

# The End of May

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Grandeur Publishing  
400 E. Station Avenue #110  
Coopersburg, PA. 18036  
[www.grandeurpublishing.com](http://www.grandeurpublishing.com)

Printed in the United States of America  
First Printing, 2021

To everyone whose path I've crossed over the years: *may you  
continue your journey with a smile in your heart*

# The End of May

Kem Richards

# 1

## The Unexpected

The roaring engine decelerated, and a droning whirl encapsulated the cabin. I gripped the armrest, hoping and praying I'd make it in one piece. *God, I hate this part.* Everyone, including the staff, remained seated and calm. The stranger sitting next to me wore a flannel shirt and a white, graphic t-shirt underneath with the imprint, "we all die someday." *Great.* He appeared unaffected by our descension while I clung to a familiar prayer I grew up reciting. A silky haze resided in the sky while the sun beat down on the earth—enough to view the skyscrapers in the distance. I closed my eyes and gripped tighter as the turbulence increased and the undulation of my organs amputated my hopes of a smooth landing. I thought of my friends and family while my heart palpitations rendered me captive to fear. *Breathe, Marcy, breathe.* Ten-thousand feet. Six-thousand. Two thousand. A loud *bang* commenced and the tires screech, touching the runway without us crashing or bursting into flames. *Phew!* My chest flattened, expelling a long-winded exhale while the guy beside me turned his head my way. He smiled.

“That wasn’t so bad,” he said.

“Ha! I thought my guts were gonna spew out onto the floor,” I said.

“You don’t fly much, huh?”

“Third time.”

I deplaned, left the gate, and grabbed my luggage, headed outside to hail a cab. One approached me where the driver inquired about my destination. He popped the trunk open, exited his car, and loaded all four suitcases into the trunk while I opened the door and sat in the rear. Newark International Airport was soon behind me.

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A heavy blanket of nervousness hovered over me as I grew anxious about entering an unfamiliar place. I wasn't there to visit, but to *live*—the "Big Apple," New York City. ‘The place that never sleeps.’ I slipped my fingers into a crevice beside me while readjusting myself on the seat. A piece of folded paper grabbed my attention. I picked it out and it said, "You're amazing, and your dreams will come true."

On the opposite side, had I been attentive, I would've read, "Liam 212-555-1440," but I was too distracted. I decided to hold on to it as a lucky token—a memento of being in NYC for the first time in my life.

*Errrkkk! Honk!* The cab driver slammed on his brakes as we exited the tunnel. "Come on! What the hell are you doing?" said Sayeed. He leaned toward the windowsill, hanging his elbow outside the car, muttering and grunting under his breath. Surprised by the abrupt halt of the vehicle, I let go of the scrap of paper, allowing it to fall without regard. My frustration elevated.

"How much longer till we're there?"

"Uh, about half-hour. Sorry about stopping so sudden."

"It's fine," I said. I sat with a half-satisfied smile.

"You're a first-timer. I can tell," he said.

I smirked. And while we both used the rear-view mirror to make eye contact, the tone of my voice heightened a pinch with a hint of a chuckle.

"Oh, God, is it that obvious?" I asked. "I'm almost five minutes into New York City, and I'm already an easy target!"

I gazed out the half-opened window to my right and laughed, sitting back to continue my conversation with him. He wore a short-sleeved button-up shirt, horn-rimmed-yet-somehow-still-stylish 60s era prescription glasses, and had hair like blackened slinkies.

"Welcome to New York City!"

"Thank you! Wait, I don't mean to be stereotypical, but you don't have an Indian accent," I said.

"My parents moved here from India when I was young. They wanted me to thrive and have equal opportunities like everyone else without the judgment of others. People still stereotype, regardless, though. Hell, I like my heritage. Being different is what makes you stand out in a place like this with so much competition around. Holding on to who you are and being yourself in the process is most important as I believe. You'll always remember your first cab ride into NYC with an Indian guy without an accent! I stand out, and you won't forget me at this place and time of your life. Ha-ha!"

We laughed. I grew humbled as I regarded his perspective. I exhaled with a hopeful heart and a sudden burst of joy in my eyes as we crossed into Manhattan. Not only was it filled with a great deal to behold, but an unfathomable amount of opportunity awaited me, and so much to do!

