

## Chapter 2

I am back in my apartment, and I am back at the teat of the booze—my lips guzzle down enough death juice to soothe my soup of sentiments. I am in a deep enough funk that the opening of the door hits me like a burly defensive end. I escape the tackle and greet Mike with a casual grin as he strode through the old-fashioned upholstery of our living room.

“Got off work early,” I said, unprompted.

He grinned back. “Logging in less than eighty hours a week? That’s got to call for a celebration.” He squints at the open beer in my hand. “Ope? You’ve been getting started without me?”

I feign my guilt in an exasperated frown. “Stressful day at work.”

He strode off to the fridge and was back in a stride, handing me a new Guinness as he opened his own. I make sure to take sips not gulps.

“Makes you think, doesn’t it?”

“What?”

“Oh sorry. I meant , makes you think about when it’s worth it, doesn’t it? Stress versus work? I mean, I know...I know there’s a dozen economic models that want to pin a number on it, value the cost of leisure versus consumption blah blah but how do you judge every single little cost? The cost of switching occupations or lifestyles or anything? You get rooted in doing something, the same thing, a day, every day. The routine is boring but it’s also comforting in its familiarity and humans by nature crave familiarity.”

He blinked at me and emboldened by my complete disengagement at this sudden rush of eulogizing, stumbled on through his suppressed emotions.

“It’s just bizarre, you know? We spend our whole lives...we as a *whole* have spent all of human civilization trying to fit a purpose to life, trying to jam in some indeterminate, vague concept into a well-defined finite pigeonhole. For the stupid, it can be religious faith, pledging to some archaic code of overblown morality. For the truly smart, it is something from which they derive enough personal fulfillment that they can ignore the thousands of little details that crawl up on you through the years, the little details that grasp your limbs and spread them and force the shackles over them. The little details that grow into huge details that grow into your life. You see this route in front of you and you fear it and you want to do everything in your power to avoid it but the fear is too strong and too absorbing and too *blinding* and you blink once, twice and the years peel away and you’ve done absolutely nothing of what you set out to do....”

He glances wryly at me, jolted back into the present and finishes, “...and then you’re just sitting there boring your roommate to death with your defeatist whines.”

I am a little taken aback.

You see, I hate Mike.

But I hate not living a lie more, so I content myself to engage in meaningless small talk with a meaningless man.

But this morbid monologue is not of the usual variety. It has plopped me back me on my haunches, like a confused Pavlov dog waiting for its stimuli. Yet my unformed question is answered with another rueful smile and look.

"I'm thinking of asking Jackie to marry me?"

The upward tilt in his voice sounded reflexive but my features remain passive.

"How long's it been? Six months?"

"Five. I know. I know. But all that stuff I was just talking about...I don't know. I do not want to be one of those men who find solace and destiny *only* in a partner but life is so damn lonely. I just want to feel like there will be one person that will notice if I disappear off the face of this earth. You know? If I snap like *this* and just disappear, when I'm alone that is, how long until someone notices? How long until someone wonders? How long until someone misses? How long until everyone forgets?"

He paused again but I give him nothing.

"All this questioning makes it sounds rash. Like a rash decision. Asking her to marry me that is. But it isn't."

I ransack my slowly submarining brain for what a hypothetical friend would say to another friend caught in the midst of combing through existentialism while pondering marriage.

"Yes, I know what you mean. Still, shouldn't you at least try living with her first?"

"I should, I should. That's also why I wanted to bring this up to you. You've been my roommate for three months and you've been great and accommodating and all, so I wanted to run this by you first. If I do ask her to live in with me, would you be ok with that? Or would you want to get another place? I don't know how many other friends you have in the city..."

*I don't have any friends, just accomplices. And now accomplices that want me dead or gone.*

I smile. "Yeah, I'm open for anything, we can definitely figure it out." *I'll either be gone or...gone, soon enough either way.*

His stupid fucking face broke out in a huge toothy smile. "Great! I definitely don't want to pressure you at all! We can grab dinner this weekend and talk about it more formally. Thanks, buddy!"

Buddy. An overused staple of friendship and endearment. Quite ill-fitting.

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After Mike had left for dinner with his stupid fucking girlfriend, I retire to my bedroom. I try to sleep, but I have never been good at it. A fruitless hour later, I roll out and fish out my cellphone and look for the quickest dial to settle my mind.

She picked up on the second-to-last ring.

“Yes?” All throaty and languid, a blend that already has my cock quickening.

“What are you doing right now?”

“Got a client coming over in about half an hour—”

“I can be on my way now.”

“Ok, hurry. The Holiday Inn off 3<sup>rd</sup>, room 329.”

I throw on hasty clothes and am out the door, already at half mast, swigging down at another flask (scotch?), snorting an uneven line off my fist, grabbing a pack of camels for the road. The blend of alcohol, cocaine, and nicotine come together in a fat, mind-crunching, mind-pleasing rush as I settle behind the steering wheel. Another drive, another blur. Pearl Jam’s “Alive” spits out a humorous antecedent to my current situation:

*Ooh yeah...yeah yeah yeah...oh...oh...*

*Is something wrong, she said*

*Well of course there is*

*You're still alive, she said*

*Oh, and do I deserve to be*

The buzz from my cocktail of drugs climaxes in its crescendo as I pull into the hotel’s seedy parking lot, the door slamming shut as my feet beat the well-tread path to the third floor’s haven of debauchery and sex.

I knock, a 2-1 quick beat.

She was only clad in her lingerie when she opened the door, her golden tassels framing her lithe body, the black lacy cloth gripping her taut breasts, the panties barely covering her lips between shapely, sleek legs curving into a buxom ass and a slightly doughy stomach. Her sultry eyes, framed by a little too much eye shadow were set in a cruel face, one shouting no crooning out immorality, apathy, a neglected childhood.

Maybe average-looking but unquestionably desirable in her unflinching depravity.

She had a wrestler’s hold on my cock as I toss her back on her squeaking mattress, bury my head between her tits, wrench the thong to one side and dig my fingers to the knuckle in familiar pussy.

Speed is of the essence (I am considerate, if nothing, of one's livelihood). Not bothering with a condom, her legs wrapped tight around my midsection. What is cleaner than a careful whore who made all her customers wear protection? The value of a raw bust outweighs anything else in my mind.

Plus, I've always wanted kids.

Her breath was ragged and urgent in my ear as she bit into the skin right under the side of my jaw, her fingers tearing at my hair. My thrusts are as quick and selfish as ever, but it is hard to tell from her performance. Maliena is a pro.

A loud groan and I roll out, letting my seed dribble out of her pussy, out of respect. I give myself another jerk or two and make sure I've been thorough as she leaned over to slurp the rest up. What a good girl.

I light up a smoke and offer her one. We stumble to the balcony, our naked bodies silhouetted by the evening dusk. A comfortable silence.

And then:

"You have anything for me?" Her first words.

"Here." And mine, as I stoop back towards the fallen clothes and pull out a baggie.

She smiled a sexy smile. "Evan the gentleman. Always knows just the right anniversary gifts, and always pays for dinner."

I watch sadly as a drop of my cum wells up and drops from her cunt to the floor.

"Least I can do for such a classy bitch."

Her throat muscles contract as the smoke slithered out into the night. A picturesque scene ruined far too soon.

She dropped the stub over the balcony and turned to me with an unapologetic smirk. "You got to go. My client is due any second."

"You're not going to clean up?"

"No. I like having you inside of me. It's like you're riding shotgun with me all night." A femininely coarse, coarsely feminine bark of laughter.

"Ah...alright. I'll be on my way."

One more sentimental grope and I am out into the cold, friendless night.