

Iva Cvjeticanin

The Big Whiskey

The last thing I wanted to do that night was to go out. An overcrowded bar filled with strangers. Music blasted so loud you couldn't even hear yourself think. A face full of makeup just so half would wipe off or smudge before you even arrived. All for what? The possibility of meeting a man who would become a love interest for a short period. A period that normally lasted no more than a month. Two weeks of happiness proceeding to two weeks of irritation and boredom. At the end of the month, I would be sick of his existence.

I had been proudly single for over three and half years. Finally comfortable in my own skin and recovered from a heartbreak that eradicated any remnants of the person I once was. To me, being in a relationship demanded mutual respect, rarely ever given, and compromise, always one sided. A type of “work” that I didn’t feel like giving to just anyone. Being single required none of that but the free will to go as you please and do as you will without the consideration of others. A concept I found to be completely exhilarating. I was so full of myself that the elders would threaten me that one day I will meet my match. A match that would put me and my colossal ego in our place.

Yet, there I was on October 12, 2019, applying eyeliner and getting ready. After extensive wrangling and arm pulling, my friend Magda convinced me to leave the house. I put on my black lace tank top, tweed skirt with black tights, boots, and my signature leather jacket. The leather jacket that held me and protected me from the

world full of scuffs and scratches. Lastly, a moon necklace wrapped around my neck symbolized my love of things that shine in the darkness.

As I stepped out the door, I stopped and embraced the perfect fall weather. Light breeze gusts passing through as I started walking towards the subway. I realized I was already running late. Being told by Magda that I was meeting a group of her coworkers, I figured my tardiness would go unnoticed.

Already 30 minutes late, guilt began to set in. I was stuck at 14th Street - Union Square station waiting for what felt like an eternity for the L train to arrive. Personal frustration began to grow as I recognized that it would have been faster to deal with the G train. Raising even more questions in my mind, “Why am I doing this? Should I just cancel and go home?” Conveniently, I saw the lights of the L train just as I was about to start walking off the platform. There was no going back, just forward. Laughing to myself while I hold the rail how NYC has so many beautiful things, but having reliable subways was never one of them.

After sprinting as quickly as I could from the Lorimer stop, I noticed I was a full hour late. Calling Magda in a panic to tell her I had arrived, she told me she was running late as well and to wait outside the bar for her so we could make our “grand” entrance together. 10 minutes later, she arrives, lights a cigarette and says, “I feel so bad. He has been alone this whole time waiting for us.” My jaw dropped down, “Just him? No one else?” She says, “Don’t worry he’s bringing a friend too. You look cute. It will be fine.” One hour and 15 minutes later, at 8:45 PM, I walk in through the two doors of the Big Whiskey and see him. There was no group of co-workers. Just him. And he sat there at that bar for an hour and half merely to meet me. The man even defended a bar stool so I had a place to sit. The bartender gave him pity shots thinking he had been stood up. His name was Greg.

The whole setup was rather clever actually. To which, I gave personal credit to Magda, who would have done and said absolutely anything to get me out there that night. Greg had invited his best friend Danny to distract Magda so he could spend time getting to know the girl he’s been hearing about for 3 years and was mesmerized

by her smile. I, on the other hand, had heard his name mentioned maybe twice. But I wasn't nervous. To be honest, I couldn't have cared less if we had a connection or not. If he was going to stick around or leave.

He stood up, gave me a warm hug, and officially introduced himself. Not even giving me a chance to shake his hand before his arms were wrapped around me. It took me by surprise. By that moment, I was already more comfortable around him than half the people in my life. He had the most affectionate smile and caring nature, which vibrated rhythmically off him. As I eyed him, I had also taken note of how handsomely he was dressed. The blue shirt that complemented his eyes and accentuated his arms to the freshly cleaned boots on his feet. Certainly nothing near the rebel rousers I was used to.

Shortly after Danny arrived, conversation sparked. His polish upbringing. Experience studying at University of Albany. Trips to Bogota, Columbia. His adorable niece. Love of rum and coke and Red Hot Chili Peppers. His upcoming trip next week to Mexico. Our words turned into melodies. He knew what it was like to have Eastern European parents. A dad, who every time he looked at you, had a technology question. A mother who called six times a day and facebook stalked you to criticize outfits you were wearing in photos. We spoke similar languages, ate similar food, and knew every trip to the homeland was like a pilgrimage to Mecca. We understood each other in a way no one ever had for either of us.

In an attempt to join in on the conversation and play wingman/woman, Magda and Danny began playfully insulting Greg. Their main focus of attack was his hair. He had these adorable curls on top, that he himself claimed not to be the biggest fan of. But I was too lost in his eyes. They carried an innocence or purity that I had never seen before. Could it have been possible in a world of so many broken souls that I had found one unscathed by life? I'm sure that at that moment, I could have asked him to draw the gates of hell for me and he wouldn't even know where to begin. So many moments throughout the night I would question if this man was real.

Boldly, Greg had placed his hand on my knee. Slowly, minute by minute, his hand would go higher and higher. Bracing himself for the moment that would change our lives. He begins to lean over, puts his hand on my face and kisses me. People say kisses are like dynamites set off. For me, it was calm like the tide brushing against the seashore at night. Like a kiss I had been longing for my whole life. A kiss that felt like I was transported to a location of tranquility where time had stopped. A kiss that made me forget everything.

Paused by Magda and Danny's screams, we watched as she squealed like a pig and fell off the bar stool in excitement. "I didn't think you guys would click so quickly. I can't believe it." She continued to yell as Danny helped her back up from the floor. I didn't care. All I knew was I wanted more. So, I grabbed him by the collar of his shirt and kept kissing. I wanted to keep repeating that same feeling for eternity.

We paused for a sip of our drinks only to see we had inspired, or more likely, tequila inspired Magda and Danny to join "in the fun." Danny had Magda pressed against the wall with their lips conjoined as if they hadn't even been stopping for air. Greg and I were both equally amazed as he whispered to me, "Thank God I brought him with me tonight." After a united giggle, we proceeded to our own little world. I couldn't stop smiling. I couldn't stop being able to get used to the idea of his arm around me.

Danny and Magda took a break from their activities to only join us for one round of drunken connect four. A game that we still debate today who actually won. Once all the pieces had fallen back on the table, they left to spend a night together that they never intended to repeat.

Greg and I decided to stay a little longer. We were so comfortable around each other as if we had been walking alongside each other for years. My feet up on the bench to give my toes a chance to relax after being crushed for six hours. We wouldn't speak a word. Just embraced in the moment. Neither of us wanted to go home. But as it was past 2 AM, we knew it was time to say goodbye.

We got up. Exchanged numbers and ordered our ubers. Me, still being cocky, said, “Oh, let me know in 2 weeks when you are back from Mexico. We can wait till then to see each other again.” One last kiss with the cool October breeze blowing. But we would see each other again that Thursday, the night after that, and forever since..

Twas the night everyone warned me about. The night I never wanted to start. The night I never wanted to end.