As our conversation merged into the noise of the city, we coasted from one traffic light to another. All the wonder and magnificence had risen in my mind, and all I thought about were the many opportunities awaiting me. I was one of millions who dreamed of living the "New York Life," except here, *I* was

about to live it. Now, I'm not saying I would do *anything* for a job opportunity. There are many things people would swear up and down they'd never do, but when push comes to shove, they exploit themselves in ways they never imagined. It's one thing to be driven, but another to be driven *and* desperate, careless, and irresponsible. That's when people start making all the bad decisions. The worst thing about it is somehow being comfortable with these 'bad' resolves and accepting them later on, but I knew better. I didn't grow up that way. I grew to be a self-respecting woman with values and morals, taking heed to my parent's advice and carrying it with me as close as my heartbeat wherever I went.

Deep down inside, I wanted a relationship modeled after them—thirty-one years and counting. I found myself lucky to have such people set a great example for me, but I was willing to put that aside for the moment. I battled something from within. Like everyone else in this world, we all have our secrets. Only ever telling one person, I kept mine close and carried it with me—never leaving my side like the loyalty of a dog to its owner.

I was so excited to be in New York, thinking of everything the city had to offer. I couldn't contain myself. There appeared to be a ton of people around on the street to my right. I had never seen so many people in one place.

"Oh my God! What's that going on there?" I asked.

He scanned the commotion while driving, turning his head in haste—and tried keeping his eyes on the road while continuing at an average speed into the SoHo (South of Houston Street) area of Manhattan.

"Oh, that? You're lookin' at *New York*," he said.

"Can we stop?"

"Uh, sure, but uh...."

A cluster of pedestrians sauntered on the northeast and southeast corners of Spring Street and Broadway where they had the green light. I'd never seen such a ridiculous amount of

people claim the streets in that fashion, strolling along like they owned it without regard to traffic. Their contagious energy excited me. Freedom and adventure encapsulated my free-spirited mind. I wanted nothing more than to be a part of the crowd.

With my head tilted and eyebrows tucked together, I pouted, forcing my bottom lip to protrude. I stared at Sayeed for a few seconds, hoping for a "yes."

"...Five minutes, and then I gotta run the meter, again," he said. "Parking is terrible around here."

Did you expect him to say "no" to a young, beautiful stranger? He obliged and used the rear-view mirror before I took a quick glance out my window. He pulled into a nearby spot, which was almost impossible to find on such a busy afternoon in SoHo. Anyone who's been to NYC can testify to the horrors of finding street parking at any time—especially during peak hours.

"Oh, my God, thank you! You see? Meant to be!" I said.

Sayeed parallel parked in the illegal makeshift spot he found. He flipped the 'off duty' button of his cab to avoid being bothered for a ride and turned the vehicle off. I grinned, opened the door, and ran off into the crowd with my bag as if I had to make an emergency pit stop at a restroom. Able to bend the rules for a while, Sayeed did what any respectable guy on this earth would do for a delightful woman. He exited the cab, walked around the back, leaned on it, and faced the street with his arms folded. I glanced back, and he smirked as I faded into the mass—my flip-flops clacking with every step forward. Shuffling through, I beheld a full row of food, trinkets, and other oddities for purchase lined up next to each other on either side, stretching for several blocks ahead.

People sauntered about, browsing, buying, and eating. The savor of a myriad of exotic foods filled the air with the succinct bursts of the calm spring wind traversing from one street to another. It's as if they were riding on a leaf—somehow waiting to dispense their delicious fragrance from behind me, over my

shoulders, and through my hair before hugging my nose. I took a deep breath, closed my eyes, and enjoyed the splendor. *This place...it feels like home. This is where I want to be.* Manhattan dispersed a sense of belonging. Instant comfort in a place I understood so little about enveloped me for a second or two. I opened my eyes and continued walking down the pedestrian-filled street where happiness filled many faces and ice cream dripped from children's chins as gravity intervened. I allowed myself to become lost in the scene—hamburgers, hot dogs, corn, and fried Oreos were being cooked and sold from local brick and mortar restaurants as well as food vendors. A certain item caught my eye from afar, drawing me to its polished luster while I looked around. It sparked, harnessing a glamorous, and enchanting magnetic pull. It hung beside others, apprehending my intrigue. I couldn't help but stare from a distance as I gravitated toward it. People ambulated in all directions while I gazed upon its beauty. A Vietnamese vendor approached me.

"Everything on sale!" she said.

