

The Chase

By Nick Anderson

I need to preface this story by saying that at the time the said night began to occur - really occur - I was wearing sweatpants and washing dishes. I was even wearing my special dish-washing sweater, one that used to be trendy and attractive but now had a giant bleach streak across the waist from cleaning countertops and frayed sleeves with accidental thumbholes. I was thinking I was just going to watch a movie, fall asleep. It was too snowy to go any place, seven inches expected, and to be honest I was happy to take the break.

While waiting for some dishes to soak, I checked Facebook. I had an event invitation, which are typically crap - I have a bunch of friends that play in bands in Austin that are always inviting me to shows, like I'm going to drive six hundred miles to watch them murder Bob Marley in an Applebees. But this invite was from my coworker Kristal, for a impromptu snowball fight in Congress Park. In true flash mob style it was set to begin only five minutes after the invite was sent, making me already ten minutes late.

Now, I love snowball fights. Growing up in Texas, I was given very few opportunities to participate, a tragedy I feel the need to make up for now as a full grown adult. But adulthood has also shellacked me with a veneer of lethargy that's made me reluctant to strap on snow boots and run twelve blocks when I've just finished a killer week and kind of just want to sleep. I text Kristal.

"Is this thing really happening?"

Not one minute later, she responds.

"YEAH RIGHT NOW HURRY"

At a certain age you may find the life you have built to be a comfortable perch from which to view the workings of others. You're done with school; got a job, a car, and suddenly snowball fights seem like something that is beneath you. Let's face it, bigger things come along in life, and you run out of time for alot of frivolities. For me though, I didn't go to art school for four years to start acting practical now. I doubled up the socks, pulled a pair of cords over my

sweatpants - I grabbed an oversized green trenchcoat and hat and ran downtown.

A surprisingly good crowd had showed up - the last time I had seen that many people on the lawn in front of the Capital they had been protesting abortion or something. I spotted Kristal's dorky wood-cutter's hat and began to walk over as a tall man with a sled yelled "NEWCOMER!" With frightening precision the entire group entered into a dead sprint towards me, and forcibly welcomed me to the group. For about half an hour the park erupted into this beautiful crescendo of anarchy, a hodgepodge of twenty and thirty somethings screaming middle school chants and battle strategies as if in a Sigur Ros video. It was very much worth the walk.

But that's not at all what this story is about. That was just the set up, what got me out of the house. As I am walking back, Kristal asks me if I want to get some coffee. We walk to City O' City as she introduces me to Dave, someone she has brought with her. He is polite and has good taste in music, but reveals that he is at least ten years older than us.

"Do they have alcohol at City O'?" he asks. He is new to Denver and has no idea where we are going.

When we get to City O' we sit at the bar and eat dinner; I have some hot cocoa, Kristal has coffee, Dave has a shot of whiskey and two beers.

"I sell Kitchen knives." he explains to me and Kristal. "Did I tell you that?"

Kristal shakes her head.

"That's why I travel so much. I'm a preferred distributor."

He gets up and stumbles to the bathroom.

"Who the fuck is Dave?" I ask.

"He's from New Jersey. You having a good night?"

"I really am." I tell her. Kristal knows the bar scene isn't really my thing; that's why we're sitting in a vegan restaurant drinking coffee. I appreciate this about Kristal.

When Dave returns he orders another drink. His accent is really coming out now.

"Eh, ya wanna get me a Pilsner guy?"

Denverites are not used to this. He is getting stranger and stranger looks at the people across

the bar.

Dave begins to argue with Kristal. “It’s tonight. They’re at the Ogden. RIGHT. FUCKING. NOW.”

“It’s in April.” Kristal insists. She pulls out her iPhone and begins to google.

“See RIGHT THERE!” Dave points to the phone. “Vampire Weekend. March 19th. THE OGDEN.”

It always sucks when the drunk guy is right. Kristal shakes her head.

