



# Thinking of You

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## *Chapter One*

It was almost 2:30 in the morning and Avril was far from sleep, but she hadn't planned on being able to rest, anyway. The arrival to a new place always robbed her of it. Whenever she would reach her current destination, exploring was always the first thing on her list – or rather the second. Most of the time, the first thing was to get high. It never really mattered to her what she took, just whatever she happened to have handy at the time, although she preferred cocaine.

It had been difficult finding a place to park with the tourist season being in full swing, but she finally got a metered space just off the strip. Three uninterrupted hours before she would have to come up with more coins to pay the metal sentry was plenty of time. Enough to satisfy her few needs, which at the moment were topped with the finishing off of an eight ball.

She scraped the fine snow into two white lines and in a split second the mirror was clean. She put her tools away and composed herself before stepping out of the cramped car. Her lungs inflated like virgin balloons with the salty sea air and she closed her gray eyes. The rush to her head consumed her and she set off.

Avril awoke to the taste of sand in her mouth.

“Hey! Watch it!” her shout was lost on the backside of the fast retreating child perpetrator. She shaded her sleepy eyes with one hand and glanced towards the sun. It was probably somewhere around two o'clock in the afternoon. The beach chair held the imprint of her thin frame as though it were the mold she was cast from. Yawning, she looked around. The sand was almost indistinguishable with the onslaught of tourists scurrying about. She wondered why people always seemed to feel the need to cram more into their vacations than possible for enjoyment.

She stretched and reached for the pop that she had propped up in the sand next to her the night before. Thirstier than normal, she gulped it, but spat it out almost as quickly as it had been taken in, except much more violently.

“That’s what happens when sun and soda interact, you know. It has a tendency to get pretty warm.” She shielded her eyes and, squinting, turned to pick out the emitter of the unusually deep voice. “Don’t worry though, common chemistry is easy to forget when no one is testing you on it. Besides, I was just about to go swimming anyway,” the guy next to her said as he wiped her used pop from his stubbly face with a corner of his towel.

“Shit! Did I do that? I’m sorry. I’m not exactly used to this weather yet.” She blushed uncontrollably; a criticism she had about herself that occurred whether she was actually embarrassed or not.

He grinned. “I’m over it. I’ve had worse bodily fluids on me than a bit of your backwash.”

She couldn’t decide if it was his smile that was charming or the good-natured sarcasm that backed it up. And his tanned skin definitely did not house an ounce of scrawniness. She briefly wondered what those muscles would feel like wrapped around her, but she let the thought slip from her mind without looking back, – method of control that she had perfected over time. The flash of his eyes told her what was coming next.

“So, where’re you from?” he pursued, feigning situational boredom.

“Not around here. I’m just passing through.” She got up and started packing her few belongings as she answered. Her tone changed slightly. Impersonal. He got the picture.

“Well, have a good vacation. Not many places are as nice as Virginia Beach is in the summer.” He gestured at the mob around them. “And all these fools know it, too. But who am I to talk? I’m taking up space here just as they are.” He made a point of showing all his teeth this time trying to be casual about the silent hint. A last chance take-it-or-leave-it smile.

Avril put on her sunglasses and picked up the beach chair. “Sayonara. Sorry about the pop.” She grinned and then turned and walked away.

As she made her way to the car, she went over inventory in her head. Last night had been a success as far as getting the essentials done. She had walked the strip in search of only a few things and had easily found them all. First and foremost there had been Ben, her new connection. He was a skinny, shifty looking, twenty-something-year-old with a nose just large enough to draw attention. She had no way of knowing if Ben was his real name, but she didn’t care. This was not someone Avril wanted to get up close and personal with. She had the info that she needed: a pager number that she could reach him at and an idea of what he could get his hands on, which he claimed to be anything her “little heart desired.” She was just glad to have a resource. Other than that, cheap hotels and restaurants with under-priced yet actually edible food seemed to come in an over abundance.

Reaching her car she stashed the chair in the trunk. She had come to the conclusion long ago that compact foldy chairs were one of a drifter's essentials. She popped a couple of vicodin and grabbed her towel before zoning in on what looked to be one of the fancier hotels. She needed to keep up with her hygiene, and there was quite a selection of indoor pools with saunas and showers that were unpatrolled to choose from. She smiled to herself. So many luxuries were free if you just knew what to look for.

The tightly rolled twenty tasted the small pile of white powder only a split second before it coated the inside of Avril's nose.

"Hey! There's a line, you know!" the irritated voice directly followed a loud bang on the door. "Not anymore," Avril thought with a grin, as she took her time cleaning up.

"I'm so sorry! Were you waiting long?" Avril asked sweetly as she closed the stall door behind her. Without waiting for an answer from the drunk and pissed off face that greeted her, Avril made her way towards the sink.

"What the – it's locked! That bitch locked the door behind her!" she heard her opponent inform the short line. "Hey! Get back here! I'm gonna fuck you up, bitch!"

"Cool down, Kim. There are other stalls," the hothead's friend informed her. Avril laughed heartily and let the bathroom door slam behind her. Soon she was lost not only in the crowd, but in the music as well.

