

AFTER FALLING INTO DISARRAY



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If It's Not Saint Laurent Leather

When I saw him in his Lululemon Athletics, drinking a Bud Light, and standing in a Juul cloud at the end of the bar, I decided it meant that living and lazy could live happily ever after: we ended up with a Peloton, two Peterbald cats, and a greenhouse full of Hart's-tongue ferns.

When I left, I took the Peloton.

After that, I decided it would be much easier to live my life in dreams: as long as my mind stayed firm I could say things like, “We’ll always have Paris” and “My tastes are very singular.” My lovers would always know what that meant and every morning we could fly to the Grancaffè Quadri in Venice for brunch.

That plan burned out quickly: I knew I could only dream for so long until my Hulu and Amazon Prime were canceled and Siri taken away because my love-dreams couldn’t pay the bills.

I fought that truth for a bit, but I got it together.

I even met my new neighbor in the Whole Foods parking lot. He was in Gucci and his cart was full of Bud Light Mango seltzer. I decided that meant flash and sweet could be the mix that lived happily ever after.

The next day he introduced me to his new, no-one-knows-what-breed-it-is rescue dog. I went on walks with them. He and I would indulge in the centuries-old custom of ice cream in the park on a bench near a fountain.

And, once again, *that thing* started to slink its way back into my life. Don't call it by its name I kept telling myself, not yet.

So, I gave it some time, but finally said its name, and he cried, "I was waiting for this, but I wanted you to say it first."

Our decision was Eastside or Westside. He decided EastSide because it was closer to the park.

To celebrate our first year his friends and family gathered around his enviable RH dining room table ready to enjoy his version of Chef Alexis Gauthier's Vegan Foie Gras and Beetroot Terrine, even though none of us were vegan.

Before we ate he decided there should be candlelight, and there was Owen Drew.

During the meal he decided there should be music: there was a cello, a violin, and Beethoven's Duet in C Major.

And then, the next morning, over Prosecco Mimosas, I decided to say goodbye and thought: from now on it will be sunlit brunches at Grancaffè and moonlit strolls through the Bois de Vincennes in Paris, and all my lovers will be in Saint Laurent Leather and drinking Mitchter's Bourbon.

We Waited In The Parlor

as Timothy liked to call the living room, for October's Wine Of The Month Club delivery—one of his many retirement gifts.

“September's delivery was finished on delivery day,” he said.

I frowned at him.

“My dear, it was only two bottles.”

I watched him pour the last glass from our 19 Crimes, Pinot Noir.

“Sometimes you just have to buy it for the label, taste be damned,” he said.

“Well, of course, you do.”

Timothy looked at me. “A question, if you will...Kieselstein or Cartier?”

Not surprised I replied, “Cartier will not hold up your new Armani Virgin Wool trousers and Kieselstein will never know the time.”

A week later, sitting in the library instead of the parlor, Timothy explained to me why he bought both: “I need to know at all times when cocktail hour begins, and who wants their trousers falling down, like you said, especially on Thursday as I walked into the Whitney, waved at Roberto, and tapped a *thank you* on Marcus' shoulder for how quickly my Jim Beam on the rocks ended up at my table.”

“Well, who would ever argue with that wonderful logic?”

“No one, of course.” And he handed me an almost full Ralph Lauren Glen Plaid crystal glass. “Ok, let's see how it is.”

We carefully clinked cheers, took the first taste poured from the

last bottle—Almarada Malbec, 2017—of October’s Wine Of The Month Club delivery.

“Well then,” I said, as I watched Timothy give an approving nod to his RL Glen Plaid and then relax back into this grandmother’s red chenille wingback.

“Now, where were we? Yes, another question for you, Kieselstein or Rolex?”

He didn’t look at me as he attempted to stay straight-faced to conceal his trick question, but he couldn’t, and laughed first. I shook my head at his attempt at being clever and answered,

“Everybody knows you don’t wear Rolex if you’re already wearing Cartier.”

He grinned, pleased with my answer, then took another sip of his wine.

“Unless,” I continued. And he tensed a bit. “Gucci has taken the place of Kieselstein, then it’s quite okay that Rolex tells you when cocktail hour begins.”

His scandalized look was, as they say, *priceless*.

Then, with his usual adorable calmness and composure, he replied,

“It was a bleak and cold November evening, and there I sat, with my Wine-Of-The-Month and only one full glass.”

After Falling Into Disarray

I rushed to Starbucks and tried to order 8.4 fl oz of Espresso. The barista, I wish I could remember her name, was a genius. She said, and I believed her, a shot is 1 ounce or so. I ordered 8, but had to promise her I wasn't going to drink them all at once. She seemed concerned, bless her heart.