“I really wanted to see them. But its sold out now.”

I nod empathetically. “I’ve never really listened to them, but I hear they’re excellent live.”

“They’re playing with The Blow too.”

“Noooooooo” I moan. I love The Blow.

Having settled this little dispute, we begin to close up shop and pay our tab.

This is when I see her. I’m not going to bullshit you, pretty girls at a bar are a dime a dozen. Even a pretty girl sitting at the bar alone. But inbetween a crowd of hipsters drinking PBR tallboys she sits awkwardly sipping a cup of coffee - she wears glasses that are thin rimmed and markedly untrendy, and a flannel shirt that would be hip as hell if she was not wearing a Northface fleece vest over the top of it.

For a while I just look at her as we are gathering our things. There is a recurring problem when I see girls I want to talk to - basically, I have no reason to do so. I can ramble, sure, like a pro, but what it all comes down to is, I’m hitting on you and now its up to you if you’re going to humor this complete stranger that clearly only values you for your looks since that’s all he knows about you. It’s an incredibly hard sell, and girls - the good girls at least - are just not appreciative of this kind of random attention. She was like a gazelle - I know that if I wasn’t cautious I would just startle her back into whatever bushes she had appeared from.

I turn to Kristal.

“Let’s say you see a pretty girl, sitting alone.” I propose. “No, let’s say you are a pretty girl, sitting alone. And I come up to talk to you, because you are a pretty girl sitting alone. What could I possibly say that would make you want to talk to me?”

“Where is she?” Kristal asks. “That one there in the hoodie?”

“God, no.”

“Good, cause that’s one of my friend’s ex wife. She works here. They had a big fight and she banned him, so he can’t eat here any more.”

Girls don’t understand what a minefield their gender is.

I point out the girl, as subtly as possible - luckily Dave is in his own little world, talking to some guy about physics.

“You sure she’s alone?”

“Yeah, she’s sitting between a couple and the register. You wouldn’t sit there if you were waiting for someone.”

“This is true. Ok well, go talk to her.” Kristal pushes me off the bar stool, I claw at the wooden countertop to remain traction. Honestly, I had no intention of talking to her. I never do. Its really just a nice thought.

“What what what?” Dave asks. He puts the pieces together pretty fast. “Ok, imma help you out man cause you a nice guy. I’ll show you how we do in Jersey.” He stands to leave but Kristal grabs him by the elbow as we explain to him that no, the Jersey method was not going to be necessary.

Kristal orders us all coffee. She wants a stakeout. For a few minutes I try to explain to her the logical inconsistencies of the bar pickup, that it feels tacky and that girls - the good girls - do not appreciate it. She is only halfway hearing it.

“Ok, well, she is alone, so invite her to come sit with us.” Dave and Kristal scoot down a seat, leaving the one next to me open.

But I do not know what I am going to say. I’m pretty well spoken, in general, when its not girls. That’s a whole different category. It’s kind of funny that when I’m just trying to order a sandwich I end up getting the deli owner’s life story, but when I’m actually trying to get to know someone I end up leaving with information like when the next bus is coming.

She sees me approaching and smiles at me. Wow. She has some of those bright eyes that leak sunshine, really quite amazing. She’s got a big accepting smile like my old friend Alex from

the midwest. I bet she is from the midwest.

“Hey,” I say, quite literally just going for it. “I noticed you were sitting here alone. Do you by any chance want to join me and my friends?”

Success!

“Yeah, I’d love to but,” she says, sipping the final drop of her coffee, “I’m just getting ready to leave to go see Vampire Weekend. Thank you though!”

“Oh you got tickets?” I ask, surprised. “That is awesome! My friends and I really wanted to go to that.”

For a moment it is like a real conversation. It floats un-awkwardly, careens around music and venues for a while before reaching a comfortable landing place of silence.

“Well, have fun tonight!” I tell her.

“You too!”

I walk back to my stool.

