

Shots

She'd come for something important and after walking sixty blocks back to her hotel, decided to get a drink and to discover. She stopped at one bar, but it was too expensive, then went to another, where a guy came up and talked about his writing. She was a writer too and he said wow. She looked at him, at his lips. He was too young for anything but kissing, probably, and he didn't really know much.

Her boyfriend called. He was in California for a conference and he reported on the bridge in San Francisco, saying he wanted them to live there. "It's expensive," she said.

It was eleven p.m. and it was her first night in Manhattan. He asked what she was up to. "Walking," she said.

She saw a club farther down, so she went to use the bathroom. She sat at the bar and got the cheapest beer available.

This guy was blond with a permanent smile, reminding her of a boy she used to date who made empty promises. He ordered shots of fire and beer for all his buddies and one for her, and although she'd stopped doing shots, she wanted to feel young again. He burned his hand and asked the bartender for ice and stuck his fingers in a glass, then asked her for her preference, and she said wine, so he bought, trying to kiss her. She told him he was better off waiting.

Her boyfriend had asked her to quit drinking.

"You dance?" she said to him and he said only when he was really wasted, and then he told her that he was Israeli and went to boarding school in Europe. His name was Iliya. He talked about his fellow interns, said they were from Spain. He had problems with his English and she was a professor of English, so she said, "Maybe I can teach you."

He was twenty-four, but bragged to be older than his friends. He showed her pictures of his boxer, asked if she liked dogs and she said, "As long they don't bite me."

They danced to the loud music, the screens showing all the footage. He bought more shots for his buddies, wine for her, and after the bartender cut him off, he had to pay his tab.

"You leaving a tip?" she said.

He said he was too wasted, so she wrote it in for him, leaving fifty dollars, making sure the bartender knew.

Iliya's friends moved to a table of young women.

"Young women want things," she said. She thought about her boyfriend, who she'd been staying with all summer. They'd been doing things long distance. She said, "I have a boyfriend."

He took a drink of her wine. "You like dogs?" he said.

She wondered if she had enough to get back to her boyfriend. She'd have to fly. It wasn't close. She already had her ticket, nothing else. After a driver from the airport made her pay a hundred dollars, she'd called her boyfriend crying, feeling helpless.

"I'm not a whore," she told Iliya. "Give me fifty dollars."

He gave her what he had and then directions to his place, said he'd wait outside.

She reminded the bartender of the tip and he poured her a glass of free wine. Then Iliya's friend sat beside her. He said he was Rolando, that he was from California. She said, "I thought you were from Spain."

"Close enough," he said.

"I'm not fucking him," she said.

"Good for you," he said. He wasn't much older than her son.

He smiled at her, said, "Don't worry about him. He's a drunk with tons of money. He likes older women."

She drank more. "I think my boyfriend's cheating on me," she said. He'd left for California the day before. She said, "I found a letter."

Then Iliya came back and said he was still waiting. She kissed him and then Rolando. The other Spain friend recorded it all on his digital camera.

She woke up in her room, Rolando next to her, and she got up to use the bathroom. Her clothes were off. There was vomit in the toilet, bruises on her knees and on her shoulder. She found his jeans and took his thirty dollars. She got back into bed and poked him, "You leaving?" she said.

When she woke again, he was gone. She put on her running clothes and went onto the street. She felt dead. She was alive.