

Ash Your Cigarette

“Don't fall into my trap.” -Gabriel García Márquez

Her Doc Martens were stuck to the floor, and so she couldn't lift her legs quickly enough in order to step in tune to the fast-paced beat. All around her was a bobbing blur. The sharp reek of body odor interbred with saccharine perfumes and musky cologne, invasive scents travelling in a cloud above the twisting and gyrating mass of compressed bodies revealed and concealed and revealed by the flash of a strobe. Though she couldn't force her heavy limbs into action, the constant pressure of jolting bodies and the steady stream of jabbing elbows jostled her in a way that made it look as if she was purposefully moving to the beat. The blossoms of sweat under her arms and along her back were ambiguous in that Clementine could not determine whether they were composed of her own bodily fluids or those of the frenzied dancers pressing in on her from all angles. Hands came down from above, gesticulating enthusiasm to a DJ that Clementine could not locate. Feet stomped on hers as they fumbled along with the heavy bass. Hips and endless ass swiveled in ebb and flow and dragged Clementine back and forth along a floor that was coated in cheap champagne, beer, glitter, and discarded chewing gum. She flung her hands to the sky, grasping for cool air as her mind grasped for directionality. She was a submarine in a sea of ecstatic dancers, her arms a periscope. Clementine was seasick. Time to jump ship.

She pushed her way in one general direction, though the rough and rippling crowd threw her off a linear course. With great determination she parted the day-glo sea in a zig-zag formation. Clementine stood on the outskirts, marveling at the mass, an exquisite reptile zoo, an intoxicated tapestry reconfiguring its stitches endlessly in time to a manic rhythm. She wiped her brows and blinked in a spastic manner so as to clear the stinging sweat from her eyes. Across the madness was another figure. His back was to the wall. He was black leather jacket, neglected scruff, blazing eyes, cool solitude in a room of people. His eyes were on her, and hers met his briefly before she escaped the heavy humid air of the glamour grotto for a smoke.

Crisp, cold air tickled the red of Clementine's cheeks until the inflamed pigment died down and her curly, moist hair began to freeze. She stuffed her hands in her jacket pockets. They were immediately relieved to find a warm place to inhabit as they searched for her pack of cigarettes. Just one left. She reluctantly removed her hands from the jacket and forced them back into the brisk air, placing a cigarette between her lips. Her right hand dove down into its pocket, again, deep. It searched for the cherry red lighter that must have dropped to the floor somewhere in the electronic bat country whose heavy bass could still be heard through its brick walls.

A bald man with a tattoo of the iron cross on the patch of skull just above his cerebellum noticed the shivering girl with the unlit cigarette hanging from her pouted lips and cut through the crowd at her.

"Need a light?"

"Sure, thanks." Clementine cringed, lamenting the sort of attention she was granted at cheap clubs. She clasped the end of her cigarette and stretched her neck towards the possibly anti-Semitic man in the denim jacket. "No problem, sugar."

Clementine inspected his stubby fingers as he outstretched his lit white Bic. There was a tan line where his wedding ring would normally rest and cracks along the majority of his cuticles.

"Come here often, lady?"

Clementine rolled her eyes and turned away. She squinted her eyes in disdain and scanned the crowd of other smokers. The man in black leather and handsome scruff was amongst the rabble. His blazing eyes locked hers for several seconds and then she looked down at her docs, which had acquired new scuffs as a result of the dance floor brutality. She blushed and thought about the contents of her back pockets. Tucked in the pocket above her left butt cheek was an epinephrine auto-injector, which she brought out in the off chance that she'd encounter a stray peanut on the sticky dance floor while demonstrating her fancy footwork. In the other pocket, on her right side, was the button that had fallen off of her suede overcoat. She fingered it while using the other hand to hold the cigarette near to her rosy face. The button reminded her that she needed to acquaint herself with the art of sewing, and also

made her wonder. How many club goers could have more eccentric possessions on their persons on a night like tonight? Little did Clementine know, there was no limit to the variety of the things these people carried.

The things they carried were largely determined by what they expected to reap from interactions with those they were sexually attracted to that night. Among the necessities or near necessities were condoms, breath mints, compact mirrors, chap-stick, pocket packs of tissues, tubes of lipstick, glow sticks, Vic's vapor rub, concealed flasks of vodka or cheap gin, loose change, combs, petite containers of perfume, pre-rolled joints, chewing gum, baggies of MDMA, toothpicks, pocket knives, filters, pepper spray, smart phones, capsules of Rohipnol, tampons, reading glasses, passports, extra hair ties, deodorant, razor blades, scrap paper, house keys, student IDs, duck tape, bottles of water, dental floss, rolling papers, wedding rings, loose tobacco, and snuffers lightly dusted in Ketamine. Together, these items took up the entire pocket space allotted to a single pair of men's jeans or about half of the compartment space of a women's handbag.

