

Jennifer R. Valdez

Lady Liberty Meets Big Ben

“I’m kidding,” I told Dara after saying she could keep the guitarist as long as I got the drummer.

Dara got us tickets to see Coasts, an indie band from England, play at Bowery Ballroom in New York City. She had seen the band play months before. That’s when she fell in love with their music, and the guitarist.

We stood in the front row, watched the boys take the stage and took our pick of whom we’d go home with if we were those types of girls. We put our bags at our feet, just under the stage and let our hands dance freely in the air. I got lost in the tempo and danced with my eyes closed, feeling the base in my fingertips. When the final song came to an end, I opened my and looked at the drummer. Our eyes met.

“That’s it,” I told Dara. “He stole my soul.”

After the concert, we headed to the basement lounge where the band would be signing memorabilia and taking photos. One by one they started showing up, but there was no sign of the drummer. Dara talked to Jimmy, the guitarist, and told him she was at their last concert.

“Are you from England as well?” He asked, noticing her accent.

“Yea, I’m from Kent,” she said.

“It’s so strange to hear another English accent in the States. But it’s nice. It makes me miss home.” His manager had come over to tell him to stay by the table so they could sign autographs and be out within the hour. “I have to go,” he said. “But what are you girls doing after this?”

“Nothing,” Dara answered.

“You should come out with us. Just hang around. We won’t be long.”

Dara was overjoyed at the fact that “Jimmy. Just asked us. To hang out.” But I did not share her enthusiasm. I was not about the play groupie for the night, especially considering I had a boyfriend.

“What’s wrong?” Dara asked, noticing my lack of zeal.

“I think I should call Nate to see how he feels about it.” I stepped outside to make the call and told him about the invitation at hand. “We’ll probably just hang out for another hour,” I said. He surprisingly had no reservations and told me to have fun.

Dara and I sat at the bar as the crowd dwindled down. Still no drummer. Jimmy came over to tell us they were going to a bar called Fontana’s down the street, so we made our way to the exit. Then I saw him.

“Oh!” Dara screeched. “She wanted to meet you.”

He looked at me, reached out his hand and smiled. “Hi, I’m Ben.”

“Jen,” I replied, taking his hand. He had a boyish quality to him with his soft brown eyes and quirky smile. He had curly dirty-blond hair that he probably didn’t comb. You could run your fingers through it and it’d be all the same. Tattoos peaked out from his sleeves and crept up his collarbone. I wanted to see them all.

When we got to the bar, the band arrived with a trail of girls behind them. I told Dara we could only stay for an hour. As soon as we grabbed a seat, Ben came to sit with us and started small talk. Dara and Ben bonded over being Southeast London kids and I sat there mesmerized by his accent then joined the conversation after he mentioned they had just performed at Coachella.

“I’m from Coachella,” I said.

“Really? What brings you to New York?” Ben asked.

“Grad school. I’m getting my Master’s at Sarah Lawrence in Creative Writing. Nonfiction.”

“No way,” he said. “That’s what I went to college for. I wanted to be a journalist.”

We talked about writing and music and how we got to where we are now.

“So do you ever think you’ll go back to California?” he asked.

“Well, it depends on a few things.”

“Like what?”

“Like if my work will transfer me.”

“And if what we talked about earlier happens, right?” Dara asked.

I looked at her hoping she wouldn't say anymore.

"If what happens?" Ben asked.

"She's hoping her boyfriend will propose by the end of the year. They're both from California so then they could move back together."

"That's just what everyone thinks will happen," I said.

"But you were just telling me that you wanted Nate to ask you." Dara looked confused.

"I don't know what I want," I said.

"You're boyfriend's name is Nate?" Ben asked. "As in Nathan? My little brother's name is Nathan," he said, and I was grateful for the subject change. "But we call him Shirley," and suddenly we were on a whole new topic. We shared stories about our siblings and I don't remember the last time I laughed so hard.

By the time I checked my phone it was 1:30. We had been there for two hours. I suggested we leave, but Ben asked if we wanted to play pool. So I took off my black leather jacket and picked up a stick. Ben partnered up with the keyboard player and Dara asked where Jimmy was.

"He left with some girl," the keyboard player said.

"Jimmy's always getting the girls," Ben said with his hand on his forehead. "Last week he hooked up with some PR lady."

I saw the disappointment on Dara's face. "Welp, that sucks," she said. "Let's play." Dara is somewhat of a secret weapon at pool. We were up the whole game and would've won had she not missed the eight ball shot.

After the game, Ben asked if there were any places still open to get a bite to eat.

We hopped in a cab and took him to the fanciest twenty-four hour restaurant in the city. Time no longer existed. After we ordered, Dara began telling us about the restroom. "There's a neon sign inside the stall that says *You Are Here*. It's so cool. You have to see it. We have to take a picture," she said, pulling out her Polaroid.

All together we abandoned our table and headed to the restroom. Dara was right. It was cool. Ben grabbed a waiter, handed him the Polaroid and asked him to take our photo. The waiter laughed the whole time as the three of us crammed into one stall trying to keep the door open while not touching the toilet but still squatting low enough to read the sign overhead. Right before the flash went off, the automated toilet

flushed and we all laughed, nearly falling over. It was an epic snapshot, which Dara let Ben keep to remember us by.

Just before Ben left we took a photo together and I wrapped my arms around him like we were old friends. Dara and I jumped on the subway around 4am with nothing more than a good story to tell about a boy we'll never see again.

"It's a shame Jimmy turned out to be a slag," she said. "And I think Ben kind of likes you. But you have Nate."

"Yeah. But I'd take London over California any day," I said.

Dara looked at me in complete shock.

"I'm kidding!"