

## Libby

Libby turned up the collar of her full length fur coat against the biting wind. Blinking back tears that threatened to cascade, she pulled open the heavy wooden door with a shaky grip. The all familiar smell of ancient beer and decades of debauchery overwhelmed her senses, this stench was usually a comfort but tonight it made her wretch with disgust.

A chipped rocks glass full of neat bourbon was placed down with a nod from the bartender before Libby had even removed her coat. With one gulp she devoured the warm brown liquor and suppressed the acidic feeling that rose from the pit of her stomach. She lit a cigarette and took a long drag, ignoring the 'No Smoking' sign behind her dirty blonde head that was vaguely visible in the dark red lighting. A few patrons gasped in disbelief at her brazen behavior but she paid them no heed. Libby knew no one would bother her in this moment, in this place.

A slam of the rocks glass on the bar prompted its swift refill. Libby grimaced and shuddered as his face flashed across her mind before she quickly drowned him with another gulp.

Half a bottle and a pack of cigarettes later, Libby slowly climbed down from her perch and tried to find the arm holes of her fox fur. "Come on miss Libby, I got you," Vince the door guy drawled in his unmistakable Bronx accent. Libby let Vince help her into the coat with her head hanging down as if all the muscles in her neck had given way. "Can I get you a car miss Libby?" asked a mildly concerned Vince. This had been a regular occurrence since that night so his patience was wearing a bit thin. Libby shook her head, stumbled across the sticky floor and out into the freezing streets in the vague direction of the West Village.

The cold wind always seems to penetrate the soul during a particularly frigid New York winter but Libby barely noticed. She wondered down streets she used to know; now they felt like a foreign maze she couldn't navigate. Brownstone buildings and boutique shops jumped out at her and leered as she bumbled past, like the city was mocking her. Fragments of memories threatened to surface from the bourbon swamp but she swallowed them whole and pushed them to the deepest recesses of the darkest places with no maps to return back there.

It had been exactly one year. One year since she had been intoxicated by his scent, one year since she had felt his body pressing against hers, one year since she had laughed with him over one of their hundreds of inside jokes, one year since she had opened the door to their apartment and seen them together.... One year since he was lost to her in such a stupid and predictable way. What was it that Brianna had that she didn't? What was so wrong with her that her husband of 10 years had so easily cast her aside? Libby was too scared to ask herself these questions even one more time. She was too close to the edge, teetering, once more and she would be gone forever.

A vibration from her pocket startled Libby as she turned a corner onto W12th street. It was Andrew asking if she wanted to grab a drink. That was code for 'let's swig a cocktail real quick and then go back to my place.' Andrew had always been lurking around Libby as long as she had known him. He worked in her building and they sometimes crossed paths over lunch. Libby was an attractive woman and had always had many admirers, less so recently since she wore her bourbon and cigarette addiction in every new crease of her face. Accessorized by sad eyes and not quite enough body weight to fill out her skin.

When Libby was cast aside a year ago Andrew became a shoulder to cry on but he also saw it as his opportunity to try and finally win her for himself. Libby let herself be seduced by him, she used him to feel relevant again and to try and fuck her pain away. With every thrust she pushed her memories deeper and deeper inside but to no avail.

Andrew was boring, he had no sense of humor and they had nothing in common to talk about. Their sexual chemistry was fairly decent though and he knew what he was doing, enough so that it kept her coming back. They say the definition of insanity is to repeat the same action over and over in the exact same way but expecting a different outcome. Andrew was Libby's insanity. No amount of thrusting could shove all of that pain inside; she was too full up already.

Libby's fingers hovered over the text message. Did she really want to see this loser again? Upon contemplation, her blurry gaze travelled upwards and she realized she was standing in front of 'Rosemary's', their favorite place. The tears she had been frantically trying to hold back could no longer be contained and they gushed silently down her face in a black river of make up.

Despite the haze of booze and tears, Libby was jolted back to sobriety by the scene before her. Through the steamed up windows of the hot restaurant on this cold night, before the cosy candle light and surrounded by the delightful hustle and bustle of this vibrant place, there he was. It was like looking at herself a year ago from afar, but now from a very different place.

There they were, Brianna and him. "Damn it, he looks good," muttered Libby out loud to no one in particular. He was wearing his favorite black suede jacket and his wavy dark grey hair fell just above his hypnotic brown eyes. Then Libby noticed he was holding Brianna's hand across the table, lightly stroking her fingers with his own; just like he used to do to her. Brianna was leaning forward suggestively and had her beautiful head tilted coquettishly as she laughed at his joke. "Grrr, he always was so fucking funny!" Libby yelled out, startling a young couple walking by her arm in arm. Libby turned to them and continued yelling, "Oh yeah, it's always sooooo great when you first meet a guy. Just you wait honey, he'll swap you in for a younger model one day! It's what they all do! Run now from this fucker while you still can!" The male half of the couple put his arm tighter around his

lady's shoulders and pulled her away from the scene. As she walked swiftly away he retorted, "Hey, screw you lady!"

Libby wondered what the hell she was thinking, how did she get to the point where she was yelling at strangers in the street? How had she gotten this far out of control? When did she lose herself to him? When did it switch so that she relied on him solely for her own happiness and not herself?

These questions come flooding into her mind as if a dam had just burst open inside of her. Libby began to laugh, how had she been so blind? She had been a fully functional, smart, sexy, attractive and funny woman before he ever existed in her world. "Screw him, I don't need him!" Libby thought. She took one last look at her past through the window and realized how happy she looked. "Goodbye," she whispered as she blew a kiss to him from across the street, then she slowly turned and walked away.

After walking a couple of blocks in a stunned, numb silence with herself, Libby realized she was still holding her cell phone in one hand and Andrew's text was glaring up at her. Andrew.... She didn't need him in her life, he was a reminder of her past and of what she wanted to let go of. He *was* quite good in bed but come on, this is New York City, there is no shortage of men. Or women for that matter.....

Libby replied to Andrew that she was no longer interested in him or what he had to offer and then turned her phone off. That wasn't enough though, she never wanted to speak to him or anyone else she knew again, this was to be a re-birth, Libby 2.0. With an impromptu yell, Libby threw her phone on the ground and stomped on it with her black leather boot. The glass shards sprung out of the device like broken diamonds being tossed away, how appropriate Libby thought. She caught sight of herself in a shop window and recoiled in horror at the black, sticky make up mess of her face punctured by two red and swollen eyes. Libby licked her fingers and attempted to rub away the smudges. "Whatever," she thought as she sauntered down the street.

Ahead of Libby was the famous 'White Horse Tavern' watering hole. She walked confidently towards it, through the door and over to the bar, ignoring the bemused stares regarding her appearance from the other patrons.

"I'll have a neat bourbon please," Libby asked the salty looking bar tender. "Wait no.... That's not what I want anymore." "What's it gonna be lady? I ain't got all night!" Was the response.

"I'll have a glass of white wine please and from now on that's what I'll be drinking!" With that, Libby sat down at the bar and said cheers to the grumpy bar keep. She took a sip of her wine and knew that everything was going to be alright.