My fixation was as if nothing else existed while I zoned into the item. Neither measure nor concept of time remained. I imagined my eyes glistened and pupils dilated like a camera's shutter retracting from the middle of the lens when focusing. The loud music and the background ambiance of cars faded. Chattering, laughing, and other ambient noises dissipated as well, yet meshed and encompassed me as if I were walking under a lattice of thick vines. The hair on my arms rose, and my heartbeat increased as I moved towards the vendor's store. I was about to open my mouth to say something when she shouted in my direction.

"*Very* beautiful! Forty dolla' for you, because you look like nice girl."

I extended my hand with my palm facing the sky. My index finger touched the heart-shaped locket first while it dangled from the ceiling of the vendor's stand. Handcrafted to

perfection, it summoned and claimed my undivided attention. Made for a princess, it possessed a distinguished beauty to it. Diamonds were embedded in the outer rim of the heart. A silver luster engulfed the bewitching piece with a faint engraving in Italian, reading, "Per la donna più bella che abbia mai conosciuto. Ti amo con tutto il mio cuore." It means, "To the most beautiful woman I have ever known. I love you with all my heart. -Alessandro."

I tried opening the locket but had no such luck. It almost appeared to be welded shut. I asked the vendor for her help.

"This very beautiful," she said. "Will look like million dolla' on you! I try."

She struggled in her attempt, furrowing her eyebrows. She pursed her lips and bit down as she tried prying it with her fingernails. The eagerness and thrill to view its contents must have shown on my face. I soon realized I mirrored her facial expressions, being so engrossed in her action but snapped out of it.

"Here, I'll try again," I said.

I extended my hand, and she handed it to me. Unsuccessful in my previous attempt, I decided to give it one last try with my fingers crunched, clustered together with the locket held in proximity to my chest. I gave up.

"Hmm...I dunno, but I want it."

"You want—okay. I give you half price. Twenty dolla."

"No, I'll pay in full. It's beautiful and worth it."

With my head tilted downward—staring, touching, and admiring my treasure, I didn't bother to look up as I reached into my purse, which hung over my shoulder. With the other handle sliding onto my elbow, I loosened the opening of the bag and fished around my wallet for some cash. After the exchange, I strolled over to the small hand mirror, holding each end of the clasp. I tilted my head so my long, dark, wavy hair remained out of the way. As I connected the two ends, I allowed the weighted locket to rest on my chest between my collarbones. What seemed like forever only took a few minutes, and I glanced back into the street from where I came

to find Sayeed waiting for me. Eager and wanting to stick around, I headed back toward him, regardless. With the many people walking back and forth in front of me, I had to weave between them to return.

Pickpockets seized opportunities in crowds like that, and I was no dummy. Stories of muggings in broad daylight remained prominent in my mind, so I clutched my bag close to my torso. Now, I'm not saying you'll ever be held at gunpoint in the middle of a crowded Manhattan street, and it's not my intent to scare you, but you have to remember I'm a woman who believes anything is possible while still hoping for the best. Being so new to a place like that, the only person I was building a relationship with and trusted was Sayeed, who happened to be standing in the same spot I left him... but with someone else. My smile soon transitioned into a frown as I witnessed him arguing with a policewoman in front of his car.

A faint muttering between them increased in volume while I ambled toward them. Sayeed expressed himself with his hands, using quick and rigid movements. I approached, unsure of what took place. The officer moved along.

"What happened?" I asked.

"I almost got a ticket," he said. Monotony exuded in his tone before swallowing a morsel of his food.

"Oh my God. I'm so sorry," I said.

"No, not your fault. These damn cops are always trying to give someone a hard time. They're bored and have nothing better to do."

I can't explain why, but I chuckled and proceeded to the rear passenger door. Sayeed, standing at the front passenger side, had his mouth full of a half-chewed bite of a turkey sandwich stuffed in his right cheek.

"You ready?" I asked. He paused and made room in his mouth to answer before swallowing.

"...Yeah. Let's go."

Being a gentleman, Sayeed opened the back passenger

side door for me, and I slid in. He closed the door, walked around the back of the cab, and into the driver's seat. *Slam!* He shut the door, started the car, and accelerated. I sat in silence in the back, gazing out the window. He utilized the rear-view mirror and regarded my new item after clearing his throat.

"You have a new necklace. Nice!" He paid attention to details, and I smiled, appreciating the compliment.

"Yeah, I just bought it, and somehow, I think I'm in love with it, already."

