

This Man's Life

A story by DONOVAN RUSSO

“I think he was in a class of mine once. Wasn't much of a scholar but still, what a shame. Am I right?” She asked.

The violinist played and the drummer tapped with bright smiles under the Roman moonlight. It was in fact a full moon that was complimented nicely with a scatter of stars. Across the street was a Roman cathedral. It was built high with a bell tower and it had a cross engrained front in center with no other than Jesus Christ himself hanging on it. Him and his wife drank glasses of Montoya Cabernet and ate butterflied, 16 oz. filet mignons with sea scallops and seasoned asparagus. She made sure to dress up nice for him; he had been quiet the whole trip. She wore a red dress with that pearl necklace he bought her on their honeymoon thus many years ago. She also had on that perfume that he claimed to like, an Elizabeth Arden to be exact. But he still didn't seem to be himself.

“Was he ever in one of yours?” She drank a sip of wine.

“One of what?”

“Your classes.”

“Who?”

“The boy. The student.”

He sighed, appeared as if he was thinking of an answer. “No,” he drank his wine.

“He was quiet, certainly not a standout. But I remember him being polite.”

He found himself staring at the cross on the cathedral. He questioned the sacrifices of Christ and why he would ever give himself up like that. He questioned what good it did him. The world was still in shambles, filled with nothing but the worst of people.

“I think it was drugs,” she said.

“What?”

“He must’ve been doing drugs, probably got roped into the wrong crowd. That’s usually how it happens.”

He took one of the rolls filled with olives, glazed with garlic. He buttered it to indulge.

“What’s wrong with your steak? Do you not like it?” She asked.

“It’s fine. I just want a piece of bread.”

“It’s your third piece.”

He rolled his eyes and gulped another sip of wine. He then took a bite out of his bread, chewing fastly and intimately.

“Think about it though. How many students get in trouble for drugs there? Maybe he was even dealing, couldn’t meet his quota. They probably snatched him in the middle of the night, shot him and left him in some hole,” she said.

He started picking at his steak again.

“Imagine being his parents? Not knowing where your child is. Imagine being him? What if he is at the bottom of some hole? What if his corpse is just rotting, never to be found?” She continued.

He rubbed his eyebrows and raised his hand, signaling the waiter. “Check.”

After their dinner, they strolled down the streets of Rome and looked at all the different houses and stores. They stopped at this gelato shop and had their sweets outside at a small wooden table.

“I really shouldn’t be eating this,” she laughed, eating another spoonful of her vanilla gelato.

“What’s a vacation if you’re not having fun?” He took a bite out of his chocolate gelato.

“Are you having fun?”

“Why wouldn’t I be?”

“You haven’t been yourself. You’ve been quiet, distant.”

“Guess I’m just taking it all in,” he forced a smile.

She didn’t smile back. Instead, she looked across the street and saw that a young man had just proposed to his girlfriend. The woman began to cry and he hopped up from his knee to grab her and to kiss her. He then put the ring on her finger.

“Isn’t that lovely?” She asked him.

“Sure.”

“Remember when we were young? How simple it was?”

“It was never simple,” he wiped his mouth with a napkin.

“What is your problem?”

“I don’t have one.”

“Can’t you be happy about anything?”

They finished their gelato in silence. He spotted this painter on a balcony. The man was tan, with dark flowing hair and hazel nut eyes. He looked lost in his work, mystified and over

taken into another dimension. He questioned what the man could be painting. Was it the scene below? Could it be him and his wife? Did the painter truly see him for himself?

“I’m ready,” she grabbed her purse and stood up.

They walked back to their hotel. She took a bath and he sat on his own balcony, drinking from a bottle of Single Malt scotch. He looked at the moon and saw its glowing face looking down on him. He pulled out his Iphone and searched “Nolan Greenwood”. The internet was plagued with news headlines.

University Student Still Missing.

Where is Nolan Greenwood? The World Waits To See.

Hofstra Student Missing: The Search For Nolan Greenwood.

He put his phone away and drank more of the scotch. He then put his face into his hands and shut his eyes real tight. It then began to rain.

“Are you okay?” His wife came out in a white bathrobe.

He looked up at her. “Just tired.”

“Can you come inside? I need to talk to you about something.”

“I was just drinking some scotch, relaxing...”

“It’ll only take a second.”

He got up to go inside and she lead him into the bedroom.

“What’s so important?”

She looked at him, her brown hair in curls due to its wetness. She removed her robe and revealed her lingerie one piece. It was black, silky and complimented her body, making her breasts seem larger and her waist seem thinner.

“Do you like it?” She asked.

He stood there and simply looked at her, unsure of what to say.

She kissed him and rubbed his chest. “I don’t want to fight with you, not here.”

She lightly pushed him onto the bed and began to unbuckle his pants. She crawled on top of him and began to kiss his neck. He looked up to the ceiling and a tear began to drip down his face.

“Would you die for me?” He asked.

“What?” She stopped kissing him and sat up.

“If you had to, would you die for me?”

“Of course I would.”

“You love me?”

“Of course I love you. I’m trying to fuck you as we speak.”

“And that couple we saw at the gelato place, you think we were like them?”

She got off of him and stood up, putting the bathrobe back on. “What’s wrong with you?”

“Is this love? Going on expensive vacations, eating at fancy restaurants...”

