

An excerpt from

MY BOYFRIEND SATAN

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It was 45 minutes into sharing drinks when Gwen's date excused himself to use the bathroom. It was 15 minutes into him being in the bathroom when she started to worry.

On all accounts, the date with Shaun seemed to be going well. She asked him all the right questions about his career (he was an electrician), his hobbies (he liked video gaming), and other common get-to-know-yous she repeated on all her dates (he was, forgivably, an Aquarius). But he barely asked her any questions in return, making the date feel more like an interview instead of a conversation, which was common when dating 30-somethings in Santa Cruz, California.

The results from her Tinder were always bleak. She either got washed out bros who still lived with their parents and coped with life by having severe acid addictions or she got self-righteous pricks with Teslas who commuted to San Jose for work and did coke in between investor pitches. This guy was at least a bit different. He was an ex-heroin addict who put himself through trade school. He had to have some kind of drive and passion to do that, she thought, and that's why she chose to meet him for drinks at the Red Room downtown.

It was, quite literally, red. Everywhere. Red velvety booths curved around circular wooden tables which were stained a kind of burgundy color that looked like spilled wine. The carpet was red too, of course. Although its vibrancy grew incredibly subdued under the grime built up over the years from spilt drink and filth tracked in from dirty shoes.

There were no overhead lights so it was incredibly dark save for the dim, cherry red LED strips that traced across the booths and walls, casting a sultry glow onto every carouser's bare shoulder and flirty grin. The brightest area in the Red Room was the bar itself which was allotted two strips of LEDs instead of just one. It was enough light for the bartenders to see what they were doing, which was to overcharge for lightly-liquored cocktails with hip names to match the theme like "Carrie" and "Crazy 88."

Gwen's best friend Cody worked there as a bartender. They had been friends since they were kids and grew closer as they aged, which was uncommon for friendships and made her cherish it even more. Gwen even lived with Cody and her family as a teenager until she was able to get her own condo at 18, making them even closer.

They were both well into their late 20s when Cody got the Red Room job. It was a popular bar in the area because of the lack of light and abundance of little nooks and crannies to hide in. A man could take a mistress there and be fairly safe from falling victim to small-town gossip. A new couple in the honeymoon phase could go there to make-out and indulge in heavy petting without other patrons feeling assaulted. And an ex-herion addict could meet a 33-year-old virgin for drinks to test the limits of her purity.

That's how Gwen's romantic expeditions always started, with her date thinking he hit the jackpot by finding a virgin this late in life.

"How rare," a man under the username BigMikey85 messaged her at 2:14 a.m. sometime last week. "I bet you won't be for long."

If Gwen was being honest with herself, yes, that was something she wanted, to finally lose her virginity. But her ultimate goal was to find her soul mate and to fall in love; the rest would simply follow. Besides, she only published the fact that she was a virgin on her Tinder account so people would have a head's up. She didn't need to see any coming-of-age movies or romcoms to know that being a virgin was a big deal to people. She had first-hand experience.

The closest she got to losing her virginity was during a make-out session with this thick-necked venture capitalist named Tanner. Tanner rocked a sandy-blonde, tousled pompadour hair style. Not one that was reminiscent of the 1950s but one of an Abercrombie and Fitch model from the early aughts. He had the baby blue linen button-up (with not one but three top buttons left open) to match his male model aesthetic but his face was all wrong and he was only 5'7. He reminded Gwen of a young, alcoholic Steve Baldwin with eyes so blue they were discomfoting.

Her and Tanner's second date was at The Hula Lounge, a tiki bar that was decorated exactly how it sounded given the name alone—Where servers were forced to wear coconut bras over their polos (even the men) and tangled straw skirts over their dress pants. It wasn't a romantic place by any means, even with the artificial glow of the battery-operated tiki torches planted at

each table.

Unfortunately, the kitschy vibe did not stop at the decor. Every food and drink item was named after something tropically cliché. Despite Gwen's protests, Tanner ordered an electric blue alcoholic concoction served in a fishbowl with multiple straws called a Blue Hawaii. When the server heaved the monstrosity down onto the table, Gwen immediately ordered a Diet Coke for herself.

"Oh c'mon, try some," he demanded, suggesting a straw to her.

"No thank you, I'm fine with a soda!" she replied, trying to be friendly despite annoyance growing deeper inside her.

"It's got Blue Curacao. It's an aphrodisiac," he said, over-annunciating the last syllable with a "cuh" sound and a wink.

She smiled politely and began mentally counting down the minutes until the date was over. It depressed Gwen to constantly witness men acting like this, knowing she was a virgin. She wondered if other women dealt with this level of overt horniness too. It was like they all thought she was some secret nympho dying to be ravaged by the right man so she could finally receive the massive cock she'd been missing for so long. No, she was a fucking person. And the only thing she wanted to receive was some respect.

Tanner drained two fishbowls back-to-back and was obviously feeling pretty good considering he would not shut up about "capital gains" *this* and "acquisition" *that* while Gwen nodded along in silence, unable to get a word in. He eventually paid the check with his Platinum Amex, which always seemed like a move people made when they secretly wanted to be lauded for their financial prowess. Gwen stifled a yawn, anticipating the end

of the date and the return to her bed. Alone as always.

