

Drafted

Dirty snow scattered the streets, and every corner I passed had bouquets of roses preparing for Valentine's Day, with every crimson petal outstretched, screaming: *Take me home!* I saw my baby sitting in the corner of Nino's Bistro as I looked through the slightly fogged up window from the scathing frost. Although her big, bouncy, brunette curls were coiled around her ears, I could still see the sparkle of the emerald earrings I bought for her birthday.

She was thumbing through an old edition of *Glamour* magazine. Her eyes were glazed over. Her blinking, slow. Her thoughts evasive to the shallow binder of advertisements, a sense of destitution encircled her. When I talked about the inner workings of my Camaro to her, or when she told me about her day at the hospital, it produced the same gaze she had now. Except when we talked, the other person would smile and nod along. You know, faking interest. Like people who love each other often do.

I focused my eyes onto the reflection of myself in the window to re-straighten the collar of my white button down shirt and the red tie I was wearing under my black dress coat; and to brush a few snowflakes from out of my brown buzz cut hair. I took a deep breath, and opened the door. I hoped that whatever she was drinking wasn't hot. Just in case she decided to throw it in my face.

Walking through the threshold, chimes danced against the door. Aside from the butchers, Selma was the only one inside of Nino's. She let her arms drop slowly to the table to set her magazine down. Her blinking had ceased all together at this point, letting me bask in her wide-eyed, hazel stare. She smiled at me. It wasn't quite joyful, but more of an obligation, really. I leaned over and kissed her on the cheek before I pulled out a chair for myself to sit down.

"Hey gorgeous," I smiled back at her, in an equally obligatory fashion.

"Hel-lo loh-vly," her Columbian accent rang beautifully through my ears like usual. She was snugly wrapped in a crème colored, fur-lined jacket, pearls draped around her neck, and a bright red shade of lipstick embellishing her soft lips.

"How was your day sweetheart?" I asked. I turned and looked over at the bloody cuts of meat in the deli. A sense of shame had begun to wash over me.

"Oh, just fine honey, just fine," she cleared her throat. "But we need to talk. You know, the big kind of talk. Not the small, chitty-chatty kind."

Fuck. Did she figure out that my ex is pregnant? I wanted to tell her myself. I swear to God, if I got to talk first I was going to explain everything. It's not like I cheated; this was right

before her. Goddamn it. I clenched my teeth, and dug my nails into my thighs. "Okay. Go ahead, what kind of big talk is it that you want to have?"

"Well I found-"

The tiny chimes thrashed furiously on the door of the deli, as a gale stomped in, interrupting her. I turned my head around. There was a dirty, contorted man shaking. From my seat, I could see that he had long greasy hair and was dressed in designer clothing. I grabbed Selma's hands, which were still on the table and felt them shake in my grip.

"A pastrami on rye and make it snappy! I like a lot of mustard, *don't* be stingy now..." the man yelled, slurring his words. He was shaking his whole leg in his attempts to tap only his foot, as the rest of his body hunched over like a wilting flower. "Places to be, places to be..." he mumbled as he swayed in his attempt to stand upright. He tapped his wrist with his finger in a spot where one might wear a watch.

I looked back at Selma, and we stood up simultaneously. For once today, we finally seemed to be on the same page. It was time to leave. Our conversation could wait. As we tried to walk by, the man spun around like a wobbly ballerina in a musty smelling music box and grabbed me by my tie. He reeked of bourbon and Ralph Lauren. Polo Black, perhaps? As the drunkard and I examined each other I saw his eyes were a yellowish-brown color, reddened by his drinking of spirits and deprivation of sleep.

"Nice tie kid... Say, I'm a little short on cash right now. Here's the deal: if I can make you laugh, you pay for my meal," he said as he slicked his hair back with his free hand. His leer swept over to Selma. He smiled, bearing his surprisingly pristine, white teeth. He jerked me forward and pressed his cheek against mine. "Have you ever heard about the time Mr. Potato Head got high?"

"No," I said although I never technically agreed to his terms.

"Mrs. Head, doll that she is, came home; found him smoking and drenched in butter in front of the telly. She was horrified. Her mouth fell clean off her face, right to the ground. Started shouting at him: *I can't believe I'm out taking care of our little tater tot, while you're sitting here baked!*" the drunkard started cackling at his own joke, irritating my face with his beard stubble.

"Ha, that's a good one. Here ya go," I handed him a ten dollar bill pretending to chuckle.

"I'll give you some advice for being a good sport; don't ever get married kiddies" pointing to our ring-less fingers before he sneered and spun back around. "And a coffee!" he barked at the disgruntled butchers again. We hurried out of the door, the hapless ringing of the chimes fading as we tried to hail a cab.

I breathed deeply. "I don't think I'm ready," I told her.

"What do you mean, ready for what?" she asked.

"For what you had to tell me," I stuck my arm out and garnered a taxi's attention. The cab pulled up to us and I opened the door for her, and then slid in after.

"Okay," she said looking straight ahead.

"Where to?" the driver mumbled.

We sat in silence for a moment. I don't think either of us were actually thinking about where we should drive to. We seemed to be contemplating each other. I thought I was going to lose her today, but love can overcome everything, right? A new life I thought, leave the emotional baggage behind.

"Let's leave. Start over," I said. "You've always wanted to go to France, right Selma? Let's go to France." She turned and looked at me; tears had begun to form in her eyes.

"You mean right now? Just leave?"

"Yes! Let's go to France. Right now," I said. Selma sighed heavily, and dropped an envelope on my lap. It was addressed to her from the government. I was a little confused, at first.

"Where am I driving you both to?" the cabbie asked with less patience. Selma stared me deep in the eyes; her voice cracked.

"Home," she said. "Take me home."