“Well?” Kristal and Dave lean in.

“She’s just leaving. *Someone* got tickets to Vampire Weekend.”

“Damn!” Dave cried empathetically. “You want I should give ‘er the Jersey method?”

“No no no” me and Kristal assure him.

“You think she’s blowing you off?” Kristal asks.

“Ah, probably. Well, I don’t know, that was a pretty specific blow-off.”

“You guys talked for a while, that’s good.”

“Yeah I felt like it went well. I think she legitimately has a concert to go to.”

We look over, and she is standing up to leave. I sip my coffee nervously as she rounds the bar. Don’t make eye contact, don’t be all weird, let it go.

As she passes me she puts a hand on my back.

“It was nice talking to you! Have a good night!”

“You too!” I respond. She sashays out the door, into the snow.

“*DUDE.*” Dave says.

“*I KNOW.*” I respond.

“Go get her number!” Kristal orders.

“What, go chase her? That’s creepy.”

“It’s *romantic!*”

“It is not.”

“Yeah it is bro, do it. She’d give it to you.”

“I think she really would, and either way, you should try.”

I stand up. Then I sit back down. “No no, its over.”

I stand back up again.

I sprint out the front door, without grabbing my jacket. The snow is still coming down hard and it takes my eyes a second to adjust to the glare of city lights on the white mess - I look up and down the street, but she is gone. I run around the corner. I jog to the next. How did she move so fast?

I go back in and sit down. “I lost her. She’s gone.”

Kristal frowns empathetically.

“Naw, you’re on a roll now though.” Dave cheers. “Let’s keep it going. Who’s next?”

I look around the bar - just a bunch of hipsters, beginning to lean on each other as the alcohol permeates, creating one homogenous blob of ironic twentysomething.

“I’m good.” I tell them. “That was exciting enough.”

“So you meet this totally nice girl,” Kristal reiterates, “that likes good music and isn’t a hipster, and you let her leave without getting her number.”

“Yes that is exactly what happened. That is exceedingly typical. *That* alone, that was amazing.”

Kristal shakes her head.

“You still thinking about *that* girl, huh?” Dave says, my previous sentiment finally setting in. “You don’t want to meet another girl, you liked *her*.”

“That’s the story.”

“Well let’s go find her.” he says, chugging the last of his beer. “What time does the concert start?”

“In like half an hour.” Kristal says.

“No, no no.” I insist. “No. No.”

We are running in the snow. We are going to find tickets. If Kristal wasn’t so appealing and Dave wasn’t so drunk I might have approached this night differently - let’s reiterate here that all I wanted was to do some dishes and sleep - but even though the muse has piss-poor timing you’re a fool not to give into the chase when she appears. I am throwing snowballs at strangers. I am talking to girls with Dave from New Jersey. I am chasing said girl as earnestly as I know how.

A few blocks from the venue a man reeking of whiskey starts to whisper to us and we lean in to listen. Forty apiece, that is not bad. They have the ticketmaster logo, they looks legit. He follows us to a liquor store where there is an ATM.

“I have never been here.” Dave announces as we withdraw money. “Why have I never been here?”

I am nervous and hit the wrong denomination button, so I pulse twenty dollars twice. The fee is only two dollars per withdrawl. I am not a rich man but I am not concerned about money tonight. I am making this happen.

“Where are the tickets?” Dave panics as we leave the liquor store. “Oh man that guy didn’t give us the tickets.”

“I have the tickets.” Kristal says. We are walking towards the venue, I can see the billboard and the line outside. We are really close when Kristal decides she needs cigarettes. To be honest I kind of have to go to the bathroom so we stop at a Seven Eleven. When I exit the bathroom Kristal is checking out and Dave is hitting on a long line of young girls waiting to use the bathroom. I am getting impatient. The line outside the Ogden has already filed in.

“Now I have to go to the bathroom.” Kristal says, getting into line.