I used my thumb and pointer finger to rub it as if it were Aladdin's lamp, lifting my treasure off my chest. I carried on, looking out the window with a hopeful, yet positive smile. *This is going to be an amazing summer for me.*

The city's heat swelled to about eighty degrees, the air conditioner ran ice-cold, and Sayeed and I continued our ride through the city. Most of the cab's journey consisted of red lights and cars cutting us off, but I didn't mind at all. You're in a zone when you're on the streets of Manhattan for the first time, and all you can do is feast your eyes upon the melting pot of people before you. I viewed people of all races and fashions in the element of their daily lives. Bikers, lawyers, geeks, freaks, and the homeless alike have a common goal—to live another day. The potholes drove me crazy, but a first-timer never gets away without experiencing a little New York City grime and hustle.

A food vendor shouted, announcing his daily specials while we stopped at a long-standing red light. I rolled down my window and the savory aroma from the honey-roasted peanuts and hot dogs rushed into the car. I scurried, searching my bag for money, and stuck my hand out, eager to exchange a couple of dollars for my first 'New York's finest' hot dog. Kept simple with only a single stripe of ketchup and mustard on it, my snack made me salivate, and I *had* to take a bite before it left the vendor's outstretched hand.

"Mm! Wow. Now, *this*. *This* is some kind of wonderful!" I said. Our eyes met in the rear-view mirror.

"You bet it is! This place doesn't know the meaning of sleep, and if you ever want to get something to eat, at say...four a.m., you can!"

New York has everything you can wish for and want. We kept driving from downtown into midtown Manhattan right into the epicenter of the city's beauty, Central Park. "We're here," said Sayeed. My overwhelming excitement transformed into sheer joy as we decelerated beside the curb. I exited the cab and googled upward to behold the building—my new residence. I stood with my bag in one hand while my other shielded my eyes from the sun. A sudden, enthusiastic, Long Island accent projected toward me.

"Hello, Ms. Burke! My name is Jerome, but everyone calls me Jerry. Welcome to your new home, Central Park East!"

Jerome Santiago, the doorman—a clean-cut Cubano in his mid-50s with distinguished features. His job entailed knowing every resident in the prestigious building. He became a well-respected man in the ten years of his employment, knowing how to make people feel comfortable and safe. He always wore a smile, because he believed everyone had bad days. "A smile holds the power to change everything," he said. Jerome was friendly enough, but make no mistake, he didn't appear to be the type of man you pushed around. He extended his hand to shake mine. "Welcome home," he said. We continued shaking hands, and I smiled back, thanking him for the warmth of his hospitality. His demeanor reminded me of my father where I experienced a sense of homeliness at Central Park East.

Sayeed popped the trunk open, and a bellowing '*thunk*' emerged, followed by a creaking noise from the rusty hinges inside. He exited the car to aid me with my luggage, slamming the door with his extended arm followed by long strides toward the rear. He opened the trunk with an undesirable '*eeek*' as Jerry advanced to assist.

With my belongings stacked, I waved goodbye to Sayeed before following Mr. Santiago into the lobby. He wished me

luck and continued with his day. We advanced inside, and everything held the appearance of new furnishings—the floors clean enough to eat from.

An older woman wearing a sun hat, oversized sunglasses, gaudy jewelry, and a long, white spring dress sashayed toward us. I imagined she was headed out. She embodied the stereotype of a pompous, wealthy individual. She walked with her neck held high, nose in the air, bag in one arm, and a stick where the sun would never reach. Her stereotypical attire came complete with a teacup Yorkshire Terrier in her purse—in the crook of her shoulder. Jerry, leading the way, greeted the woman.

"Good evening Mrs. Parsons. How are you, today?"

"Good evening, Jerry. I'm going out for a few hours. I'll be back a little later," she said.

"Alright. Have a good one, ma'am."

He faced me, mouthed some words, and rolled his eyes while smiling as she walked away. I continued following him to the elevator and took another intent scan at her before I turned around, walking backward to gain a clear view.

"She's a nice lady—and lives in the apartment below you, by the way. She can be a little... "dramatic" sometimes, but keeps to herself," said Jerome. He allowed me to enter the elevator first before following with my bags.

"Penthouse, correct?" he asked.

"Mm-hmm."

I nodded. The elevator's ring held a short and distinct echo that faded as the doors shut. Jerry pressed the 'PH' button and inserted the key next to it, turning it to the left. A low whirring sound commenced as we ascended past every floor with the sweet fragrance of vanilla inside. I exited first. He followed with my luggage before handing me my dangling keys. They stopped making noise as I clasped them. "Here you are, Ms. Burke. Home sweet home," he said. I stepped into a gorgeous

place with cherry hardwood floors, granite countertops, and pristine white curtains drawn apart from vast windowpanes.