“You wanted to go to that restaurant.”

“I wanted a lot of things in life. And there’s a lot that I can’t get back.”

“What are you talking about?”

He pulled up his pants and stormed out the door.

“Where the hell are you going?” She was scared.

There was no answer. He walked in the rain and passed all those buildings that he and his wife saw earlier. He found himself standing in front of that cathedral, across the street from the

restaurant. This time though, the violinist and the drummer were gone. The lights were turned off and everyone was home. It was just him and Christ, lightning struck.

“I’ve sinned!” He looked up to the cross. “I’ve sinned and I can’t be forgiven!”

He then went into the cathedral. It was filled with stained glass pieces of the virgin Mary holding the baby Jesus in a stable. A huge cross dangled from the ceiling and there were rows and rows of pews. He saw the staircase in the corner that lead to the bell; he walked up it. When he got to the top, he touched the bell- ice cold from the rain. He looked up to the sky and fell to his knees, allowing the rain to further drench him. He then found himself reliving it.

“There is something about their smell and beauty that corrodes the mind. We become attached to them, as if they justify ourselves and our relationships. But flowers die. They rot if they do not get any water, rejecting the very existence of human nature if they do not get what they want,” said Nolan, naked in the hotel bed with him.

“Could be one of your better ones,” he took a puff from his joint, giving Nolan a nod.

“The only way in which I see flowers as appropriate is when we use them for death. Now that is the true symbolization of the flower. Hidden beneath their perceived beauty is a weakness that can be ripped apart with ease. They can be shredded to pieces and forgotten about for the rest of eternity. Now that’s what I consider remarkable.”

Nolan put the paper down and awaited a response from him. “Well, do you like the way it concludes?”

“You’re getting there.”

“What the hell does that mean?”

“Writing comes with experience. You’re too young to understand.”

“Is it worth submitting?”

“Of course it is. I’ll always encourage you to do that.”

“Do you think I actually have a shot at winning?”

He looked at Nolan, began to rub the student’s red haired scalp. “Why does my opinion matter so much? If you’re going to be a writer, you need to stop being so insecure.”

Nolan grabbed his hand. “You know how important you are to me.”

The two kissed and he got up to leave Nolan in the bed. He went to the window, still smoking his joint. It was raining outside.

“When are you going to leave her?”

“Soon,” he took a puff.

“That’s all you ever say.”

“Well it’s true.”

“Yeah well I’m not just some dude who you could fuck when you get horny.”

“What’s your problem?”

Nolan stood up and walked toward him. “I want things to get more serious between us.”

“And I told you a million times that you need to be patient.”

Nolan sighed and grabbed the joint from him. “It’s my turn for a hit.” He then jumped back into the bed and began to read his poem again to himself.

He put his hand on the window, feeling the pure coldness from the outside. He then turned and looked at him. Nolan smoked his weed, was drifted off into his own reality.

“I’m scared,” he said.

Nolan looked up, “What?”

He walked towards the bed. "I'm scared to tell her. I can't do it."

Nolan glared at him, "Why?"

"Because I'll lose everything."

"But you'll have me."

"But I'll lose my family."

"You're kids will support you if they love you."

"They're too young to understand."

Nolan thought a moment. "Is this about fear or is this about shame?" He stood up.

"How could you say such a thing?"

"I've given you a year of my life!"

"Nolan..."

"No, fuck you." Nolan pushed him.

"Nolan, calm down."

"I'm tired of being your dirty little secret." Nolan began to dress.

"What are you doing?"

"Someone needs to be the man here."

"What does that mean?"

Nolan began to leave the room but he stopped him.

"What do you plan on doing?"

Nolan looked dead into his eyes, "The thing that you can't do."

As Nolan tried to leave, he pulled on his arm. "You can't do this to me! You'll destroy my life!"

"You're too selfish! She needs to know about us!"

He was able to tackle Nolan to the ground and they began to fight. Nolan punched him in the face and was able to knock him off. Nolan then stood up to leave.

“I’ll do it!” His nose was bleeding, but he put his hands up as if he surrendered.

“You’ll do what?” Nolan was out of breath.

“I’ll tell her. I’ll tell her right now. Just let me be the one to do it.”

After some persuasion he was able to convince Nolan. “Just let me get dressed, stop this nose bleed.”

Nolan, overwhelmed with happiness got him some tissues for his nose and they sat on the bed together.

“What will our life be like together?” Nolan smiled.

“I don’t know.”

“Can we get married?”

“If you’d like.”

“Can I tell my parents?”

“After I tell my wife.”

It was after his nose bleed that Nolan decided to use the bathroom. When Nolan left the room, he unplugged the lamp on the bedroom night stand and stood by the door of the bathroom. As Nolan came out, he tangled the chord around the young man’s throat and squeezed it tight. There was some fight at first, Nolan gasped for air. But once he got him to the floor, the job was concluded quickly- it sounded as if his lungs were crushed. He wheezed his last breath. When Nolan stopped breathing, he stopped choking him. He then began to cry as his young love went limp in his arms.

Thunder and lightning struck and he found himself back in reality. The rain continued to pour and he was shivering. But it was a good shiver, one that he needed to endure to do it. He stood up from his knees and looked at the concrete street below him. Over burdened with grief, he had one last act to commit.

The End