“You, like - are you from around here?” Dave asks a girl with short hair purchasing bottles of water. She shakes her head and giggles to her friend. A woman by the candy bar isle begins to yell into her phone. “JAIL? *JAIL*? Not again Robert you son of a oh I SWEAR TO GOD ROBERT.”

“Boo boo boo boo!” Dave carrols to the woman. “Someone’s in trouble oh man Nick am I

talking too much?”

My skin is literally crawling. The first band is at nine, it is 8:45. Why are we in a Seven Eleven. By the time we leave there is no line to get in, so we just hand our tickets to a incredibly short woman in a yellow rain coat. The inside is packed and dark, people are buying drinks and Dave is making more friends. He pauses for a moment as I scan the room.

“You wan some backup? I think I remember that she was blonde.”

I appreciate the effort but tell him I’m going solo on this one. I begin to hunt. First the back row by the bar - then the next and next and next down. I walk behind and then in front of each railed row - I need to remind you that I am carrying a dramatic splay of outer-clothing from the snowball fight, sort of like a homeless man. My hat is ok looking but I am wearing the dishwashing sweater, cords over the top of sweat pants, double socks, and black business clogs. I look like I wandered into this place completely on accident on my way to the free clinic.

There’s the balcony too! From the dancefloor I stare upwards and try to make out the faces of the people hunched over the railing, as colored lights paint rainbows over them sporadically. I make my way up the stairs where there’s another bar, crowded with masses of people trying to order drinks. The people here are seated and facing the stage, I can’t see their faces so I walk through them as if trying to get to an imaginary seat at the end of their row. It is no use. I return to where Kristal and Dave stand, drinking Bacardi and Coke.

“No luck?” Kristal asks.

“Not at all.” I say. “I seriously looked at every single person here. Maybe I *was* getting blown off.”

“Keep looking.” Kristal motioned with her hand in a circle, scanning the room. “I’d bet she’s here.”

I return to the front of the theater, look around at the people smoking outside. She didn’t seem like she smoked. But as I make my way back inside I see a sleeve of flannel sharking its way through the crowd. Its, her, I could tell. Throwing all social norms to the wayside I begin to gallop through the theater lobby - I can see her walking toward the dancefloor, about to reach another giant mass of people.

“ . . . H- . . .H-Hey HEY!” I am nervous at first, but then think better of it. “HEY!”

She turns, those giant ocean eyes looking back in confusion as she sees me - first like she doesn't understand and then that sweet, *sweet* recognition, oh god, she remembers me.

“Hey!” she exclaims! “I thought you weren't coming!”

“Yeah, we uh - we found some tickets!”

“I thought it was sold out.”

“Yeah we scalped them. So hey listen - this is kind of weird, I know, I acknowledge that, but I felt so ridiculous after you left, that I didn't try to get your number or anything, or even your name. I was just thinking that I'd like to see you again. We should go to a show or get coffee or something.”

Overwhelming, I know. Like I've said, I can't plan my words out, they just happen. But this girl, she looks genuinely surprised and flattered.

“Uhh . . . yeah!” she smiles cheerily. “Yeah we should do that.”

She pulls out our phone, and we do that thing I love so much -

“Ok give me your number, ” she says, and I do - “And now I'm going to call you . . .”

That first vibration of my phone in my closed fist, the lights and alarms that herald the addition of the new contact - it's clamp is more satisfying than the game-winning three point shot I made in middle school basketball, more cathartic than the look of a master ball thrown at Mewtwo . . . she is drinking a Red Stripe. I love Red Stripe.

“I'm going to be down front if you want to join me.” she adds.

Can I tell you something? If you have never danced to Vampire Weekend with a midwestern girl that drinks Red Stripe, you are missing out. There is literally an entire hemisphere of endorphins your brain has not released yet. It's true, she's from Indiana - somehow I just know these things. And can you believe she had never listened to The Blow? But I swear to god her eyes started to water as we swayed to Parenthesis. If you haven't ever had that feeling, that how-the-fuck-did-this-happen love-rush excitement then I don't want to hear your goddamn excuses. I was doing dishes. I was throwing snowballs at strangers, I was drinking coffee and i was following her here. I am wondering, after the final encore, how this happened.

