

Excerpt

I realized I was a hypocritical liar the day I wore a bright pink-colored dress on a day that was not meant to wear a bright pink-colored dress.

Overcast weather was always like this: you could never tell the time because the outside stayed one color. It was an infinite stretch of shades of grey, with the same kind of light filtering into this musky, dank paradise. It was as if the whole world was a poster, a picture and a postcard of what was and what will be. I must have looked like a clown in the middle of a black-tie event of hors d'oeuvres and fancy cocktails because everyone stared, wondering *what* and most importantly, *why*.

Well, the weather promised sunny skies, a breeze that made you sway round and round, and flowers at every corner of the field. Our lovely manager was treating us to lunch so I figured a nice spring dress would add an extra touch to the restaurant, my confidence, and the benefactor.

But I knew I was spinning the day out of proportion the moment I left my apartment because the wind bit me so hard I felt tears well up in my eyes. I wanted to run back in to change my life into something else, but if I went back in, it would take me an extra ten minutes to come back out, and then I would miss the bus that came at 8:30, and then I would be late for work, and then I would feel worse because I never

stayed the full eight hours anyway, so I told myself to suck it up because there was nothing I could do.

I also knew I was spinning this lunch thing out of proportion because I ended up carpooling to Marco's with Ross.

I never liked Ross. It wasn't because his voice was so nasally you thought he was holding his breath on purpose, or he wore sunglasses under clouds of rain, or he thought he had a chance to stay in our elite club of volunteers, but because I couldn't talk to him. You had to be careful with your words to Ross or else you would start to see him quiver underneath his pants. Once he started quivering, he would spit out all these nasty things to you because that was the only way he knew how to defend himself. Ross was sitting too close to me in the backseat, and every time the car bumped around/turned/twisted/stopped, his leg would brush up on my naked thigh and I knew I should have just taken shotgun.

Once we were seated, he just so happened to sit right across from me.

I wondered if he knew I hated his guts.

Marco's was not nearly as packed as I thought it would be. The waitresses seemed too beautiful to be randomly hired and our table for 15 filled up the entire middle of the restaurant almost too coincidentally, like we were made for this place. I felt important. The menu looked exquisite too, and I

felt even more powerful than ever—I could order anything and everything I wanted because I wasn't spending a single dime.

I wondered if this was what all rich, corporate people do: eat hundreds of dollars for lunch and then go back to the office to make thousands of dollars more. And then I imagined myself like that for a moment. First, as the wealthy boss, treating everyone below me to lunch at the usual 5-star restaurant because I could, and then second, as the new girl at work treated to lunch by all her handsome managers and colleagues. They would all try to figure her out and make her laugh while she judged which one was wittiest of them all.

Ross ordered a diet coke.

I never understood the point of diet coke. In fact, diet coke seemed to be even more insulting than regular coke. If you made a point to drink coke, then you were either a badass who knows coke is bad for you, or an exercise freak who knows coke is bad for you.

One could never be both.

He finished his second refill before we even ordered.

By the time his lunch came, he already finished his third cup.

When he expressed interest in a fourth refill of diet coke, the managers all complained about it.

“That’s so *bad!*” Danielle cried, her hands on her face.
“Stop drinking it.” Her nails were always changing colors.

“Yeah, Ross, you’re done,” Lillian said.

I wasn’t too sure what Lillian did. It never seemed like she knew what was going on.

I was so glad and so relieved that they were all expressing what I was thinking this entire lunch that I couldn’t hide my thoughts and feelings anymore.

I said, “You know you’d probably need to run two miles to work off all that sugar off, right?”

His joking smile faded into something grim. Ross’s tiny face scrunched up like the back of my dirty sponge. He looked like he was about to leap onto my face and claw my eyes out. For a moment, I thought he’d do it and I’d end up in the hospital with a million dollar battle scar on my face.

But he didn’t.

He stayed in his seat.

I didn’t know if I was disappointed or relieved.

Ross sneered, “I got diet coke, not regular coke.”

I couldn’t find the right words to say, but he continued to defend himself, as always, “It’s fine. I’m healthy.”

I wanted to point out that diet coke was worse than regular coke, but I was unclear on the scientific details, so I just shut up and stopped paying attention to him because what the fuck did I know? Maybe I was wrong.

But after a couple of seconds of zoning in and out of reality, I found myself still hearing his voice. Then I realized that he was blabbering on about his healthy diet because it was *diet coke*, and not *regular coke*. I didn't even know who he was talking to and I almost lost my cool until I realized some people couldn't be saved.

Afterwards, when I got back to the office from the wasted lunch, I felt sort of bad for what I said because who was I to tell him what to do? He could do whatever he wanted with his own stinking life. He could lock himself up in his basement and play video games all day and smoke up Mary all night and it shouldn't matter to me. He should be able to drink all the diet coke he wants and pretend to be healthy.

No one has the right to judge him for his actions.

No one has the right to judge anyone for anything.

And although I cling to that ideal with all my life, heart and strength, I knew I was lying to myself because there lived a monster deep down inside me that encouraged all these damaging and destructive thoughts. It was a gross thing, a disgusting slime that only saw the world in its rawest and most sinful form. It would mock me, laugh at my silly daydreams and unrealistic expectations. It would hide in the depth of my own abyss and come out when the shadows fade. It would whisper in my ear to just *fuck* everything and *everyone*.

And not more than once now, I gave in to its sly and
charismatic smile. It was lulling me under with its dark magic,
so slowly that I didn't know I was in it until it was too late.
And when I was in its hellish cavern, I didn't even try to
escape.

I laughed with it endlessly, all evilly, all un-kindly.

We can judge people for their actions.

We can judge people for anything.