

Adam Giles

Christine

After two years hanging around with the same group of friends as Christine and becoming more and more infatuated with her from a distance, the nineteen-year-old narrator decides to “seize the day” and tell her about his feelings for her. He buys flowers, writes a card that says “I love you” and waits to get off work so he can present them to Christine. This excerpt picks up the action as the narrator approaches Christine’s house.

I turn my car onto Christine’s street and roll toward her house. I see her white car in the driveway. I park on the road. I pick up the card and the flowers from the back seat. I hold them and stare at my steering wheel. I place the flowers gently on the passenger seat. I open my door and step out of my car. I walk slowly to her door. I stand there. I take a deep breath. I ring the bell. I wait. Her brother answers the door—he looks surprised to see me.

“Hey. Is Christine home?”

“Yeah, just a minute.” He turns around. “Christine!”

I look back at my car. My knees weaken and my hands shake. Christine walks to the door wearing a white T-shirt and plaid pajama pants. She bends her eyebrow and curls her top lip.

“Hey,” she says.

“Hey. Can I talk to you?”

Christine looks side to side and back at me. “Uh. I guess. What are you doing here?”

“Can you come outside?”

“What’s going on? We have company over right now. I can’t talk too long.” Her eyebrow curls down again and her lips part. She steps onto the porch and closes the door.

“Okay. Please don’t be shocked. But I came here to give you this.” I hand her the card. I pause. I look at the ground. “And to tell you that I love you.”

I can’t lift my heavy head. I stare at the porch’s grey concrete. I force my head up and look at her face. I’d never seen that much of the whites of her eyes before. Her lashes flicker up and down and her mouth remains open. I look at her mouth and wait for words to come out. I wait and wait and wait. Silence. Silence forever.

“Okay,” she mutters. “When did this happen?”

“It’s been here for a while but I never had the guts to tell you before.”

“So you just show up here, unannounced, and throw this on me while we have company?”

“I’m sorry but I just had to tell you now. I couldn’t take it anymore. I know you’re going back up to Lindsay tomorrow and I had to tell you to face-to-face.”

Christine fires a blank stare at me.

I swallow some saliva. “I brought something for you. It’s in my car.”

“I don’t know, Adam,” she says. “I should be getting back in now.”

“Please....” I say. “Just come over here.”

I lead her to my car. I open the passenger door. I pick the roses off the seat and turn around. I hand Christine the roses. “Here.”

Her eyes widen, squint, then open again. She holds out the card. “No. I can’t take these.”

“Yes you can,” I say quietly. “Please. Just take them.”

“No!” she whines. “I’ve got company inside. They can’t be seeing me walk in with flowers.”

“So just hide them.”

“No. Here.” She holds out the card.

“At least take the card. You can hide that easily.”

“Okay,” she snaps.

“I hope you understand that I needed to tell you and I want to stay friends no matter what Christine.”

She nods. “Okay. I’ll send you an e-mail or something when I get back to Lindsay.”

I nod. Christine runs back to her house and I walk around to the driver’s side of my car. I open the door, fling the roses into the passenger seat, sit down and slam the door. I speed away. Tears blur my sight. I turn onto Credit Valley Road, past the Petro Canada gas station. I turn onto The Chase and, as I turn, I grab the roses off the passenger seat and throw them out the window. I’m almost home when I shake my head and turn around at Sandown Road. I drive back to Petro Canada to buy cigarettes. I don’t know which ones to ask for since I’ve never bought a pack before—I always just took some from my dad’s open packs around the house when I felt like smoking. I ask the guy behind the counter for the DuMauriers in the grey package—my dad’s brand.

The guy turns around and looks back at me. “The special milds?”

“Yeah, I think so,” I say, looking at the floor.

“Can I see some ID?”

I look up at him and squint. I fumble though my wallet and show him my driver’s license.

“King size?” he asks.

“Yeah.”

“\$4.73 please.”

I hand him a five-dollar bill and he hands me some coins. I grab my pack of cigarettes and walk back to the car. I drive to Erin Mills Town Centre. I turn into the parking lot and look over a sea of open asphalt, not one car in the lot. I pull into a spot and jam the gear selector into park. I turn the key backwards so my car’s off and I can still listen to music. I listen to “Push” by Matchbox 20.

I wanna push you around

Well I will, well I will

I wanna push you down

Well I will, well I will

*I wanna take you for granted
Yeah, yeah, yeah.”*

I rip the plastic wrapper off the cigarettes, open the pack, and rip out the silver foil that covers the cigarettes. I pull out a cigarette, place it between my lips, then fumble in the glove compartment for an old lighter. I light up, wipe the back of my sleeve across my eyes, and look across the empty parking lot. Dim, orange lights shine down on grids of darkened yellow lines painted over the black asphalt. I breathe in some smoke and blow it out the window. I pool the saliva in my mouth, bend my tongue, and spit out the window. I look over city lights, cars driving along Erin Mills Parkway, and the empty parking lot. I smoke.