Brian Jennings, a prematurely balding man with an industrial bar in one ear kept a pair of hand cuffs in his back pocket, hoping that one of the squirming, tattooed women in the crowd would be interested in making use of them later. He would be disappointed to find no one that he felt like leaving with, and went home alone, then placed the handcuffs in his bedside drawer. Nicole Scott had an oily complexion-- dermatologists had told her this would benefit her later in life as it would slow the development of wrinkles and fine lines-- but at the moment this caused her great self consciousness, so in her back pocket she carried a pack of oil blotting sheets that she excused herself to the bathroom to clumsily use behind the cover of a rickety stall door in twenty minute intervals. Jake Lombardi carried in between his thumb and forefinger a small pill that he hoped to dissolve in the drink of any attractive vulnerable young lady he could corner near the bar. Anna Besser, a girl with a half shaved head, kept a lollipop and her grandfather's pocket watch in the interior pocket of her grandfather's well-worn leather coat. The lollipop was meant to remind her not to grind her teeth whilst deep in the throes of a roll, and the watch a totem that she couldn't leave home without.

The gentleman behind the scruff had exactly thirty-three cents in his pocket. He could not leave home without that exact amount of change, which he thoroughly counted every several hours of every day. It was a tick of his, along with always having to check that the oven was off before stepping through his front door. He counted out the change and approached the cute girl in the suede overcoat that had caught his eye during the earliest throws of the night.

“You should ash your cigarette.”

She panicked and looked down at her smoke. The lipstick caked butt wasn't so far from the burning tip at this point-- more than half of the stick was now composed of combusted material.

She lightly tapped the cigarette and relieved it of its ashes, looking down at her polished nails, as she was still too afraid to make eye contact with him. The cold had numbed her fingers into a state of clumsiness and she dropped the roach, and then fumbled to catch it, without thinking that it would be wiser to allow it to drop to the ground. The lit tip sizzled into her palm. She swore and flung the cigarette into the smoke enveloped crowd that they stood on the perimeter of.

“Are you ok? I've got something for that. That is going to bloody hurt tomorrow though.” A mechanical engineer, the man in the leather jacket also carried antibacterial ointment in his pocket. This wasn't a daily necessity, just something he had forgotten to empty into his toolbox before setting out for the night. “Stretch out your hand.”

Clementine presented him with her palm, now featuring a circular grey scorch mark just below her thumb.

His blazing eyes stared into hers as he softly rubbed the ointment along the burn. “Now let's dance.”

The two re-entered the madhouse. All hopes of verbal communication between the two were dashed by the fury of the feverish sound the DJ was unleashing above the writhing mass of dancing bodies. All hopes of penetrating the mass were also futile, and so the man in the leather jacket led Clementine to the wall he had previously stood with his back to. He pressed Clementine against the wall, a mirrored surface, and he began to kiss her with a fervor not unlike that which

characterized the crazed movements of the mass unfolding before them. Both sets of their feet stuck to the floor.

Scruff and the smell of leather overwhelmed Clementine as he led her through their salival exchange. The buckles on his jacket jangled as he pulled her by her hand through the cold streets on the way to his apartment, both of them leaving the friends they had already lost to the thrashing mass hours before.

They clumsily pulled off one another's clothes. The smell of sex, whiskey, leather, citrus, and sweat filled the room as they twisted beneath his sheets. The rhythm of their copulation transformed into a rhythm of steady breathing as the two fell asleep, pressed against one another. Clementine was the big spoon. They smiled as they slept, completely satisfied with the performance of their lover and with their own performance. Fulfillment and wholeness fueled their pleasant dreams. The two lay intertwined, the moonlight filtering in through his blinds and bathing their nude forms.

Sloppy kisses and scratchy scruff slowly traced their way along Clementine's feminine frame until she gently roused from her slumber. He handed her a mug of coffee and gently insinuated that the two should begin their respective days.

"How is it that I make my way out of your college?"

"You needn't worry about that. I'll walk you home. Wouldn't want you to take the walk of shame in front of the construction workers outside, they'd have quite the time teasing you..."

"Anyway, your beautiful, bedraggled state is due to me, so I will deliver you safely."

Clementine blushed and sipped her coffee. "If you insist."

She awkwardly pulled on her now wrinkled outfit and he clumsily began dressing as well, starting with the socks. He slyly checked the oven while she buttoned her jacket.

He accompanied her on her walk home, his arm in hers. The two walked along the cobblestone streets, enjoying the early winter air and soaking up the dim December sun. The two were filled with a feeling of absolute bliss. It was as if they had swallowed a bit of the dim December sun and it burned within their breasts,

sending out a little shower of day-glo and ecstasy into every single one of their particles, into every one of their fingers, each one of their toes. Clementine's burn throbbed with joy. The two could feel the showers emitting from their breasts as they walked slowly towards her home, smiling, together, in silence.

Outside of 65 High Street, Clementine ascended her front stairs. She leaned back to kiss the man in the leather jacket goodbye.

"What is your name?"

"Clementine. And yours?"

"Mark. I'll have to commit yours to memory."

She buzzed her way into the building and backed in through the red, wood door. He wouldn't let go of her hand, and pulled her close once more, kissing her outstretched palm just above the burn. At that, she turned around and entered the house, closing the door behind her.

Clementine leaned against the door, her heart brimming with bliss. She felt was in love. How *odd*.

Mark pressed his back against the opposite side of the door. He fingered the button that he had found in her back pocket. He could almost see the sparks showering from his chest. He felt he must be in love, or something of the sort. Was it Clementine? Yes, that was the name. He would never forget. He repeated the name over and over as he walked back home to reunite with his welcoming bed.