Strobe lights in every color of the rainbow flashed epileptic seizure warnings all around her as she made her way past one of the clubs' three bars. The packed dance floor moved as though it was one big mass instead of many smaller ones, the room alive in itself. Rhythm engulfed her throughout. With eyes closed, she let it take her small body over. Arms, legs, hips – they all seemed to take on lives of their own, moving in unison to the beat that swirled around her like a thick fog. She was lost in it in no time, and she never wanted to find her way out. Slowly everything that ever had been or ever would be bad in the world melted away, leaving only the moment in its place. This was her time and she was a goddess.

For what seemed like only minutes dance partners came and went making their rounds across the floor. Both guys and girls took their turns moving with her, and she accepted each of them. She wasn't picky as long as they kept their hands to themselves. Anyone trying to hump her leg was sent away like a queen dismissing a disloyal subject, all while still keeping the beat. Her head swam and she was free. She flowed as though the next day would never come.

"What's your name?" Avril's eyes snapped open to a face that was too much too close for comfort, and she almost fell backwards in surprise. He caught and pulled her back up in one smooth motion. "What's your name?"

He attempted to shout over the music, his breath tickling her inner ear.

“What?” she mouthed the words to emphasize the point, “I can’t hear you!” His facial expression and following wink proved that despite his obvious drunkenness he understood enough to abandon the question.

As they danced, Avril felt herself start drifting back into her trance, but she found that she couldn’t take her eyes off him. He seemed to be different than anyone else she had been with so far that night. He had a style all his own. His presence demanded attention. His green eyes swam under the blacklights – the only things more fluid than his movements. Taking her in, drinking her, he seemed to never break gaze. She felt eerily entranced and yet strangely secure, as though this stranger was protecting her.

Avril was amazed at the way he commanded the space around him. He took up the entire dance floor and none of it all at the same time. With her head still spinning, Avril couldn’t help but let a smile melt across her lips. Almost a combination of straight trance and some sort of ninjitsu, his movements were like nothing she had ever seen before, and if he cared at all about the dirty looks he was getting from all the people he kept bumping into, he didn’t show it. His overflow of confidence shattered the presence of the glares they were getting. And, without realizing it, she moved with him. Entwined together, naturally they worked as one, as though they had been doing this dance all their lives. Soon everyone else disappeared all together. She could feel herself drowning until the only things left were him and the rhythm.

“Last song of the night!” the DJ shouted from his booth shrouded in shadows to the already dispersing dance floor. It took Avril’s eyes a second to adjust to the slowly brightening house lights. She ran her fingers through her long hair that now hung in thick strands twisted with the heat of a hundred bodies in motion. A minute later the music died down and so did her movements. She cringed as she got her first taste of the ache in her legs that she knew would be lingering for at least a day or two, but it was worth it. It was always worth it. She never felt more alive than when she danced.

“So, what’s your name?” he tried again still shouting over the ringing in his ears. Not much taller than she herself was, she could now see clearer they shared the same thin build. He leaned towards her and she could smell the jack and coke on his breath with all the ambiance of the bar.

“Just a tip – when the music is on it is virtually impossible to hear anything else. You should save the conversation for a time when your breath isn’t wasted.” She smiled and started to turn away. “Thanks for a good time!”

“Hey!” he reached out and caught her arm. “So after all that dancing you still won’t tell me who I was dancing with?” he laughed.

“Why do you feel like you need to know?”

“Because you are a great dancer and you have an amazing body.” He

looked at her slyly; just oozing with what she figured he probably thought was charm. Except to her he only looked goofy and she couldn't help but giggle under her breath. She rolled her eyes at the obviousness of the situation.

"Look, you're cute and I had fun, but I'm not looking to start anything right now." She went to head for the door again.

"A-s-s-u-m-e makes and ass out of you and me, you know. I think you're jumping to conclusions. Besides, who says I was trying to start anything beyond friendship?"

"You have an amazing body," she mocked his voice.

"A good impression. Okay, so you got me. I'm probably not hard to see through in this state. But, from now on my intentions will remain decent. Besides, I do feel that compliments should be given when they're due. If you want I can take it back." His smile portrayed every ounce of the confidence that his movements on the dance floor had held. Although he looked young she knew he couldn't be much less than her own twenty-two years, and the paper wristband that he sported confirmed that he was at least twenty-one.

"No, that's okay."

"Hey, are you hungry? We usually go to this twenty-four-hour waffle place that's about a block away. It's not gourmet, but I've definitely had worse." He cut her off before she could try and leave again.

"Who's we?"

"What? Oh, the guys I came here with. I think most of them have gone back to the barracks by now. I know at least Joe has duty tomorrow, but I think Shane is still here somewhere." He started looking around. "Well, he has to be here. I'm his ride."

She briefly considered this new option; she had been planning on getting something to eat anyway. Her stomach growled loudly.

"I think I'll take that as a 'yes'." He grinned. "There's no backing out now!"

"You seem pretty sure of yourself." She toyed with him, mirroring his smile.

"Well, you can't use the excuse that you're not hungry."

"Avril." She held out her hand.

"It's very nice to meet you, Avril. I'm ..."

"Dylan! You coming or what? Let's go!" the rather annoyed deep voice echoed from the exit hall and was quickly followed by large guy packing his cigarettes vehemently. "C'mon man, I'm starving!"

"Avril, Shane. Shane, Avril." Dylan said as he made his way over to his impatient friend.

"Hey-hows-it-goin'." Shane pulled out a smoke and lit it. "Can we eat now?"