

## It Started with Her Smile

A tarnished stool in an underground bar attracts me to sit. Being in a room with no one I recognize feels so appealing. The filthy shadowy paint peels down toward the stained cement floor as it's craving to be released from its adhesive confinement. I kindly request a scotch in order to pacify the development of articles being generated in my thoughts for the daily newspaper. As the bartender places my drink on the splintered counter, I acknowledge the grime beneath his nails on his disfigured hands. His face possesses a permanent grimace that resembles his daily misery. Happiness isn't what it used to be in this destructive atmosphere. I never lost my passion, unlike the rest of the individuals in this dimly lit chamber. In this innovative realm, we smash bottles on heads and shake hands with death. Outside of the tap house it's each man to them self, but in here it's all welcomed spirits. I'm not active in this fragment of the city so I won't be disturbed or remembered.

The attractive entertainment on stage is a distraction from the depressing scenery. The singer has a brilliant voice and it's clear that singing until the tavern is vacant every night is the only desire keeping her alive. She observes me sitting at the counter and it's obvious she's analyzing to find out where I'm from and what I do. It doesn't take an additional glance to notice I do not belong in this part of town. How I appear in public verses when I'm developing the paper is two diverse sides of myself. I work alongside my best friend constructing newspapers. As far as I know, we are the last remaining newspaper being produced. The sales are poor, but it's motivation to get up in the morning. Being acknowledged or making a commotion could cause an unwanted interaction, so instead I observe the locals in their nightly rituals taking it as a past time.

I notice a young woman in a cracked murky leather coat that blends in well with the shadows. There is no hesitation that this woman is contrasting from the others that dwell here. It must be her hypnotizing smile; I believed I would never see another smile again. She rises up from the tarnished table behind me and strolls over to the vocalist and whispers softly in her ear. Her straight and lengthy jet black hair glistens in the limelight of the stage. She sat back down at the table with her friends and they giggled loudly. I could feel the scotch taking its toll and I begin to notice that the other bar dwellers are growing agitated of the obnoxious young adults. The adults at this particular table appear to act like they do not care what the others think of their behavior. I can't help but to continue rotating around to catch a better look of the captivating lady.

I take the opportunity to turn once again, only to catch her deep ocean blue eyes locking with mine. She has caught me in the act of gawking, so I rapidly turn back around. I'm as stiff as the drink in my hand and can sense my face throbbing as the room felt abruptly hotter. It felt as if her gaze left me branded. The embarrassment of being detected by such a magnificent wonder of the world has me preparing ways to terminate myself as swiftly as possible. In the middle of a careless adrenaline influenced resolution, I turn around once again and lift off the stool, only to find myself smashing into the girl's chest. I'm paralyzed and gawking at her once again with my jaw on the ground. She's just watching me with that damned smile again. I break out of my trance to look past her, only to see her supporters turned around and snickering at what just took place. I stumble over words trying to form a sentence, but I'm helplessly swooning over this tall woman.

She tells the bartender to order two more drinks for us. Somehow, she hasn't broken eye contact or removed the beaming smile on her face. I hear the contact of the two newly filled

glasses striking the timber bar behind me and yet I still can't turn away from her gaze. She extends her lengthy arms on either side of me to reach for the glasses, closing the gap amongst us even more. With an intimidating hoarse voice, she invites me back to her table. I feel a squeak leave my mouth and I nod my head excitedly.

Hours past as I become acquainted to everyone at the table. I discover the mysterious woman's name is Rose. Rose speaks enthusiastically about their impressive strategy to leave the city and freelance without regulations and authority. It sounds like an impossible fantasy, but one I unceasingly desired. As the evening passes, I can't help but fall for Rose. This lady is an adventurer, risk taker, and rebel. She has all the characteristics I wished I had the nerve to be and maybe that's why I'm so fascinated. She asks me if I would like to be her companion and join her in leaving town with her friends. Never have I been offered a future with somebody such as her, or been given a chance to follow my heart. She looks at me with her glistening royal blue eyes and signature smile, patiently awaiting my answer. I tumble into her enchantment and seal the deal with a returning smile.

