

Sort of Like Bukowski, But Completely Oblivious

by Anthony M. Powers

"I have to tell you something," she says.

"What?" I ask.

"I have a boyfriend." My mind goes blank except for a slew of curse words which seem to flow like a flooded River Styx through my thoughts.

"You probably should have told me that before I started kissing you," I say.

"It's not your fault. I kissed you back."

Her thighs are pressed tightly against my hips as she pushes herself up and away from our recently conjoined lips. She pulls her strawberry-blond hair away from her face with both hands and holds it in place behind her head. She stretches backwards for a moment. The left strap of her grey top hangs delicately around her freckled shoulder. Her bright blue eyes are cold, almost emotionless, as she looks down at the dark pools that are my own.

"I'm a bad person," she says. Her voice is unwavering, her face expressionless. I feel the warmth of her body seething into me, through her denim into mine.

"No, you're not," I reply.

"How do you know?"

I don't know how to respond. I stare up into her almost frigid gaze, racking my brain for what to say. The truth is I don't know. I open my mouth to attempt an answer, but before I can, hers is already open and on top of mine again.

My eyes don't close but hers are shut tight, and something inside tells me that to this girl, I could be absolutely anyone.

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"This is a waste of time," I say.

This is what I tell Jack every time he talks me into going out to try to pick up girls, and just as he has every other time, he completely ignores me.

As Jack and I enter the bar, I scan the room on the off chance that I might actually see someone I know. I don't. I realize it's karaoke night and it makes me shudder. This won't be the first time I'll have to listen to off key renditions of assorted 80's hits all night long. I look to the stage and there's a man with no arms sitting at the microphone singing "Only the Lonely." I can already tell it's going to be a strange night.

We're barely inside when Jack stops in his tracks in front of me and turns slightly back in my direction. There's a good chance he's changed his tune and wants to get out of here as badly as I do.

"I don't know, man," he says. "What do you think?"

"Let's just get a beer and hang out for a bit." I say it without thinking. As much as I don't want to be here, I'm not about to leave without a single drink.

Jack rolls his eyes and turns back towards the bar. Before we can take another step, we're cut off by a group of 5 or so women trying to get to the exit. They pass by us single file and we try not to look like we're looking at them. The last girl is a red head. Her laughter gives her away as being intoxicated. Unlike her friends who walk by without a glance, as she begins her pass, she looks at Jack and smiles.

"Well, hey there," Jack says. The way he says it makes him sound like a douche bag. This is Jack's idea of being flirtatious. She keeps smiling and walks past him.

Her eyes meet mine. I don't give her any lines, I don't try to pick her up—I don't even smile. Her grin widens like a Cheshire cat. She reaches up past my cheek and softly rubs one of my sideburns. She begins to walk away and as she does, her index finger moves delicately across my face to the middle of my bottom lip. My jaw drops slightly. And then she's gone.

I let her go.

I look at Jack, who's staring at me, smirking, his eyes wide.

"What the fuck was that all about?" I ask. Jack shakes his head at me.

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"Do you even care about me anymore?" she screams.

"Of course I do," I reply forcefully. "I just..."

"You just what?" she demands. I've seen this angry look cross her face more times than I'd like to remember. We've been dating for only a few months, but from what I can gather marriage feels like based on movies and syndicated television series, we fight like we've been together for years. For the past month, every time we drink together, it turns into a screaming match.

"Do we have to do this here?" I say. We're standing on the street outside of Nick's house. Most of our friends are standing on his porch, watching us as they smoke Marlboro Lights and drink from cans of lukewarm Nati Light.

"Say it!" Her voice echoes down the street and passersby on their way to the bar look over at us. I know they're all hoping to see me say the wrong thing and get slugged for it. That's what I would be thinking if I was them.

"I care a lot about you, but... I'm a sophomore in college. At this point in my life, I'm really not looking for a wife."

It's humid tonight and her light brown locks look curlier than usual. Her eyes stare up at me, large and unblinking. Her pupils seem big enough to jump into, and I'd like to do exactly that—to hide inside the one place she'd never be able to look. A tear rolls down her cheek leaving a trail of black mascara.

And I feel like a bastard because she looks almost comical to me.

"I... I can't talk to you right now," she says. Her voice quivers. She turns and walks with hurried pace down the street. Two girls from the front porch scurry after her, shooting me dirty looks in the process. I can hear her crying from here.

I'm not quite sure what I've done wrong; all I know is that somehow I fucked up again.

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"Your eyes freak me out from this close up," she says. Her breath smells like cigarettes and Chap Stick. Maybe it's because she smokes menthols.

"What? Why?" I ask. I try to keep eye contact and not look down at her exposed breasts. Her dark hair is spread around her head on the pillow like a halo.

"They're creepy," she says, smiling. "You have cat eyes."
I have no idea what she means.