Then, I rushed back home and went to the LavAzza website. I wanted to try and make the Espresso Martini that magically appeared on my Facebook feed after I was on Amazon searching LavAzza Coffee.

I had the espresso now, minus the .4.

I had ice.

I had the 1 fl oz of Vodka.

I had sugar.

I even had the chocolate I needed to garnish the side of the glass, but God Damn It, who has Hazelnut Liqueur just sitting around?

So, I made it anyway because, as I said, I was in disarray. After shotgunning it and thinking how good it was, I started to feel better. But, like my 89-year-old Nonna used to say, "It's Always Something" because at that moment the Lavazza Gods stepped in and said:

"There is absolutely no way you can know if it was bad or good because you made it the wrong way. Starbucks Espresso, you might as well have used mud. AND, you left out the Hazelnut Liqueur, THAT is what makes the drink, Dingbat."

I stood there, jaw-dropped, trying to make some kind of sound, then:

"We almost decided not to talk to you, but your intentions were pure: you went to coffee and booze to pull yourself out of disarray. So, if you want to play big shot and get all designer drinky, you

better always have the right ingredients, you never know when they might make things even better.”

For a few seconds, I heard a high-pitched shushing sound, then: “We should not even tell you this, but here is the reason why: we know that tomorrow when you are in Trader Joe’s buying your usual cans of Jack Fruit for those disgusting so-called pulled pork sliders, you are going to meet an old flame. You are going to talk and laugh, then exchange numbers. On Friday, you are going to get that call you couldn’t decide if you should make because, like we just said, you are a Dingbat. On Saturday night you are going to have dinner. After dinner, you are going to say, ‘Hey, um, would you like to come back to my place, I make this amazing after-dinner drink called an Espresso Martini?’ ‘Wow, very impressive’, your date will think. And, well, we are not going to spoil the rest.”

For a panicked, split second I thought: where did we go for dinner, what did we order, who can ever decide.

I heard thunder, then: “Okay, you thought it. You are absolutely not going to that seafood brothel, Red Lobster, we know you were going to do. And, you are absolutely not ordering that farm-raised, flopping around in giant water cages all hopped up on steroids and antibiotics eating each other’s feces, Tilapia you always have. We are telling you right now, stop eating that disgusting mess. You will go to Cafe Speranza on the Boulevard. You will order the wild-caught seared salmon with a chilled Pinot Noir, the house is fine. Capisce, got it?

For another split second, I was relieved.

Then, split-second panicked again, I started thinking hard: if it MAKES the drink, what brand of Hazelnut Liqueur should I use in my Saturday after-dinner, back at my place, impressive, LavAzza Espresso Martini?

I heard thunder, then: “Your Nonna was right.”

And they were gone.

And there I was, back in disarray, standing in the kitchen thinking:
Shit, I should've asked them what I wore on my date.

WHEN IT TASTES GOOD GO WITH IT

We couldn't avoid shopping at the same location since we lived in the same city, and we both enjoyed the Paisley Farm Pickled Brussel Sprouts that only Village Market sold, which is where I first met Jenny. We both went for the same jar, and that would be the scene in the Hallmark Movie where each other's world gets turned around in the right direction and leads to the ending where each other's life is complete. That didn't happen to me. We all know that happens maybe .5% here in the real show. But, she did tell me how good the Eggplant Parmesan was, how the sauce is all homemade by Antonio's mother, how the kids and grandkids wanted to jar it and sell it, and how grandma said: "Only when I'm dead because it will never taste the same, let them take the blame, not me."

So, I started buying it. After a couple of months of seeing Jenny at the market, I thought: Eggplant Parmesan was the perfect opportunity to invite her to dinner, but instead of the usual Charles Shaw Chardonnay she said she bought from Trader Joe's, I could buy the Charles Shaw White Zinfandel and surprise her—at least it wouldn't be Eggplant Parmesan as usual.

So, the next time I saw her I said,

"Hey there, did you get your brussel sprouts?"

"Oh yes, I bought three jars." Then she looked at me with a bit of embarrassment. "But, there are none left."

"That's okay, I can get them the next time I come in."

"You should tell Antonio he's out and to order more."

And, just when I was about to suggest we get together for dinner,

her cellphone rang:

“Hi honey, I’m at Village Market. Yeah, I’m getting the pickled brussel sprouts. Sure, I can stop at Trader Joe’s and pick up the wine, and oh yeah, Nancey just got her new Mercedes AMG-GT, so I’m going to stop by and see that—” all the while trying to smile at me with that, *not to be rude, but, maybe you see I’m on the phone so say goodbye*, smile.

