

Stealing Glances

She walked into my bar on December 3rd, 1997. Her long, dark brown hair draped around her bare shoulders and her fur coat fell down around her wrists. She was a dime and a real catch. I instantly felt attracted to her as I watched her walk from the door to the corner stool of the bar. Her blue eyes darted back and forth checking the door and around the room as if she looked for someone. There was a spark about her. She was the kind of girl you sleep with one night and go out looking for the next. I didn't want anything serious, but I knew I wanted her pressed against me in the back of a cab on the way to my 10th floor shit apartment on 8th street.

"Excuse me." She shouted at me across the bar. She bent over the counter and squinted at me, eyeing my nametag. "Excuse me, Tristan? Excuse me, but I need a drink."

"Sure, what can I get you?" I ask her as I lean my elbows on the counter in front of her.

"Scotch, on the rocks, please." She said to me in a rush, her voice trembled and I could feel her breath on my lips as she said it.

"Sure thing." I turn around and begin making her drink. I steal glances at her and she's looking frantically around the bar again. I set her drink down and ask, "So what are you doing here on a night like this?"

She takes a sip of her drink and stares up at me. Her eyes are big and mysterious. I'm lost in them. She looks back down in her drink and swirls it around. Her lips purse and she takes in a deep breath and lets it out slowly. I can tell she wants to say something, but isn't ready. "I ran away," she states. "I finally ran away from him."

"Oh... what's your name?" I ask.

"Eliza." She smiles faintly and takes another sip of her scotch.

"Who did you run from?" I ask hoping I'm not being too forward.

"My husband."

"I'm sorry to hear that. Just know your safe in here." I smile back at her and turn to walk back down the bar. A regular waits at the other end begging me to give him another beer. I bend down to the fridge and pull out a bottle of the cheapest stuff I've got and slide it down to him. I turn back around and see Eliza gone with a handful of dollar bills in her place. I look for her through the windows and see her smoking a cigarette leaning against the brick wall. Snowflakes fall around her in a blur and the end of the cigarette illuminates in the night and I can see tears filling her eyes. There is something about her. I wonder what she's thinking.

Where happened to my life? Mitch used to be so good to me. One minute he's all I ever wanted and the next he's making it big by selling out. We went from being in love and broke to having all the wealth in the world and broken. My wrists ache remembering his grip and my body

is black and blue. I hide behind layers of make-up and clothing because I'm nothing but damaged. I should have known, I should have known he was changing, but it was too late when I found the needles and the little blue box with everything inside. That's when I knew this life with Mitch, as my husband, had to end. I did what I thought best and now here I am outside a bar smoking the cigarettes I swiped from his nightstand. I've never smoked once in my life.

After what felt like too long a moment to watch this captivating woman stand in the night I realize her coat is still on the bar stool. I rush around the bar to grab it and run outside not thinking. I push the doors open and burst into the fresh fallen snow. I slide across the sidewalk and catch myself before falling.

"Here," I say, "you left this inside. It's cold out, I thought you might need it."

"Thanks," she replies. She drops her cigarette to the ground and kicks a pile of snow on top.

"Do you want to come back inside?" I ask her.

"No thanks. I should really get going." She says while throwing her coat back on.

"Where will you go?" I ask.

"Somewhere?"

"With him?" I ask her.

"I can't go back to him."

"Then where?"

"Anywhere. I've got to go."

"Come inside," I tell her, "come inside and think a while. It's warm in there."

"You're a nice guy, but you don't know what your saying, it's best I leave."

"New York isn't safe for me anymore." She whispers.

"Why?"

"He'll find me."

"Come inside." I try one more time.

"I need to get going. Thanks for the offer." She turns to leave and I grab her wrist. She flinches.

In the distance I hear tires screeching. A black SUV rounds the corner and Eliza rips her arm from my grasp. "I need to go." She says sternly, but it's too late. The SUV pulls up in front of the bar and a man jumps from the passenger side. His suit is wrinkled and his smile is wild.

"Mitch," she gasps, "how did you find me." Eliza says shrinking back behind me.

"I'll always find you." Mitch smirks, "Now come home with me. It's time to go."

I was unsure of what to do. My heart raced and I could tell I was about to be in the middle of a battle I was unprepared for. I could sense the fear in Eliza as her whole body trembled against mine. I felt compelled to help her. Without thinking I shoved Eliza to the side and punch

Mitch square in the jaw. I gathered Eliza from the ground and raced her down the street. I could hear Mitch recovering behind me so I dove us into the nearest subway station I could find. I turned around and saw Mitch along with two other men following behind us. I ran down the stairs with Eliza behind me struggling to keep up.

I knew when she walked into my bar I desired her. Now, here I was with her running behind me. Her small hand cradled in mine. We approached a turn-style and I grabbed her throwing her over. I then leaped over myself and headed down more stairs to the S train.

“Stop,” she panted behind me, “he’ll get us and he’ll kill you. Stop, why are you doing this.” She screamed at me.

I didn’t know why I was doing it. All I knew was that when I looked at her leaning against the window of the bar I knew she needed help. I knew I wanted to hold her. I didn’t know where we were going, but I knew there was something about her a damaged person like me needed.

We boarded the S train just in time. The doors shut behind us and I watched Mitch in the distance shouting as the train started to take off. I turned to Eliza and looked her in the eyes, panting and out of breath. I had just made a decision to save this woman and I didn’t even know why. She looked up at me and her big, blue eyes let out a single tear.

“So,” I whispered, “where do we go from here?”