A Dream Within a Dream

I’ll never forget the look of pain in your eyes – I was in such awe of how beauty and tragedy could coexist so perfectly. You were hurt and broken, and you had no idea how badly I wanted to fix you. I stumbled outside of my party to find you on the porch drenched in a wonderfully intoxicating scent of Jameson and cologne.
*“Are you DRunk?”* I sat down next to the stranger.
*“No, but you DEFENITELY seem like you are.”*
My eyes were filled with just innocent confusion, *“why are you… sad?... What’s your name?”* I searched for his face.
He proceeded to tell me that his name was Marcos, and that he felt like no one wanted him at my party. I laughed him off and told him that it was MY crossing party and that he could either join me inside or leave be because he was killing my vibe.

I yanked Marcos by his collar, and dragged him inside too faded to see if anyone actually cared. After that night, the following weeks blurred together. We were just two friends who were both broken looking for someone else to fix us. Marcos would study my mannerisms and I learned his drink orders over the next few months. Holidays floated by, and before I knew it, it was Christmas.

“*I have something for you,”* pulling a small box out of his pocket, “*open your eyes*.”
*“I know you don’t get along with your sisters... in the same way I don’t get along with my brothers... so here’s your crossing set, since no one ever got you one*,” He opened the box and inside was a 3-piece jewelry set of emerald hearts embodied by gold. I stared at it for a while and watched how the LEDs in my room reflected off it.
“*My color*s,” I stared amazed at the beautiful green and gold. Truthfully, I resent many things about joining Greek life, but something about this little necklace with matching earrings and ring made me feel excited again. I held the box in my hand and thought about everything he was trying to say, “*I love you... I care about you.... someone cares about you*”. I thought about how much I hated being active at my own chapter, all because of a simple misunderstanding that really had nothing to do with me. But the expression stands, “you’re with us or against us,” and my refusal to pick either side resulted in what appeared to be an inevitable loss. For a group of women that claim they look for sisterhood, there was sure a funny way of showing it.

My face must have looked very lost because I was so wrapped up in my thoughts about what-ifs. “...*you don’t like it*,” he reached to take it away from me.
“...what?” I focused back in, “No! it means the world to me...it’s beautiful, but it’s still part of a broken memory”. I had him put on the necklace and we spent the rest of the night talking about what it was like to be an outcast from the one place we were promised sanctuary.

Now every time I wear my letters, I make sure to wear the set he got me, but not for the reasons he bought it. I love my community... well at least parts of it... most of it? It’s brought me some of the best memories that I would never have thought imaginable. It helped me become a better leader than I was in high school. Everything has two sides though- many of my bright moments were also met with heart breaking ones.
As more time passed, even Marcos and I began to erode. By then, it was too late – I loved him. Many things felt tainted, but one thing that never changed was the way the emerald and gold shined. We would argue and find our way back to each other.
“*You’re still wearing that*” he’d laugh and point at the necklace he bought, “*I thought you would have chucked that shit by now*.” This was our game. Wearing the necklace and his banter was our very unhealthy way of saying sorry. I thought it was always ironic, how someone who wrote such beautiful words couldn’t ever just say he loved me... even after I told him. Fear was also a marker for the set he bought; the stones were in the shapes of hearts. He couldn’t give me his, but he could me five other ones synthesized in a lab because at least then I wouldn’t leave.
Somewhere deep down I think that he loved me, he studied my habits too well to simply be “*indifferent to my presence.*” But I guess, loneliness can make you do the most fucked up things... even when you don’t mean to.
For so long I thought it was him saying he had loved me, but maybe I just took the gift for more than what it was. The liquor would bring us back together, and I couldn’t think of why else he would do that. The set was a mere catalyst, and object to cling onto because it was proof. The little emerald hearts were a reminder that I made the right decision, and that the smallest bits of happiness I found in the community made up for all the sad ones.
Our dance was slowly coming to an end, I had lost an earring, and the ring must have found its hand to another. I cried to him that night, because that ring stopped being made and there was no way to replace it. Again, covered in his scent of Jameson and cologne, he embraced me. Through the whiskey he whispered:

“*Take this kiss upon the brow,”*

*And, in parting from you now,*

*Thus, much let me avow,*

*You are not wrong, who deem*

*That my days have been a dream,*” he stumbled back.

“*I love you too*” I whispered.

Naturally, the seasons would change, and we’d stay in our cycle of push and pull – but it was weaker now. I only had a couple of the hearts left, and even they started to look a bit cloudy. It was beautiful in the month of July, but no matter how bright the sun was the sky always felt a little grey. I resented more and more each day until there was nothing left. I found the necklace tangled at the bottom of my jewelry box- and something inside of me broke all over again. I stared at it with so much pain in my eyes wondering how I let it get this far. I didn’t have the energy to say goodbye, so I faded into the night thinking that maybe he had found another heart to give me after all.
November had rolled around, and it was my birthday. My days were quiet, and my dreams were loud. I had gone downstairs to pick up a package that was left for me. I was lost in my birthday activities, and found myself stumbling back around two am. I threw myself on my bed only to find something poking me in the back- my small package from earlier.
I opened it.
To my surprise I opened the little box to find my five emerald hearts. I drunkenly walked over to my jewelry box to place it on top and remembered that I had the old necklace... it sat tangled forgotten in the bottom drawer. I hadn’t thought about how the chain never actually broke; it was just messy. I fumbled around a bit with it and remembered how beautiful it was. I neatly tucked it away in the jewelry box and went back to sleep.
I sit here now twisting the chain between my fingers and think about how something so beautiful could hold so much pain. I thought about telling him thank you, but something told me he didn’t want to see me again. Marcos never had the perfect words for me, but these five little hearts said whatever he needed to.