

**No Other Smile.** 13 June 2007

I have never seen anything that compares to her smile.

When I saw her, I lifted my right hand into the air and waved. I didn't slow down though. I stood on my pedals, ready to coast down the hill.

But she smiled. And I couldn't help but stop. "Hi," I said as I squeezed the brakes. Black pads, covered in gray dust, touched the rims of my bike, and I set my shoes on the blacktop.

"How are you?" she replied. Her smile, curved at the corners—irresistible. It was like Mr. Barrie described: there was a kiss, hiding at the corner of her smile, taunting.

"I'm good." I smiled back. In spite of my apparent indifference, I was glad to see her. I swung my leg over the bike seat and grabbed the handlebars with one hand. "How's your semester been?" I walked down the hill next to her.

She told me she wasn't studying English anymore. Now it was communications, journalism. I laughed and told her I used to be in communications. I tried to tell her why I didn't like it, but I didn't know how to explain. I stumbled over my words and then told her that I was sure she'd like it. Then I told her that this was my last semester.

The sun was on its way down. We walked toward it, as it dropped behind the apartments, its escape imperceptibly slow, yet far too quick. The air was cooling. A kid rode quietly by us, biking up the hill. I don't remember hearing people around. It was just still. The whole world was still. Except for a slight breeze, smoothing out all rough edges. I was glad to walk next to her. It might have looked like we were together.

Last fall, we had a class together. I think we were pretty good friends. Then she went home. I always wished I had gone out with her. It's not that I never asked. It's probably not that she didn't want to. It just never worked. Nothing ever worked.

"So what are you doing after you graduate?" she asked.

"I'm going to be an exchange student in Chile for a semester—try and learn Spanish." And I'm going down there by myself. All alone.

“That sounds awesome.”

“Yeah, I’m really excited.” That’s what I tell everyone.

“My brother served his mission in Chile.”

“Oh yeah? Which mission?”

She said it was one up north.

You know, I may have been wrong. I think there is something that compares to her smile.

Her eyes.

“I thought you were going to be a teacher,” she said.

“I don’t know what I’m going to do.” I wonder if she could tell I was ashamed. “I’ll probably work for a year—and look into masters programs. So how’s your summer going?”

“It’s been really busy. I do a lot of homework.” She paused. “I’m dating someone.”

I’d known she was dating someone. I saw them together once. He was about my size and build. But he stood much closer to her than I ever had.

“That’s great,” I said, and I smiled. It was a real smile. I was happy for her. She really looked happy, and that made me glad. If anyone deserved to be happy, it was her.

She told me that he was going to meet her parents that weekend. She was nervous about it. I told her I was sure it would go well. How could it not? How could anything defeat that smile?

When we got to her apartment, I stopped and swung my leg back over my bike. “I hope it goes well for you,” I said.

“And I hope you have a good time in Chile.” She waved. “I see you sometimes, up at the Hinckley.” I kinda smiled—not a real smile—but didn’t say anything. “I just thought you might want to know,” she laughed, uncertain. I could tell she regretted saying it: she sees me, but she doesn’t get my attention. “Maybe I’ll see you around,” she said. But it was one of those closing remarks—not an invitation. Not even a perhaps.

“See ya,” I said. She turned and walked away.

I stepped on a pedal and started down the sidewalk. But I didn't sit down. I stayed standing. And I kept pedaling. I pedaled hard, looking straight ahead.

It wasn't just the sun—the sidewalk, the gravel and sand on the pavement, the white line—they were all fading away. I was the only thing that stayed, and I just kept pedaling. Not to somewhere, just away from where I had been.