

“Ok... quick... list three thing that you like about her...”

I looked at the wall. I couldn't look into her eyes. They were too piercing. I knew they knew what I was thinking. I hoped they didn't know. I never knew what they knew.

“Quick... come on... one... two...”

Above me, the light was slightly swaying, stirring as it hung from the rafters. It was making me dizzy. The fans in the bar were on full blast, sending the dusty stale air around at a quick pace like one of those Tyco racetracks. On the table, my beer sat in a pool of water. The glass was sweating like a fat kid at sports day. I tried to remember how many beers I'd had. One, two... maybe four... six maybe... it was hard to concentrate... I had to go bathroom.

“Oh for fuck's sake... you started this... what do you like about her?”

She was right. I had started the conversation. But I'd been tricked into it. It was her eyes. They had a way of tricking me and lulling me into a false sense of security. Once comfortable and sitting across from her, my mouth started moving and I had no control of what I was saying. It was as easy as that.

She started fidgeting in her chair. She was antsy and angry and trying to look like she didn't care that I hadn't answered her question. I had seen this in her before, and it always made me wonder why she got so aggressive when I talked about someone else. She could go a week barely acknowledging me, yet the second I started talking about someone, she wiggled out and started tearing them apart. Brick by brick.

“Honestly... come on... you have nothing to say all of a sudden? You don't always have to be a...”

Outside, I could see the rush hour traffic slowly trudging along as the sun relentlessly beat down on the street. The cars looked like mirrors, and every time one passed the bar's lone dusty window, it was like a flash went off. My eyes had little dark patches etched into them from the bright lights. They stung and my head hurt.

I tried to focus. I thought about the things that I liked about her. There were more than three, I knew that for fact. It was just hard putting it into words, since there was an avalanche of things. How did you talk about someone's eyes without sounding like a spineless romantic? Is it easy to describe the way someone's mouth turns up at the corners when they're happy to see you, even though every other muscle in their body is trying to show absolutely nothing? Her poker face was easily readable. How about her walk, or the way her hair has a thousand looks as the wind blows it across her face? Or the upturn of her nose or her hands that look slightly rougher than they should be? What about the way she smelt or the skin on her neck that looked like milk. Maybe silk. What was better, describing something as milky, or soft like silk? Milk sounded homely and kind of pudgy. Silk it was.

I looked up and caught her stare. It made me sweat. There was so much that I wanted to say. I just couldn't get it out.

She started laughing. It wasn't a mean laugh, but more the kind of laugh that someone does when someone falls but doesn't get hurt. A polite mocking laugh.

“Oh I get it... haha... she doesn't exist?”

“Huh?”

“You had me going... there is no she is there? You're always trying to...”

“Back in a sec... need to go use the bathroom...”

I got off the stool and tried to walk. My legs were numb from not moving. I looked drunk but I wasn't. I didn't feel drunk but it took my legs a minute to realize that too.

On pins and needles I walked to the back of the bar and found the men's washroom.

Darker than the rest of the bar, the washroom smelt like old dry bright yellow urine and shit, unconvincingly covered up by urinal pucks and aerosol air fresheners that promised spring rains and tropical gardens.

It was a shit hole. The stalls' doors were missing and there were cigarette burns everywhere. I didn't want to touch anything and I gasped and clenched my teeth, desperately fighting the urge to puke.

At the urinal I barely aimed. What was the point? Point and shoot seemed to be the norm in this washroom. Beside me, a man as weather beaten as an old pile of railway ties was peeing. He coughed as he pissed, causing his stream to arc up and down. At my feet I tried not to notice the growing pool that was crawling towards me. I needed a distraction. Quick... I tried to think of three specific things that I liked about her.

Ok... ok... One. I loved the way her eyes disappeared when she laughed. But not in a bad way, like a pug or that chubby kid in grade four. She laughed with her whole face, her whole body. Maybe that was why I tried to make her laugh so much.

The old man spit into the urinal, and backed away even though he was still peeing. I tried not to stare at his dick as it hung out of his jeans. It looked like an old cow's tongue. It looked like it had been treated very badly, dismantled, then put back together again by a blind kid.

“Hey! What you lookin at you little cocksucker?”

I smiled. His voice was gravelly. I knew where I recognized him from. He looked like the sailor on a pack of Player's Cigarettes. Ok, maybe the dad of the sailor on the pack of smokes. Or the picture on the pack after the pack has been left sitting in the elements for the last thirty years. Something like that.

“Sorry?”

He coughed and hacked up something into the sink. It was red and green and skipped off of the stained sink and shot up onto the wall. Ricochet. It was gross. It made me laugh.

“What's so fuckin funny? What the hell's wrong with you ya little queer?”

Two. She had a way of looking at me that was very discreet and hard to catch. I could usually feel it on my skin, her eyes, and if I tried hard enough I could see her look out of the corner of my eye. When I saw pictures of me when she was in the background, she always seemed to be looking at me.

He brushed past me and angrily opened the door. He was muttering about fags and I could see his wet footprints leading out the door. It was disgusting and I realized that washing my hands was probably worse than leaving without touching anything.

I left without washing my hands.

The bar was quiet. I made my way through the maze of empty tables. I lost track of his footprints as the tiles from the hallway faded away into the dark green stained carpet of the lounge.

At our table, she had ordered another round. Was this my fourth or tenth? I had no idea. I needed to think. How many times had I gone to the bathroom? That was usually a good clue to how much I'd had to drink. One beer usually equaled two trips to the bathroom. I didn't know what my problem was. I needed to get that checked out.

Three. I knew the third reason the second I sat down across from her.

"Do you have an ibuprofen? I have a headache coming on..."

She reached into her purse and got out the bottle of painkillers. She was always so well prepared. Quietly she opened the bottle and took out one of the pills, then held it in the palm of her hand. Her hand was perfectly flat, palm up. She never passed me anything, but always held it there and waited for me to come and get it.

I reached for the pill, my fingers slowly brushing across her skin. Her hand trembled. Slightly. I could only tell by the way the pill turned to the side, enough for me to read the dosage. 400mg. That was enough. Her hand was soft and not rough at all. Milky soft. I loved that she always waited for me to touch her. I just didn't know if it was a conscious thing or not. I really wanted to touch her.

I swallowed the pill with a long sip of my beer. The drink was cold and foamy, making my eyes tear over. It looked like I was crying.

"There's the little faggot now..."

The old man from the bathroom walked past me, followed by a pack of cronies that were equally in the same state of disrepair. As he passed behind me, his elbow dug into the small of my back. It was boney and weak. Sharp like whalebone.

He mumbled some more.

"You should get that checked out..."

He stopped and turned around. His nose was red and large and I could see his blackheads pulsing like little sea anemones. "What did you say you little cocksucker?"

"I said that you should get that checked out..." I nodded towards his crotch, "it looks like it's rotten... can't be good to be walking around with it like that..."

He looked down and turned without a comeback. If I didn't know better, I would've thought that I'd hurt his feelings.

Her stare was incredulous. I could tell that she wanted to laugh.

"Oh my God! What was that about?"

I smiled, looking past her, avoiding her stare. In my head, I mulled over the three things I'd come up with. I didn't want to forget. One, her laugh. Two, her discreet look. Three, her waiting touch.

"Seriously... what was that all about?"

I wondered if now was a good time to tell her what I liked about her.