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11.12.04

AA

If I have to stand up and say, "Hi, my name is Tonya and I'm an alcoholic," I am going to scream. AA meetings are bullshit. Everybody already knows I'm an alcoholic; they don't need me to say it. Who doesn't know after that headline, "Teen mother kills baby in drunken rage." Fuckin' reporters.

I've told anybody who will listen that it was just an accident, but nobody believes the baby killer. Yes, I was drunk; yes, I was being irresponsible; but no, I did not purposefully kill my baby. Nobody will believe me, but I don't blame them. I wouldn't believe somebody like me either.

My precious baby boy. My precious little Joshua, oh how I miss you so much. I better not start to tear up. If there's anything worse than an alcoholic baby killer then it's an alcoholic baby killer who's crying to get sympathy. Not that anybody would feel sympathetic for me anyway.

Of course the meeting is starting late, it's not like alcoholics are very good at keeping time. Look at that guy over there: bald, fat and ugly. No wonder he drinks. That woman looks like she is about 24 hours away from being a bag lady. That girl must not have seen the sign; crack whores are meeting down the hall, sweetie. I don't fit in here. If my picture wasn't in the paper then nobody would think this is the face of an alcoholic. I used to be beautiful; I used to be the epitome of beauty. Now I am just a 20-year-old baby killer.

And here comes another low-life alcoholic. Wait, this guy actually looks different. He's oddly attractive, but it's definitely not because of his clothes. I haven't seen a plaid jacket with leather elbows since the last time I watched Mr. Rogers. His coat is so old it might have

actually been Mr. Rogers'. "Hi, my name is Gregory and I'm an alcoholic." Hello Gregory, indeed. Not only is he attractive, but he got this damn meeting started. Now I'm only 50 minutes away from going home to drink my problems away.

Jesus, I can't believe it's only half done. I can't stand hearing these people talk about their lives anymore. For fuck's sake, I don't care. At least I get free coffee out of this

"Hi, I'm Gregory." Not expecting anybody to be talking to me, I don't turn around at the sound of his voice. If he is talking to me then he can talk to my back. "Excuse me miss," the man says. Filling up my cup of coffee, I look beyond myself in the mirror. Gregory is much more handsome up close. Too bad I can't say the same about me. After the accident I try to avoid all mirrors; I've become so frumpy. "I couldn't help but notice you haven't said anything yet. Don't you want to share your story?"

"I'm sorry, I don't really feel like sharing anything. I wouldn't be here if it wasn't for the cour... uh, if my friends hadn't convinced me to come." If he hasn't recognized me from the paper, then I'm not going to volunteer any of those details.

"Is this your first time? The first time is always the hardest. I know, it's my twenty-third consecutive first time." I can see him smiling in the mirror. He's got a great smile and he's really a beautiful man, but he looks so sad. "Can I buy you a cup of coffee?"

"That's a great line bud, but you know the coffee is free, right?"

"Ah, sarcasm. I like that in a woman. You're very intriguing, Miss..." He pauses, waiting for me to fill the silent air with my name. I won't give it up that easily. "No, I meant after this dreadful meeting. May I buy you a cup of coffee then?" For the first time since he began talking, I noticed a slight accent in his voice. The way he said dreadful makes me think he's British.

"Well I, well I..."

“Two well I’s. I will take that as a yes then,” he says, winking at me in the mirror. “I better get the meeting started back up. I just keep coming back, and somehow I’m now the leader. I guess I’ve just outlasted the last three. So, how about that cup of coffee?” Gregory asks me again.

Throughout the rest of the meeting he kept looking at me, as if that would make me stand up and talk. He’s beautiful, but not that beautiful. “The least you can do is have one cup with me, I’m not a murderer, I swear.” The word murderer has become like nails on a chalkboard to me; it’s my kryptonite. Joshua loved Superman. I loved Joshua. It looks like he wishes he could take those words back. He must have seen a frown beginning to form, or he knows more than he is letting on. “Look, I didn’t mean anything by that. Now you really must let me buy you coffee, it’s the least I can do. Besides, I love talking about myself and I need an audience.”

“All right, fine. But you better not try to rape me or anything. I’ve got pepper spray in my purse.”

“Brash – I like that as well.” Gregory flashes his sad smile. “Deal. Let’s go to Radina’s. I can’t stand how commercialized Starbucks is.” That’s the first thing he’s said all night I can agree with. When we get to Radina’s, Gregory pulls a chair out for me. He must be British. I’ve never met an American man who did that for me. Of course I’ve never met an American man. All I seem to find are boys. Taking his hand out of his black leather glove, he reaches across the table and says, “Hi, I’m Gregory.”

Yeah, I know; you’ve only mentioned your name at least three times already. “Hi, I’m Tonya.” If he does know who I am, then it won’t hurt using my real name anyway. I like my name; it’s pretty. I make an effort to avoid his handshake by grabbing the sugar shaker sitting in the middle of the table. “So, what’s your deal anyway? Why did you want to have coffee with me so badly?”

“Because you are beautiful,” he says. “Most of the girls I’ve met lately are just hideous. Did you see that one girl at the meeting? I think she missed the memo: crack kills. Bloody ‘ell.”

“Bloody ‘ell? You are British aren’t you?”

“Unfortunately, I am. I try to hide my accent. I try to hide everything really.” Another thing we can agree on – hiding is the only way to survive reality. The waitress brings us two cups of coffee. Two very black, very hot cups of coffee.

“Would you like to make this coffee Irish?” I ask, reaching for the flask that is always in my purse.

“I don’t think you’ve heard – we’re alcoholics. Besides, I don’t like the Irish.” He smiles again, but I still notice a certain sadness in him. It might be from years of drinking, or maybe I just wish somebody were as sad as me. “So Tonya, tell me a little about yourself.”

I’m Tonya; I’m an alcoholic; I killed my baby; there is nobody left in the world who loves me. “What do you want to know?”

“First of all, how old are you? Are you even old enough to drink? Am I going to have to card you before we have sex?”

“Whoa! Fuck you asshole. Just because I’m having coffee with you doesn’t mean we are going to have sex. I’m leaving.”

“Wait, I was just kidding. I wanted you to say more to me than three words. It worked didn’t it?”

“Yeah, I guess it did. But that’s a good way to get some pepper spray in your face. I’m 20, by the way.”

“20? I knew it; you aren’t even old enough to drink. How old were you when you had your ba.” He coughs in his hands, thinking I might have missed the first syllable of baby.

“Excuse me. How old were you when you had your first drink?”

“I knew it. You do know who I am. Are you some kind of reporter? I fuckin’ hate reporters. I’ve said all I’m going to say. No comment, no comment.”

“No, I’m not a reporter, but yes, I did know who you are. I’m sorry I didn’t say anything sooner. It’s just that we have a lot in common, and I needed to talk to somebody in the same situation. I lost my son five years ago. And you really are beautiful”