

# Romona

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I was sitting on a curb on some random city street with 3 duffle bags full of what I believed to be the most important things in my life. In reality, it was all just clothing...some clothing I don't even wear anymore...and a couple of CD's that I considered to be a part of me. You ever have somebody yelling and crying at you while you're trying to pack your belongings? You sorta leave things that you should of packed, and packed things that you should of left. I could tell you in detail what really happened, but there's really no point. I mean...a funeral, a dead sibling, an argument, an exile. That's the short version of it. Now I'm staring up at the huge buildings in the city, watching people rush back and forth and back and forth with purposes...jobs to attend to, homes to go to for the holidays...it was three days before Thanksgiving. I smelt the excitement of Christmas shopping like the smell of cinnamon buns on Christmas morning at my house. And here I was...fucking creep with bags sitting on a curb on 5th avenue. All of a sudden, I saw this tiny bouncy ball slowly come to a crawl at my feet. It was one of those bouny ballsthat are easily lost by children but thankfully only cost 25 cents and are either easily replaceable or easily forgotten...whichever came first. I picked it up and looked around to see where it might have come from. It didnt seem like anybody was going to claim it, so I started to place it in my pocket. I really don't know why I did that...I guess because I used to beg my mom anytime we saw those vending machines with those bouny balls in it for 25 cents...and it seemed like the sorta toy that wouldn't exist anymore today...wouldn't be able to keep kids this age busy for more than 2 minutes. Something like that about it and I wanted it...plus I liked the color...it was cyan. As I was putting it in my pocket though this little girl of about 7 years old came running up to me flailing her arms at me: "What! Do you think you're doing!?" I sort of recoiled and quickly pulled my hand out of my pocket along with the toy. It wasn't that she scared me, if anything her voice was so much like a little kids that I couldn't help but smile slightly to myself. It was just...I didn't expect it I guess. "Oh, umm, hey I'm really sorry. Here." I held out my hand with the ball in my palm for her to take it. She didn't take it right away though. Instead she sorta stared at me with these hard eyes and a pose she clearly learned from one of her parents: arms crossed, hips out. She kinda reminded me of my kid sister (who was now 21) when she used to yell at me for rummaging though her books. "Come on, really I'm sorry, hey here, please take it?" "Not if YOUR fingers are on it now!" She said this so suddenly that it took me by surprise and I couldn't help feeling a little hurt. I felt like a kid who gets picked last in gym class because he smells bad and no one wants to get into a huddle with him. I was

also kinda sad that a kid that young was already worried about germs. Her bright blue eyes must have noticed I felt bad about it, because a second later they softened and as they did she reached out for the ball with a smile on her face. "Thanks" she said like nothing happened. She turned the ball around in her fingers for a while while she stared at me and increasingly made me feel more uncomfortable. She had short tomboyish hair that was black with a hint of red in it. She wore a tiny pink hoodie that didn't seem to be keeping her warm much, jeans, pink converses, and big glasses with black rims. You could tell she dressed herself. She was holding a notebook under one arm which clearly seemed to be some sort of diary or a place to put random thoughts. Get that...a 7 year old with a fucking diary. All of a sudden, she smiled and giggled and sat next to me on the curb. I moved over...it was 2011 and who knows what people think seeing a 23 year old guy talking to a 7 year old girl. It's depressing that that's where people's heads go automatically these days. "Where are your parents?" I asked her quietly without looking at her. I could feel she was looking at me when she answered: "Moms in the Starbucks over there with my little brother getting her double shot of espresso." "And she always trusts you by yourself?" At this question she held her head up high like it was her greatest achievement and said "Yep yep." There was a long pause after this. To be honest, I was starting to feel sorta depressed. "Why do you have all these bags?" she asked looking around at my disaster. Just like a kid-curious as all hell. I answered mainly because I was feeling so damn lonely: "My clothes and stuff..." "Where are you going?" She started to bounce the ball very close to the floor so that it wouldn't get away from her again. "I don't really know" "Watchya mean you don't know? What, did your mommy tell you to leave?" 'Jeez, smart kid,' I thought. I didn't answer her...I just shrugged which I sort of assumed she would take as a yes. The truth was I was beginning to lose interest in the conversation and was playing around in my pocket with my switchblade. My plan was to use it on myself the first chance I got, I just didn't want to do it on the city streets, having all those fucking people staring at my corpse and all, you know? I sorta made up my mind that I wasn't no good for this world and that I wasn't going to amount to no good and that the single best solution would be to leave this world. "My mommy would never throw me out," she said. This made me smile for the first time in what must have been weeks. I thought to myself 'that's because you're 7 years old' but instead I just said: "Well, I hope she wouldn't. What would you do if she did?" "I guess I would go to my grandmas....or maybe my uncle and aunts house...or maybe the playroom in McDonalds." I thought briefly of my dead grandmother and how I couldn't go to her anymore...but then I just said to the girl: "Hey...what's your name?" "Romana...you know like the movie?" "Yeah, I know (truth was I really didn't)." "What's YOUR name?" "I'm Casey" "Casey's a girrrlss name isn't it? Your mommy named you after a girl?" I chuckled... "No it could be both a boy and a girls name" A slight pause at this while she pondered the statement "That's silly." "Yeah....I guess it is. What are you and your mom and brothers plans for the day" "Well...Mommytold us she was going to take us to Rockefellercenter...we're from the Island see and we rarely get to see it even though we live an hour away." She looked sad. You could tell the reason was because her father and mother worked all the time, or perhaps they had a rotten relationship. Either way, it was odd to live so close to the city and never visit it. "Hey" I nudged her with my elbow because the last thing on earth I needed was a sad 7

