

## An Anchor In The Storm

I slipped quickly into the trance of perfume, cigarette smoke, and the ever-beating war drums that the city had to offer among its jazz clubs, cabarets, and cinemas. It began in a crisp October that reminded one of home and distant country lanes that have since been paved over. I had finally entered the world of men and humanity and drastically wanted nothing else but to leave it with a quiet whimper and a bold declaration that I am a child, not to be trusted yet on living by myself. I knew that I was wholly unprepared for the world and in fact, was.

The days were sweltering, and the nights required a heavy jacket and a firm conviction that it wasn't the slightest bit cold. It was a strange time indeed and was made only more fascinating by the advent and perfection of the automobile with screaming engines that could project us across the horizons with the same speed as the starships glowing in the radio tubes and the new laws that prevented men from indulging in the only vice that counts; dark amber poison.

Yet, I found myself wrapped within the grips of another mistress. I was enchanted with her raven locks, deep soulful eyes, and a pale complexion that would make the clouds blush of embarrassment at themselves. She was twirling in the gilded dress that reflected within the watchful crystal eyes of the chandeliers and champagne flutes. She spun until she almost fell and did so with such grace that every man would look over their wives' shoulders and make breathless remarks. There was not a single man or woman in that joint that wouldn't throw themselves into her tender embrace or laugh along with her quips. She had a smile that made you feel like the only person that matters and she would give you a glance that indicated that only you and she knew the punchline to a joke that didn't need to be told at the moment. When you saw her, you felt comfortable and safe. She would flash her gleaming eyes at you; like a lighthouse, she would single you out and direct you out of the tumultuous waves that keep you

up in the long hours of the night and would lull your drowning body out of the tempest-filled sea, into a harbor of safety and quiet breezes.

How we came to know each other is beyond my comprehension. We brushed arms around the bar, greeted each other outside the coat check, danced a bit to the swing music that pounded in our blood-filled ears, we laughed as we were bumped into each other by the shifting and swaying crowd that would throw you around carelessly like a dissatisfied child throwing a fit of anger; and we somehow found ourselves escaping the prison of bodies, sweat, and headaches that could only be cured through a breath of fresh air.

I walked a few paces behind her in the early morning grey as she skipped ahead and twirled and spun down the sidewalks. She talked and discussed her grand ideas with the still burning lamps in desolate windows and with the passing cars that paid her no mind. She talked about the power of the stars, why she preferred the sun to be gone on her escapades, and everything else that would appear in her head. I simply put my hands in my pockets and listened.

As I strolled with a carelessness I hadn't felt since childhood, I felt content. I was still anxious about the approach of day and the harsh light that would inevitably dissolve our bond.

But right then and there in the dusk her voice tethered me to her and kept me moving despite the haze of the night and the aching of my legs. We rambled, tumbled, and walked through the entirety of the city until we found ourselves alone in a park as the sun peered over the looming distant skyscrapers, creating the silhouette of a crowd gazing across the harbor at us.

She was a breath of spring in that ever-cooling autumn, and it felt as if the blossoms would burst forth from a different season and the birds would cry out in exuberance at her mere presence as she walked forward since her world was always so bright and new.

The leaves were golden under the light and their oranges reflected that of the pumpkin-lined porches. I found her most intoxicating, and I wanted nothing more than to hold her in my arms and tell her that she was the best thing that had entered my life. The sky was lit in fire and yet didn't burn brighter than the glow around her.

She spun around and stuck out her hand in a handshake. "I'm Isabella. I don't know if I mentioned that."

"I'm George and I must say, I think I've hurt myself." I said in a dramatic fashion.

Her eyes grew wide, and she quickly asked, "Are you quite alright? What do you mean you've hurt yourself?"

"Well, it appears I've fallen for you, and I think I banged my knee on the way down."

Her eyes darted to my knee and when her synapses finally fired to her brain, she lost her smile and playfully hit me. I exaggeratedly stepped back in pain and cried out as I held my arm. She laughed as I howled that her attack hurt. She hit me even harder this time and started to enjoy herself.

"You are very mean for that," she said in a proper, upright tone that suggested an acquaintance to money that I could never master.

"Well, I'm a mean person," I declared as I twirled around in mockery.

She darted towards me with the intent to playfully hit me and I ran off into the park. She followed me screaming about how she was going to get me and how I was going to regret being

mean. We played this game of pseudo-tag through the park. We ducked around trees to hide and jumped over benches as obstacles.

We chased and fled from each other through the streets and finally found ourselves outside of an apartment building that pierced the canopy and reached out into heaven.

She slowed as we approached the building and she sadly claimed that this is the end of the line for the night and that she had a good time with a matter-of-fact tone that tinged with sadness. The doorman drew his cap low and looked towards the street in a hard stare. My companion turned to me, gave me a quick peck on the cheek, and darted behind the door. She was gone forever out of my life.

I stood for a long time looking at my own reflection in the perfectly polished glass. Hoping, praying, manifesting that she would remember me in the same way that I would remember her. That I would make some small impact in the least. That while sitting in a cafe, sipping on some new fad English tea, her heart would be pronged by a stabbing pain that had to be explored to be understood. That she would look wistfully out past the elaborately hand-painted front window, past the rows of cars speeding by, past the children playing in the streets, and into the park with the sharp realization that I did, in fact, love her and that she, in no small fashion, loves me too.

I walked home in the cold hours of the rising sun. The collar on my coat wasn't enough to keep out the ever-invading frigidness. Yet, every time I thought of her, my face would flush, and I would have to ease the collar back to let cool air rush into my nerves and settle them.