



Proudly Presents

FORGIVE AND FORGET

WRITTEN BY BRIDGET GRACE SHEAFF

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I had salmon for dinner last night, pasta the night before that, and on Saturday, June 8th, 1991, I had tacos. And the evening of the 1989 Oscars, Sunday March 26th, I had chicken—*fried* chicken. And cold mashed potatoes. I was seven. I have this, well, thing. I have superior autobiographical memory. It's a real thing. I remember everything. I'm serious—literally everything. I remember every birthday, every first day of school, every anniversary, every lyric to every song written by Hootie and the Blowfish—and everywhere they played. I am capable of remembering everything. This means I am capable of winning every trivia contest, acing every history exam, and you never want to fight with me because I am capable of bringing up events you probably don't even recollect—which my husband has called “cheating” 127 times in our relationship. There is only one thing I am *not* capable of—forgetting.

I hate when people ask me, “Do you remember that one time...?” I just want to shake them by the shoulders and say, “Of course I do! Why would you even *ask*?” But of course, it works the other way, too. I remember what seem like hugely monumental events, and no one else even knows what I am talking about. It is often strange to think about people who don't remember everything. People who are forgetful baffle me. Not forgetful in the way that they misplace their reading glasses, although I would never do that. I'm talking about those who can't remember the details of the past or the feelings of ordinary moments.

Of course, those moments which other people see as remarkable, I usually remember better than they do. Like with my sister, Ellen. I will bring up things about her own life that she doesn't even recall. Or if she does, she remembers them differently. Don't worry. I straighten her out. I remember everything that happened the day after the Berlin Wall was torn down—November 10th, 1989. I was in fourth-grade then. Ella, who would have been in seventh-grade, was telling me everything that her classmates had discussed about Germany and the news footage. Surprisingly, I learned a lot from Ella. Not that she was dumb. We had a lot of conversations like

that walking home from school. It was only four blocks from our house, but we would walk slowly—so we could talk. Goodness. I looked up to her so much. She was so brave and wise. And I was always shy. In fact, I spent most of my elementary years hiding. Ella would never hide. She would stand face-to-face with whatever problem was ahead and stare it down.

Ella was never the prettiest girl in her class. I thought she was beautiful, but... she was bullied relentlessly at school. There was this one boy, Max, who was absolutely awful to her. I remember Ella crying in her room after school, because of the atrocious things he said to her. I remember them all. Every insult rings in my head, stored in the file of my fourth-grade year. It didn't even happen to me, but... I never tried to help. I would see him walking outside to the playground after lunch, and I would hide. I would flee to some refuge far away, and he would find Ella and the taunts would begin. Ella put on a brave face and tried to ignore them.

One day, December 2nd, I was hiding under the slide, when Max came outside. Ella and her friends stood huddled in a small bunch, trying to stay warm. It was freezing outside, and there was an inch of snow on the ground. Max walked out in this truly hideous olive green ski jacket and neon-orange stocking cap. He sauntered over to Ella and threw out the always popular, "Hey, loser." Ella ignored him, and her friend Jane muttered, "Buzz off, Max." Max was relentless though. He grabbed Ella's hair and pulled her toward him. She screamed, more from fright than from pain. Max was not a small boy. He was muscular and tall, and he couldn't control himself. I put my mittened hands over my eyes and didn't watch. I heard him say, "Don't none of you move, or I will pull her hair out. Then maybe her head will grow new hair that isn't the color of barf."

Monday, March 27th, 1989. Max stole her purple backpack and ripped the bottom open. "What is all this?" Her papers flew everywhere. "You are such a freaking nerd." We were on the way home from school and instead of calling for help or doing