year old. "You'll love Rockefeller center...it's awesome. You get to watch the people ice skate and hear the christmas music and..." I started to tear up and stopped myself. "It's just great. Have fun there" There was a little pause and then she finally spoke, looking me dead in the eye "Casey, hey, are you okay?" I looked at her. Nobody had asked me that question since my brother passed away from Luekemia 2 months ago. He was my best friend...and no one ever asked me. "Yeah" I said while looking down at my feet. "I'm okay." She took out her notebook and began writing something down. She then tore out the piece of paper and handed it to me and said in her most adult voice: " This is myaddress. You can send me letters and we can talk if you want, you know? Hey?" I took the address with no intentions at that moment to ever really write her a letter. "Okay...I'll do that, thank you" I smiled at her. She smiled back. "Romona!"- her mother was calling from across the street. "I better go" she said jumping up. She looked at me and said "Hey, how are you going to get where you are going. Do you have money? I have some money here if you want it...it's only (she took it out of her pocket and began to count it) 7 dollars but it can get you a meal or something, right? Here, hey, take it," and she waved it in my face. Before I knew what was happening I was crying. I was crying hard...in the middle of the street. She looked terrified. "No, no it's okay. You keep that. Buy yourself something. Thank you though" "Are you sure?" I wiped the tears away "Yeah I'm sure don't worry. Thank you." She put her money in her pocket and smiled at me. "Hey, write me okay? And like daddy always says to me:"cheer up kiddo." And with that she giggled tossed her hair over her shoulder and started skipping back to her mother who was giving her a very scary look. You could tell she was going to get a good talking to for talking to a stranger like that on the city streets. I hope she didn't. I sat on that curb for what must have been 20 minutes more. And then...instead of carrying through with my plan...I just sort of felt like going home. I mean...I justsorta wanted to go home. I actually wrote to Romana for 10 years straight, until I got a call from her motherone day telling me she was in a car accident...paralyzed from the waist down. I remember the second I got that phone call I ran tothe train station and took a trip out to the island. When I got to the hospital I couldn't recognize who she was. I mean the last time Isaw hershe was 7...she was now 17 and looked so much older, and at the same time, more weathered. I didn't want this image toerase the image of her as a 7 year old so I quickly pulled out what I wrote on a piece of paper and left it on her hospital tray. I didn't say a word...she wasn'tconscious. It said: SAVIOR And I imagined what that would be like to wake up after a long sleep and know that somebody thinks that of you. And it made everything seem okay.Despite my losses, and despite hers.Itmade everything seem okay.