

If I were an object I would be wine. I drink wine most nights and if I could, I'd drink it most days. It gets me, and I get it. I understand how something so universal yet so unique can selectively attract its suitors based on its character traits. Sort of similar to how I've longed for connection and have only received interest from whatever the parallels of life have chosen for me, or perhaps what the notes of my present life have subconsciously chosen for itself.

Jason, Alex, Vince, Jonathan. Boring, unattractive, dirty hipster, and probably a pedophile. Night after night I try my luck of love, shooting for the 'I met my man on Tinder,' stars, by swiping; mostly left, then right .5% of the time. It's Saturday night, or what I like to call laundry night, and instead of joining friends for an evening that could lead to like or lust, or at least the perception of it, I've chosen to clean my underwear. How to Get Away With Murder is humming in the background, loud enough to soothe my loneliness, but quiet enough to convince me I'm not alone, real or imagined.

Since I moved to the city of dreams and palm tree filled skylines three years ago, I was making up for wasted time stuck in a Pleasantville-like relationship back in middle America. After six years of dating, my ex Charles wanted babies and joint checking accounts and I wanted to get as far away from him as possible. We had grown apart like we were intended to, which I realized in year five, but I stuck things out in of hope my feelings being temporary. For 28 years I believed my mind could overrule my heart and this was no different. My first real relationship had turned into *the* relationship, but I was

too young and this was too soon. When I finally ended it, I wanted grief, the kind I saw in movies where girls would cry for days on end, crumble at the feet of friends with sorrow for time wasted and love lost. Instead, I was overcome with a profound sense of freedom along with a sprinkle of fear of the unknown. On my best days, my newfound liberation led me to being boy crazy. On my worst days it led me to curling up on my couch in a debilitating loneliness. This, no amount of wine or TV could soothe.

I fell in love with David's photos. His naked chest intentionally visible and covered with black, red and green faded tattoos that appeared to have had meaning at one time. His disheveled hair grazed his shoulders in dirty golden buttery waves, and he had alluring blue eyes I imagined our future child adopting. David's profile said he 'hated bullshitters and that drunk girls were unattractive.' I told the truth more than anyone I knew and excluding my wine habit, I preferred to toke over taking shots. We were perfect for one another. After a few back and forth texts filled with blushing emojis and exclamation points in series of threes, David asked if he could call me. Considering my dating pool had been exhausted weeks prior, I said 'sure' and didn't wait three minutes before my phone vibrated.

"Hey Sabrina! It's your Dad," I unexpectedly heard on the other line.

"Oh hi! How are you?" I said uneventfully.

“I’m good, just calling to check on ya, see how you’re doing. I uh, called and left you a message last week... Just missing you babygirl!”

“Thanks for checking on me, I’m well. Just expecting a call right now actually...”

“Well I don’t want to hold you, just wanted to tell you I love you. Give me a call tomorrow, or whenever you can.”

“Yes! I sure will,” I said with little intention of doing so. Resentment arose and I fumbled for my wine only to discover the weight of an empty glass.

Moments later an unknown number popped up on my phone, its David. What ensues is hours of heart-flutter worthy chatter followed by visions of the proposal David would magically surprise me within 1.5 years. Right after our two-week trip to Italy and Greece and right before I would become pregnant with our first child, a girl named Genevieve Rose. David was energetic, exciting, charming and had that ‘something about him’ quality I couldn’t quite articulate. He was passionate about issues like social justice and he grew heated talking about economic disadvantages created by systemic racism for black and brown people, despite his whiteness. His fury fueled my curiosity and two nights later we were on our first date, although I would’ve said yes to going out with him the first night we matched had he asked.

Parked in the alley of my shitty shoebox Hollywood apartment building, I open the icy blue Acura door and slide in. We exchange smiles and immediately after, a kiss. Reward overpowered risk and I was down for the ride. A close friend

of his was having an art show in Beverly Hills at the ritzy Sofitel Hotel and I was his honored plus on.

“What do you want to drink,” said David.

“Are you sure,” I reply. I remember that David is sober, and God forbid I’m the one to send him back into an alcoholic spiral.

“Yeah, just because you drink doesn’t mean I have to,” said David.

I was too nervous to not drink but too scared to come off as a lush.

“Can I have a pinot grigio? Thank you,” I say.

Before David, there was Anthony. I didn’t immediately find him attractive but accepted his offer for dinner and a movie out of boredom and a ‘why not’ mood. I gladly chose the restaurant, Osteria La Buca, an Italian staple with the best caprese salad east of the 405. Two-thirds through my first glass of Sauvignon Blanc, I knew what type of date Anthony and I would have – me talking while he listened.

“So, what do you do for fun, when you’re not working?,” I cheerfully asked. “The gym usually. Sometimes I go out with co-workers,” he spoke in between bites of butter soaked sourdough bread. I smiled subtly while nodding my head and waiting for him to at least ask me the same question. “You?” he managed to say. “The same I guess. Working out, hanging with friends, movies, events, festivals. I also love to cook!” I rattle off. For the next hour we exchanged sentences and one to three-word answers until we’d both grew tired of the awkwardness. We went on a second date because I had cancelled plans and

needed a fill in. We went to happy hour that turned into a 2AM taco truck run and juvenile banter about who was the most delinquent as a kid. By date three, my indifference for Anthony graduated to intrigue. Soon, I was smitten. Anthony was in the military - a special ops unit called MARSOC - that required him to be in Guam and the Philippines for six months out of the year with his impending doom approaching a mere three months after we began dating. Initially I was unbothered. I simply wouldn't put any extra effort into us. Whatever happened, happened. Unfortunately, when Anthony left so did his promises of flying me to Guam. It was the last time I would risk falling for someone I needed to grow to like.