I’m not dense, so I waved goodbye. She smiled even wider, and nodded goodbye as best she could with her phone on her shoulder, against her ear, while she tried to organize her cart.

I walked away, headed to the wine section, picked up a bottle of Woodbridge White Zinfandel, then headed over to the prepared foods section, and ordered a one-person portion of Eggplant Parmesan. Jimmy, behind the counter, apologized five times to me because they were out.

“But, we have Veal Parmesan.”

I almost said, disgusting, but instead, “No, no, I’m fine.”

He suggested Baked Ziti with his, “Grandmother’s amazing sauce, who can turn that down?”

So, I ordered a one-person portion of that and headed towards the checkout.

I watched my stuff roll up the belt, then Bella said,

“Hey there, how are you today? Oh, I see you’re trying the Baked Ziti this time. I just love that. You know, it has my grandma’s homemade sauce?”

“Yes. I know.” She is always cheerful so I figured I should be

cheerful too. “I really love that sauce. It reminds me of my grandmother’s.”

She scanned everything I had, looked around to scan more, then popped her head up with a kinda—*oh, poor guy, everything is going to be ok*, look. “No brussel sprouts today?”

And I could’ve said, “No, I guess Jenny has it all.”

And Bella could’ve replied, “Well, there is more where that came from.”

But, that never happened. All I did was shrug my shoulders and say, “Thanks for double- bagging,” and walked out trying to channel some healing Hallmark vibes because I couldn’t stop believing Jenny never really liked Paisley Farm Pickled Brussel Sprouts, or Charles Shaw Chardonnay—it was always the, “Hi Honey” on the other line.

And, as I was about to get into my Subaru Station Wagon, I thought: the only way I can get past all of this and somehow feel complete is believing Jenny and I will always have, Eggplant Parmesan.

When The Skeleton Walked In

Oh, the stares and whispers started:

“This, my dear, is not a costume party, it’s a birthday party.”

“Omg, I bet she feels so stupid, I know I would.”

“Oh yeah, really, you have a costume party after this. It’s 10:30, like, when does it start, 11:00?”

So yes, I walked up to her and said,

“Nice bones,” and we laughed because it was a flirt, and stupid. I offered to buy her a drink. “So, I gotta ask, did you think...”

“Ah no, it’s Halloween almost, right, and I love Halloween, so if there’s a party I dress up unless it’s like a funeral or wedding—unless it’s a Costume Wedding...”

“Omg, wouldn’t that be so cool,” one of the eavesdropping friends of a friend said.

And I thought, yeah it would be. It would probably save a ton of money on Bridesmaid’s and Groomsmen’s dresses and tuxes. Hell, you could go to Target and buy one of those bag costumes for 25 bucks and there you have it, finished.

And then, of course, I had to say to Tammy, who made the first shitty comment about Katrina— Skeleton Lady,

“Hey, did you ever think of having a Halloween Wedding? Do you know how much money you could save on dresses and tuxes? You and Derk could dress up as Frankenstein and the Bride of...”

Tammy replied with the all-powerful Middle Finger.

But now, since I didn’t want Tammy to be mad at me, I had to buy her a Lemon Drop shot. And since I was buying, I included me and Katrina, Marge, Tom, Derk, Allison, Nick, and two of

the friends of a friend I didn't know.

And that started other people buying and the drinks pouring:

“What next?” I asked Katrina.

“How about a Red-Headed Slut.”

And the Sluts went around.

“How about an Absolute Bitch,” she said.

And the Bitches went around.

“How about a Smurf On The Rag,” she suggested.

And the Rags went around.

By 11:30, after the shots finished flowing and the not-so-dirty-dancing kicked up, everyone was like:

“Shit we fucked up, why didn't we dress up?”

“Hey, we coulda had a Birthday slash Halloween Party.”

“I haven't dressed up since I was a kid.”

“Shit, this coulda been so great.”

And then everyone got bummed out except for Katrina, who just smiled and said,

“Good seeing you all and thanks for the drinks, but I gotta go cuz my Uber is here, and the Halloween Party I'm going to starts at 12. You know, what some people call the Witching Hour.”

David Calogero Centorbi is a writer that in the 90's earned an MFA in Creative Writing from the University of Arizona. Now, he is writing and working in Detroit, MI.

Published work in Anti-Heroin Chic, The Daily Drunk, Drunk Monkeys, Horror Sleaze Trash, Schuylkill Valley Journal-Dispatches, and Tiny Molecules. He is also a regular monthly contributor at Versification.

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