

My watch always says 11:11 or 12:34. My roommate was a mystical San Diego native who liked her moonlight meditations and yoga at the beach, crystals and tarot cards, so when I exclaimed I was sick of seeing those times on my watch she remarked, "But, that's such a good sign! Don't shut out the Universe, Vera, the Universe is relaying messages..." She went on about this, being in alignment and how the Universe is speaking to me, but it was 11:11 am and I was running late for my doctor's appointment.

I didn't have time to listen to the Universe talk to me while my body was clearly yelling at me. The doctor even said so. She took an ultrasound and shook her head, scolding me and my lifestyle habits. I told her just to take out my gallbladder or my liver, whatever she needed to do to get rid of the pain. She ordered me some more tests and bloodwork and sent me home with fewer answers than I had arrived with. I left the doctor's office in a hurry. On my way out, an elderly woman, moving very slowly and hunched over her walker, lifted her head slightly up to make eye contact with me. She asked me what time it was.

My watch always says 11:11 or 12:34. This time it said 12:34.

"It's 12:34," I replied, then ran to my car because now I was late for a lunch date clear across town. Being late to this lunch date had started to make me anxious which was surprising since I had talked myself into not being anxious about it at all. It was with a man, Wilmer, I considered too smart to have anything to do with me. He could intellectualize anything and explain things in about five different ways as I would stare at him in awe -- I found his intelligence incredibly irresistible. His intellect was only rivaled by his sense of humor and humility.

This wasn't really a formal date honestly, I had tricked him into helping me with some of my writing. We belonged to the same writer's workshop and his shares were always brilliant, insightful, and lively so I couldn't wait to hear what kind of feedback and criticism he had for me. Being late was the last thing that should've been on my mind, however. By the time I arrived, he was sitting at a table on the patio of the Italian restaurant in Carlsbad, a beautiful coastal city north of San Diego where we'd agreed to meet. By a quick count of the empty glasses on the table, Wilmer was on his third glass of wine and feigning interest in the menu.

I smoothed out my navy blue dress and straightened my cream colored cardigan and held my laptop and purse at my sides. I sat down across from him and his eyes widened, "Well, hello there, Vera. I ordered

you a merlot but it appears that I also drank it for you. I have another one on the way." I was about to interrupt him to say that I actually had given up drinking because I was an alcoholic and can't stop once I start but as my mouth opened, the waitress set the overfilled glass of burgundy fluid scented with a sour and woody smell in front of me. Into my opening mouth went the wine.

My watch always says 11:11 or 12:34. I squinted at my Apple watch and the screen illuminated cheerfully in the darkness with a pink butterfly background and 11:11 am on its face. Why was it so dark if it was morning? I looked around the room and didn't recognize it at all, only that it was a hotel room with the black out curtains drawn shut and I was alone in this big bed. I was fully clothed, wearing my navy blue dress and cream colored cardigan, now embellished with red wine stains and black mascara. I let out a groan. I did it again - blacked out and probably ruined what could have been at least a nice friendship. In addition to that, I hadn't even gone back to work after lunch, I had no idea where my car was, and I was obviously missing another day of work. I stuffed my head under the giant cold pillow and tried not to hate myself until I got some sober sleep and could piece the day together.

My watch always says 11:11 or 12:34. When the knocking was loud enough to wake me it was 12:34 am. I had slept the entire day and I didn't even know who was paying for this room. I jumped out of bed and looked for my purse and my laptop. They were sitting in a chair near the window. A quick survey of the room suggested that drinking had continued into the day and night. I looked outside the window and somehow I had managed to end up in downtown San Diego. The knocking continued at the door so I cautiously made my way there, stepping over empty beer cartons and bottles. I stumbled over my shoes and a pair of men's shoes and made it to the door. I looked through the peephole and there he was, Wilmer, in an undershirt and messy hair, looking quite disheveled. He was carrying a paper bag containing what appeared to be a twelve pack of beer. I'd have to end this now.