We walk out side by side.

“I have to go to a friend’s place now.” she explained. I think she could tell I was going to ask her to coffee, or drinks, or something just to keep the night going. I am an understanding person though; I am not going to beg the night for a spoonful more of what I’m already drowning in. We allow ourselves to lose each other in the crowd. I watch her head bob away, until I lose track and can’t see her anymore.

“I’m going to be at that wedding.” Dave says, leaning against a stop sign. We are assisting him in hailing a cab, as his flailing is inconsistent and liable to creep out cab drivers. “Seriously dude that was awmaasassing.” he is looking at Kristal who is laughing hysterically at everything he says.

“You should text her. Make sure she got where she was going safely.”

I pull out my phone and struggle to edit a message together.

“Krissal. *Thasso romantic right?* Kristal we should go on a date like that.”

She erupts in laughter.

“I’m gonna texxxx you make sure you gohh ome a’ight. Ok?”

“Ok Dave.”

“*Let’s do this again.*”

“Ok Dave.”

He waves through the back window as his cab speeds away.

I am walking Kristal home.

“Seriously, who the fuck was Dave, am I right?”

She shakes her head. “He is a really nice guy.”

“Yeah, no, he definitely is.”

“And he really likes me alot.”

“That he does.”

“I feel bad, because that’s just not going to happen. You missed it, he kept trying to make

out with me on the dancefloor. It was gross.”

“Yeah that’s too bad.”

“Yeah well, at least someone found love tonight, right? She text you back yet?”

“No. Do you think she’s going to?”

“I don’t know, it went well right?”

“It did, it did, it definitely did. But you never know with these things. I could have really creeped her out by the end. You know, there was this moment where she was like ‘So, what made you guys decide to come to the show?’, and I really didn’t have an answer, I think she kind of put it together after that. I mean I really pounced on her when I saw her. Plus I think she’s a little bit older than me. Not that that’s bad, but I’m like just *barely* my age, you know? And she’s going to go see some guy named Jamie *right now*. She said he was a friend but that’s totally what I would tell someone if I was in that position and I didn’t want it to get awkward, right?”

“Nick,”

“Do you think she’s fucking Jamie?”

Kristal stops me. “You did fine. You did everything right. If she doesn’t text you back, she doesn’t text you back.”

I kick a clump of frost with my business casual slip-ons. The snow has finally stopped, leaving a dense, undulating layer of ice over everything. “I know. I know I know.”

Have I mentioned that Kristal is a single mother? Understandably she’s hardly one to be caught up in happily-ever-after romances.

“You know the whole night, Dave didn’t ask me about my daughter once. He was too busy trying to convince me to go on a date with him when he was already out with me. Why does he want to worry about tomorrow so much, when we have tonight?”

I nod my head.

“Think about it. Does tomorrow really matter when you had tonight?”

You know, I think a lot of people feel like they’ve lost something important when they find out that real love isn’t anything like that bastard Walt Disney suggested. But the love after it is so much better -after you toss the notion of glass slippers you can just be in love because you want

to be, not because it has to be perfect and forever.

I drop Kristal off, and as I'm walking back to my place, I nervously check my phone - I don't know if she is ever going to text me. And though I want to, I know I can't judge the effect of the night by whatever message I may or may not receive from a girl that may or may not be in the throes of love with another man as we speak. I'm the only one that can give the night value. I can either begrudge the dangling edge of the evening, or accept the chase for what it is.

I turn off the lights in my still apartment, collapse into my bed. I feign sleep, but in my mind all I am thinking of is that phone, waiting for it come alive with its incandescent lightshow.

Oh, Godbless the Chase.