Unlike Anthony, the attraction between David and I was freakishly magnetic from day one. Our first date felt more like our 15th date, as if we had known each other forever. I was introduced to his friends as if he knew we'd see each other again. I was simply his 'beautiful date, Sabrina,' an intro that said both everything and nothing depending on how you interpreted it. My hand was held gently, and my brown skin was given the compliment of being softer than anything he had ever touched. It wasn't just how I was being wooed that attracted me to David, it was the exhilarating, guard less connection I felt, and I was sure he felt as well. David confided in me that he was recently released from prison for a five-year sentence of robbery and aggravated assault. He was innocent, but the law didn't see it that way and David was now a statistic of the odds not being on his side like many other men in his urban, survival-based

hometown of South Central. I thought about running away. Then I decided to stay. No relationship was perfect, and love knows no bounds, or something like that.

Driving in Los Angeles traffic any time after 2PM on a Friday is a hellish trap. Layer in the rambunctious annual West Hollywood Halloween parade and your odds of getting in or out of any area north of the 10 or east of the 405 are slim.

Brian was one of my best friends and someone who took Halloween very seriously. By late-August of every year, costume materials were ordered, designers hired, and makeup artists were booked. Tonight, Brian was the spitting image of the mad hatter while I was Rosie the Riveter wearing the least wrinkled denim shirt in my closet and an old bandanna I picked up from the .99 store.

"I can't believe this is your first PRIDE parade in LA girl," Brian yelled above the techno remix to Rihanna's 'We Found Love,' while waiting for my honest answer. "I know right, I think last year... OUCH," I yell. I spin around and see a girl an inebriated girl bounce off a group of guys behind me who did out what I really wanted to do and push her to the ground. "Sorry she's super drunk," said another girl trailing behind tipsy tangy who was struggling to find her footing on the sticky, liquor-soaked floor. "Get your sloppy ass friend, girl!" Brian yelled at the powerless friend who either didn't hear him or ignored him and proceeded to drag her friend in the direction of what I'd hoped was the exit sign. "People do not know how to handle themselves. Stupid drunk bitches. Wanna go to

Mood?" Brian said. Mood was known for their heavy pours and male dancers who 'let you touch them more than the other gay bars,' according to Brian. "Sure," I say, knowing damn well I've hit my limit of crowds and drunkenness for one night. I clamor through the doorway and walk past what must be forty people in line shivering, lined up outside the club's entrance. I turn around to talk shit to Brian about how people who wait in lines lack self-worth and see Brian talking to a slightly thinner 6'2" Mark Consuelos look-alike. I Irish goodbye knowing Brian won't notice I'm gone until some time.

After my hourish commute home from work, driving to the parade wasn't an option and David offered to be my knight in shining armor and pick me up. "I'm 15 minutes away," said David's text. "Traffic sucks." I figured he was just about head over heels in love with me as no one offers to pick anyone up from West Hollywood Halloween. It was like asking a friend to help you move - no one *wants* to help, but they do, usually so you won't think they're a dick. "Sorry! I replied. Hopefully it lightens up soon. Thank you for picking me up." "Yeah, all good," David flatly replied.

Outside, the once 85-degree temperatures dropped to nearly 60 degrees. I shivered excessively, more than what was valid. A quick glance around to observe how others were dealing with the chill confirmed I was alone and colder than usual. "Hey, get in!" David barked as he pulled up. "I've been sitting in traffic forever to come get you. C'mon get in and close the door."

"Yeah, again, sorry. Didn't expect it to be this big of a deal," I mumbled.

We peeled away from the curb in silence and away from the noise I had found comfort in hearing. David grew quiet, entranced with the road in front of him. A red hue glazed across his face and ears. I placed my left hand on his right knee in hopes of connection but was met with distance.

I don't remember when David left my apartment. It could've been one hour or three hours ago for all I knew. I strained to sit up in my bed, awakening my numbness to the pain in my pelvis. I massage the handprints on my neck, looking for evidence of passion, finding detriment instead. I hear echoes of the word no but can't determine if it's me saying it. I feel the pressure of David's body on top of mine, dense and persistent. Warm tears slide sideways on my face, grazing my temples and falling into my matted hair.

As a kid I quickly learned to block out the things in life that hurt. To push them so far down that no one would ever see my pain. It was OK that people were shitty, because I would soon forget anyway. I forgot when my father went away to prison. I forgot the times he promised to take me with him on father-daughter dates to the park and museum like I saw other more fortunate kids doing. I forgot him when the pain of his absence was too hard to bear even in the few attempts from him to make his presence known.

I roll out of bed and grab my phone to check the time and see 'David message' displayed on my phone. "Hey, hope you're doing OK! Sorry about last night, I was a bit upset. You feeling OK? Hope I wasn't too rough 😊." I delete and block David's phone number. He can't reach me, and I can't reach him. I call Brian and ask if I can come over and talk. This time I don't forget. This time I choose to remember.