When I opened the door, Wilmer had other plans in mind. He pushed by me emanating the stench of cigarette smoke and started ranting about the government and God, about fruit and statues, about hipsters and lawn chairs. His eyes were wild and his hands were frantic. I wasn't afraid but I knew I couldn't stay. I prayed

quietly for peace and guidance while the words he rambled filled the room with the nonsense of a manic drunk -- a person I had been so many times before.

My eyes were shut and I called upon a higher power to restore us both to sanity. There had been too many nights like this before. There had been enough shame. There had been enough surrender. But had there been? If I was here, in a situation like this, again?

My watch always says 11:11 or 12:34. I had been gone from my own familiar life since Tuesday and I didn't know what day it was, only that it was 11:11 am. My blue dress was now thoroughly wrinkled and had cigarette burns from when I'd fallen asleep with a cigarette in my mouth and when Wilmer had accidentally ashed on me. My cream colored cardigan had brown stains from beer that had been spilled on it, to accent the red wine and black mascara from crying drunkenly about happy things and sad things. In the almost week that had passed, I hadn't been able to leave the hotel room while Wilmer was swinging from being a completely rational charismatic man to what AA people would refer to as, "A drinker in his cups... an unlovely creature." I had only managed to escape while he was in the bathroom vomiting on Saturday morning and begging me to go to the store to get more alcohol.

My watch always says 11:11 or 12:34. But that Saturday morning, I didn't want to know what time it was but I knew the stores would start selling alcohol soon. I grabbed all of my belongings, which had been littered across the room like confetti, and spat on my fingers. I borrowed a glance at the mirror near the entry and rubbed the saliva underneath my eyes to remove remaining traces of mascara and smudged eyeliner. My shoes had disappeared two days ago, we had searched everywhere for them before relenting that they'd been a sacrifice to the God of our Powerlessness so I walked out of the room and into the carpeted hotel hallway completely barefoot.

This was a nice hotel and the people that were awake at this time seemed wholesome and warm. They were strolling to the free continental breakfast or walking to the pool for a lap before breakfast. They were families excitedly sprawling out maps for sightseeing or marathon runners tying their neon running shoes that matched their neon running suits. Everyone looked happy and healthy and whole. I walked passed them all and prayed as I walked into the drugstore that was just now opening. The layout of this store is always the

same, with miscellaneous home goods and greeting cards to the left and liquor and groceries to the right. Without hesitation, I walked in and turned left. I found a pair of cheap black and white slip on shoes, and marched to the checkout counter. The shoes were \$4.96 so I put a five dollar bill on the counter and walked out, stepping into the shoes on the way to the trolley. I didn't have a trolley pass and I didn't really care. The least of my problems would be a citation from the trolley police for not paying fare. The trolley was empty but I was standing. A homeless man tapped me on the shoulder and motioned for me to sit. I sat. I breathed. Then I cried.

My watch always says 11:11 or 12:34. That Saturday night, my watch said 6:27 pm as I sat it on the bathroom counter before getting into the bathtub. I felt as though I had broken a curse. My phone rang, it was Wilmer, still on his binge of simultaneously drinking and dialing. I ignored the phone call. I clutched my abdomen, the familiar pain which had no origin and no explanation. The water was waiting for me and it was hot. I was to be made pure again.

I eased myself into the bathtub and made peace with my indiscretions as I stared at my feet. These feet had walked me through liquor stores and bars, through mental institutions and general hospitals, through offices and courthouses, on concrete and on rugs. It seemed that just as the Universe had supposedly been telling me that I was right on track, my wheels had fallen off and I was here again in a morass of self-pity. All of the greying old men in the AA meetings I had attended had been right -- each relapse was worse than before and my bottom was getting lower and lower. If the Universe had been trying to say anything to me at all, it was that I had nothing left to try and no one else to save me. No amount of amethyst crystals, no amount of writing, no amount of romancing, no amount of important job titles, no amount of alcohol -- the problem was within me and here, I had to stop.

As the bath water muddied with a week's full of grime, my mind became clear and I found clarity.