One significant detail of news she overlooked to declare sooner was that they are in preparation to leave town this dawn. Rose states to meet her back in the bar at daylight with everything I wish to take with me. She requests a hefty amount of currency for supplies and I can't help but to fall under her spell again with her smile. I withdraw the requested amount of money for her needs, but am practically heartbroken to part with such a sum. We say our goodbyes and she seals her promise of gathering back at the bar with a kiss. As I sprint in the radiant illumination of the moon, I recap the inconceivable actions that transpired. The spectacular atmosphere is flourishing with a furious fire shining bright. I'm bursting with plentiful anticipation and wearing a smile I haven't worn in ages.

I erupt through the icy metallic door of my house and jump onto my best friend to wake her up. As irritated as she appears, she correspondingly seems pleasantly surprised to see me so cheerful. She gets completely caught up on what transpired at the bar and acts joyful for me, but troubled in my judgment to abandon everything for this woman I hardly know. I can't help but confess that she is accurate in a sense, but there's no way I can discard an inconceivable opportunity like this. Like a best friend does, she advises me not to trust this lady and the proposition is too good to be genuine. Despite what she articulates, I continue filling my backpack with necessities. We embrace and say our farewells outside the house.

With a bloated backpack over my shoulders, I dash back to the bar as the blushing sun is starting to rise. When I get to the exterior of the bar, not one person is to be seen and the neon decorations outside the bar are no longer buzzing with color. With slight disappointment, I come to the conclusion that Rose and her associates must be running late if they aren't here yet. I stroll inside to see the bartender alone in the uninhabited room and sweeping the abandoned litter at the table I was sitting at previously. He gives me an aggravated expression that exposed his displeasure to see me return.

I ask the bartender if he recalls seeing any of the individuals who sat with me after I left, but instead he proceeds to convey what truly transpired once I left. He clarifies that once I left, the tall woman came back inside to chat with his singer and proceeded to influence her to quit and leave with her immediately. She then informed him that I was to pay for their bill and then she headed for the city entrance with the vocalist at her hip. Rose again failed to enlighten me that she was planning on inviting an additional woman on our expedition.

Arriving at the gate, I frantically look around every building to find my absent acquaintance. I resort to questioning the guards if they observed a crowd pass through recently. It appears they have no recollection of any common civilians passing through except the typical traders traveling to the next town over. As I ask additional questions, it is evident that I have become an annoyance to them. They begin to dismiss me from their presence, but stop mid-sentence when I reference the tavern entertainer. He demands me to tell him everything I know about her and the criminals that she was with. I wear a puzzled look and attempt to describe Rose for there must be some sort of mix up. In no way he is talking about my sweet Rose. He assures me we are speaking of the same lady and I can't believe what I'm hearing. The guards at the gateway explain that Rose and her companions are a gang of con artists and thieves with a price on their heads. I was only the latest victim of her wicked scheme, but with that face I would fall prey to her again without thinking twice.

With the remaining dignity I have left, I make my way back home. I dread having to express the bad news to my housemate. I stand at the front entrance with no motivation to open it. My shadow silhouette, created by the golden climbing sun behind me, reminds me of my faults. As I stretch out toward the door, it swings wide open and I find myself face to face with my best friend. She embraces me and I could see tears on her face. While struggling to breathe, she expresses to me that she was going out to see if I had departed and to attempt to influence me not to leave. I tell her I'm not leaving and to go inside so I can clarify everything. Her reaction to the truth of Rose is equivalent to mine when I found out.

Together, we invent a strategy for revenge and to prevent another innocent from falling prey to her again. Rose won't get away with stealing and lying in this region any longer. I vow to myself to write every day for the paper and distribute it out as far as possible. Our mission is to

inform others so no one will fall as a victim to her scheme again. Her face will be recognized in every settlement she visits and justice will prevail.