

Milo Cruz didn't know Dr. Poe's voice could do that, get higher and go faster. But the professor's rambling discourse on road rage wasn't what had made Milo stop thinking about Olivia. It was the silence that followed. Poe stood frozen before a roomful of listless students. Then, as if nudged by a spirit, he grabbed a notebook and read, "No one ever said it was going to be easy, Claire."

Anyone else wondering what road rage or this *Claire* person had to do with *The Great Gatsby* or *20th Century American Literature*? Milo snuck a few glances before shifting his attention back to Olivia, there on his left, up front, her eyes closed. Was there room for him in her secret place?

Blake Carver, the boyfriend with the big biceps and rattlesnake tattoo, discerned Milo's longing and nailed him with a deadly glare. Milo's response was to stare at Dr. Poe and pretend to be enthralled. Blake wasn't buying it. From the corner of his eye, Milo watched Blake give him the finger and put his hand on Olivia's thigh. She sat like stone, unmoved. Milo almost smiled.

This improbable love triangle might not exist without Ed Poe, who was a mild, boring man, but more notably, a generous grader, though that wasn't why Milo had enrolled in his crowded elective. Olivia Moon was why. Olivia, who in 2021 had made Milo an offer: *So you want to be my boyfriend?* Who twelve years later didn't know Milo from Melo, had no memory of the tongue-tied second grader who couldn't for the life of him summon a *Yes*, or a *No*, or even a *Maybe*.

An abrupt *crash!* revitalized the classroom. Poe's shattered mug, spilled coffee, and notebook lay on the floor between him and his students. "I can't do it anymore," he moaned. Phone cameras followed him as he stumbled toward a window, which refused to open. Amid the confusion, Milo and Olivia's eyes met. Poe located the keypad and pressed the keys that made the window rise.

Milo jumped up and rushed forward as Poe's hands grasped the window sill. "What if you land on someone's head?" was all Milo could think to say. Struck by the unexpected question, Dr. Poe turned, smiled, and collapsed.