It was furnished, but a little airy and needed some more decorating. However, the immense vantage point captured my attention the most.

"Oh, my God! This view is amazing!"

I dropped my belongings where I stood and dashed to the view overlooking Central Park. I exhaled before its splendor, placing my hand over my heart. With my shoulders relaxed, I leaned against the left side of the wall, staring out of the large-scale window which stretched thirty-something feet. I walked out to the terrace and sighed. *This is breathtaking.*

The day was coming to a close at only seven o'clock in the evening. Our earth's brightest source of light made its way over to the western hemisphere of the world, getting ready to tuck itself away for the night. Its warmth and the array of colors it scattered across the earth radiated in magnificence. I couldn't believe I was so lucky to live in a place with such prestige. My apartment building faced West, and the fervor of the sun claimed every inch of my face as I gazed out over the park. I took a deep contented breath with the satisfaction of being in my new place. My home.

"You got the best view in this whole place, I think," said Jerry. My excitement made him chuckle, and I walked around the rest of the apartment in admiration while he set my luggage down a few feet from the door.

"I'm definitely home...and thank you for everything, Jerome! Here, let me give you something." I scurried over to give him a tip, but he declined with a smile.

"No, no. That's quite alright, Ms. Burke. I'm just doin' my job. If there's anything you need...anything at all, just give us a shout, okay? Here's our numba."

He handed me the building's business card, turned around, and exited into the elevator.

"Thank you, again, Jerome."

"My pleasure. I'll see ya lata," he said.

He closed the door behind himself, smiling. I guess if you were at a hotel, and you received service like this it would be appropriate to tip the doorman or bellhop. Jerome didn't seem to take offense to it.

I always had a burning desire to live in a place so magnificent. My dream became a reality. In Manhattan, location is everything. The panoramic view overlooking Central Park should be the eighth wonder of the world, and if you ever get the chance to visit, please do. Put it on your bucket list! The trees garnished the colors of the season and birds soared through the air. I walked away from the elevator and toward my luggage. Within an hour or so, I was halfway unpacked with some of my clothes folded into the drawers. Blouses and dresses hung in my spacious walk-in closet, and my copious amount of shoes had no end.

I soon decided to take a bath, and after walking into the bathroom, I let the water run, allowing the tub to be filled three-quarters of the way. The steamy water vaporized the air, relaxing my mind and body after such a busy day. Some of my belongings were laid out on the queen-size bed, adorned with the most pristine Egyptian cotton.

I began removing my clothes, unbuttoning my jeans first. I'm of a slim build, standing at a height of five feet nine inches with a silver belly ring to show off. My black-laced Victoria's Secret underwear—which I loved, hugged my athletic-toned figure and hips. I dressed my supple lips with a light, subtle, red lipstick—and polished my nails forty-eight hours ago. The struggle to unbutton my shirt while pulling the end of my jeans off proved my multi-tasking skills needed refreshing.

The soft cashmere amber-scented candles in the bathroom drew me in with their tantalizing, warm aroma. The flames flickered about in an odd, yet comforting and beautiful way. A spa-like ambiance was needed after my long, hectic day. I entered the tub, one leg at a time, allowing my body to

acclimate to the hot, steamy water. I leaned back, closed my eyes, and expelled a sigh of relief as the surrounding air moistened my face.

With soft music playing in the background, I indulged in the serenity and relished at the moment. Happiness, tension, excitement, worry, and accomplishment engulfed me all at once. Negativity and doubts dissipated upon submersion. I shut my eyelids to enjoy the absolute peace I experienced—and in full transparency, I grew a little more tired than expected. I began to doze off. A heaviness took hold of my eyes, and the more I fought it, the more it consumed me.

I soon found myself underwater in a lake surrounded by weeds, desolation, and despair. My jaw and body trembled. I moved my hands and feet to rise to the surface while running out of air. No help existed. The sun pierced through the rippled surface as I succumbed to a lack of oxygen. Hope lingered above.

Someone grabbed my leg before my crown surfaced. A woman with dark hair grasped my ankle as if her hand were vice grips. I gasped, swallowing some water, and kicked, jolting my body with the hope of freeing myself. Never reaching the surface alive set into my reality.

I opened my eyes and spat out the water residing in my mouth as I sat up in the tub. *Oh, my God, I fell asleep. I can't believe I fell asleep in here!* My heart pounded out of my chest, and my eyes widened at the implied sound of a male's voice coming from inside the penthouse.