,” Claire said. Thank god Wendy seemed not to have taken her seriously, as that actually got a chuckle out of her. “Wait, how do you know Marco?”

“Aaaaaand that’s definitely more than three-strikes,” Harmony said to me. “I think our cover’s definitely blown. Wanna raid the buffet and get out?”

“Uhhhhh...” I said, still unsure of what had actually just happened. “Works for me, I guess.” As the two of us left, I could hear Wendy and Claire talking.

“Are they your friends?” Claire asked.

“Something like that,” Wendy responded. “Actually, I think they also-” At the time, I didn’t get to hear that last part. Looking back, Wendy had probably realized she recognized us from school. Doing *Wedding Crashers* may have been a bust, but I am glad I came. For one, if I hadn’t gone, I would have never met one of my best friends. I also may never have truly met Harmony.

The two of us sat underneath the bus stop as the rain came pouring down. On any other day, I would have been my usual self, but there was too much on my mind to be apathetic.

“Okay, I have, like, a *lot* of questions,” I said bluntly.

“Shoot,” Harmony responded.

“So... what exactly did you *do*, back there?” I asked.

“Just some aura-reading.”

“Which is...”

“Back on my home planet, my people can see the color of identity.”

“...Do I have an aura?”

“Everyone has an aura.”

“What color am I?” Also, why was I believing her?

“Greyscale with a tiny drop of pink.”

“What does that mean?”

“Could mean a lot of things.”

“Very informative.”

“The pink is pretty new, though. I don’t think I saw it yesterday.”

“...Huh. Neat.” We waited in silence a little longer.

“...What’s your color?” I asked.

“Wish I could tell ya,” she said, sounding a little disappointed. “The only colors we can’t see are our own. Though I have always wondered what it would be. Maybe it would make things easier.”

“Easier?”

“... You ever just feel like you don’t know who you are?” *All the time.*

“No, I don’t think so,” I responded.

“Lucky,” Harmony said. There was one more thing I wanted to ask her, but I wasn’t sure if I was ready. Still, I mustered up all the courage I could.

“...That thing you said earlier about marriage and... *being okay with seeing every color...* Do you really believe in that?”

“I mean... I kinda need to,” Harmony responded. I had never heard her sound so hesitant in her own words. “Ya know, I actually have a secret item on my bucket list that I know I won’t be able to check off.”

“Which is?” I asked

“I want to fall in love,” she said. “At least once.”

“I’ll give you a heads up, it’s overrated.”

“Really? I don’t think so.”

“Even though you’ve never been in love?”

“Yeah. If a feeling can be so powerful that it creates something as beautiful as that wedding, then it’s gotta be worth it.”

“You thought that was beautiful? The loud music, drunken antics, and the delusional bride were beautiful to you?”

“Mhm,” she said, not the slightest bit defensive as she looked to the sky. “That’s why I think humans are so beautiful. No matter how confusing or messy they are, they can still come together like that just to love and exist with each other.” Harmony turned to look back at me. Her eyes looked like they had galaxies in them, like she didn’t see the concept of limits. “Don’t you think that’s amazing?” For once in my life, I couldn’t bring myself to say I disagreed with her, even if I still kind of did. Though it’s not like I would ever admit that. Instead, all I could do was stare into her eyes, wondering how someone with that much curiosity could exist.

“Huh,” she said, her smile suddenly shifted to a look of confusion.

“What?” I responded.

“That little pink spot of aura you had.”

“What about it?”

“It just got a little-” before she could finish her thought, the bus pulled up.

“Took them long enough,” I said. “So, what’s on the itinerary for tomorrow?”

“I’m glad you asked,” she said, pulling out her bucket list as we boarded.