

I picked up a bottle. "There are so many flavors nowadays. I'm just going to get plain...easier to mix with other stuff."

The Brick took two bottles for himself, and we ended up standing next to each other in line at the register.

The cashier glanced at each of us and then said to him, "I'll do you first."

A laugh is a terrible thing to waste. When I couldn't keep the joke to myself any longer I whispered to the Brick, a la Beavis and Butthead, "Heh, Heh... She's gonna *do you* first."

The Brick chided under his breath, "Dirty girl!"

I stood there giggling with flushed cheeks as he watched me pay for my vodka.

"Have you eaten yet?" he asked.

"Not yet. That was next on my list."

"Let's have dinner together."

Leave it up to me to score a date in the duty-free shop. We popped into a restaurant called the Brooklyn Ale House. The Brick was a programmer for a software company in Vancouver and had been in New York for business. I could not keep from staring at the way his chest and biceps filled out his shirt as he explained how he was training for a triathlon in the fall. Between talking, eating, ogling, and drinking, I had lost track of time. When I asked the Brick to check his watch, there were less than fifteen minutes left before my flight was to depart. We sucked down the last of our Long Island Iced Teas and asked for the bill. The Brick paid for dinner and ran me to my gate. As the last passengers were boarding the aircraft, I stalled as long as possible before bidding him farewell. When the time came for me to go, we traded contact information and a kiss on the cheek vowing to keep in touch.

Excitement. I had never flown first class before and fancied being treated as if I was someone rich and important. A cabin attendant led me to my seat, brought me a bottle of water, and hurried to find me extra pillows. Next to me was a gent who I guessed was in his forties. His longish wavy hair, wire-rimmed glasses, and hard-cover book containing the word "politics" led me

to deduce he was an intellectual romantic—one of those analytical types who pondered every situation from balls to bones, but secretly wished to lose himself in the magic of pure spontaneity. Politics was engrossed with reading his book as our plane ambled down the runway. I considered it rude to interrupt him. If he was feeling talkative, I reckoned he would initiate in his own time. The trip to Nice was close to nine hours long, so there would be plenty of opportunities.

Who had said what to whom first, I can't remember, but we began talking before I finished my first glass of champagne. He ordered champagne as well, and we proceeded to cover topics ranging from hobbies and politics to travel and dating. The cabin attendant was visibly irked about having to refill our glasses every fifteen minutes. I instructed her to leave the champagne with us and we managed to polish off two bottles before the in-flight movie ended. Passengers in a three seat radius around us were hard pressed to get any peace. Another attendant asked us to keep our voices down as a courtesy to the others trying to rest. We toned it down a notch, but with the exception of a few hours sleep, we maintained a lively conversation during the entire flight.

The international businessman mostly told me about his travels visiting with foreign dignitaries and government officials to close multi-million dollar deals. I drank too much to remember the specifics of everything Politics and I had talked about, but I would not have bothered to keep up if I did not feel an affinity toward him. As he spoke, I came to the surprising conclusion that I preferred older men. Men my age were under a lot of stress. They had to compete with their peers. They had to make a lot of money. They had to sow their wild oats. All their urgent striving resulted in ubiquitous displays of pomp and recklessness. Men in their twenties and thirties were still making mistakes and learning the ways of the world. Involvement with a man my age made as much sense to me as a radioactive toothbrush. Older men like Politics were secure, established, cultured, and intellectual—all the qualities I liked that came with experience, which only comes with age.