Having ingested around ten servings of hard liquor under the guise of two drinks, Tanner tripped on the way out of the bar and stumbled into the empty street. As he corrected his balance, he found Gwen watching him with careful eyes and sauntered over to her.

“You better call an Uber. You seem a bit drunk,” she suggested curtly, staring at him.

He nodded lazily and fished his phone out of his back pocket. Gwen followed the movement and noticed his raging erection pushing against his already-too-tight khakis. How it was even possible for him to maintain a hard-on while being so drunk, she didn't know. But a primal longing twinged in between her thighs despite his arrogant personality and pedestrian looks.

On every account, she was way out of his league. To start, she had at least 3 inches on him, her lean frame standing at an easy 5'10 without shoes on. Color stained her cheeks like crushed strawberry, making her look permanently embarrassed, cold, or turned on and her pouty lips arranged themselves in moody expressions to match. While most of the dates she went on were lackluster, she had a hard time feigning interest as her large, grey eyes drooped slightly at the corners, making them appear bored and sad. The rest of her features distracted the men from noticing her apathy, like the long white-blonde hair that cascaded down her slender back in waves and her ample T&A. But despite the beauty imbalance between herself and Tanner, the sight of his engorged dick filled her with an animalistic desire.

This feeling happened to Gwen countless times on previous dates with other Tanners, Brents, Johns, and Brodys. But things never advanced past the make-out session. Something always

came up whether it was her own hang-ups, his disinterest, or a sudden “where are you?” call from a wife...

“How long until the Uber comes?” she asked, with a newly invigorated interest. Tanner immediately picked up on the shift in energy.

“11 minutths,” he slurred and took a step forward to close the space between them. Gwen’s skin tingled and her bottom lip twitched with anticipation. She looked over her shoulder at the alley next to The Hula Lounge. Even though the street was fairly abandoned, she was too embarrassed to even share a kiss on the cheek if she thought someone could see her. So when he suddenly reached for her waist, she swiftly took his hand in hers and lead him behind the lounge.

The moment they stepped into the refuge of the dark alley, Tanner pushed her against the sticky brick wall and mashed his lips into hers. She was taken off guard by the feeling of prickly facial hair against her soft lips, already growing in from that morning’s shave. He pried apart her lips with his and breathlessly moaned into her mouth, filling her senses with the taste of stale alcohol and scent of his hair pomade. She accepted his tongue with hers, sticky and thick with lack of hydration. She immediately regretted this whole make-out-in-the-alley decision because he was too drunk to be intimate in the way she wanted, in the way she always dreamed about but no man had yet to fulfill.

She was too shy to stop him and it felt harmless enough to kiss for a while so she moved her tongue with his and let him push himself against her. At first, the sensation of his hard cock against her pelvis made the depths of her sex throb with desire. But he suddenly changed position and began rubbing himself

against her thigh, making her feel absolutely nothing again.

Just as she was about to work up the courage to stop the make-out session, he suddenly pulled away. Recoiling her head back, she wondered what she did to upset him. But when she looked at his face, she saw it coming two seconds before it hit her.

Gwen jumped aside right as bright blue vomit sprayed the entire alley wall where she was just standing. She stood staring in disbelief as Tanner wretched and expelled more blue liquid on the pavement and his own shoes with the speed of a flowing bathtub faucet.

Right when she was about to ask him if he was okay, her reminiscing was interrupted by her current date returning back from the bathroom. At least 25 minutes had gone by and she had to shake her head to clear her thoughts. She smiled to welcome him back but it quickly faded when she noticed the other man standing next to him.

“This is my best friend, Peter,” Shaun introduced, presenting his companion like some prized show pony. Gwen sat in silence for a while, her already-large eyes bulging in confusion while her lips formed into a tight, polite smile.

“Hi Peter, nice to meet you,” she managed to say, extending her arm for a handshake. He took her hand weakly and shook it once before going limp. As he moved to redact his hand, Gwen, more familiar with shaking hands of normal people, held strong and kept shaking. The discrepancy in hand movements resulted in her hand looking like a predatory fish, clenching onto and shaking the life out of Peter’s dead one. Her set of gold bracelets, thin as angel hair, danced and jingled around her svelte wrist like a lure. Awkwardly releasing, Gwen smoothed down the lap of her black slitted dress and then waited, confused.

“So random,” Shaun started, stretching an arm above his head and reaching to scratch in between his shoulders. “I ran into Peter and we got to talking.”

That was some coincidence but it was possible, she thought, considering he was away from the table and “in the bathroom” for at least 30 minutes. But what if Shaun was having such an awful time, he called Peter from the bathroom and had to wait for him to arrive to save him from this date? The date seemed to be going as well as any of her other ones, so she was confused. Then she shrugged at that thought, realizing that none of her other dates went well.

She smiled again politely. “What a coincidence!” She let out an exhale/sigh/laugh combo and looked at their drinks with awkwardness. Shaun’s Manhattan had melted into a pale brown broth and Gwen’s pinot noir was drained and had been empty for the last 15 minutes. She looked up again at the two of them, her eyebrows slightly furrowing. Why was Peter still standing there? Her mind rushed to fill in the gaps. Maybe she would end up losing her virginity in a threesome? Please, who was she kidding? Shaun was decent looking but Peter was hot. Too hot for her. Despite the weak handshake, he had that effortless kind of sexy only found in men who have never had a problem attracting women their whole lives. Shaun must have always felt second-best with Peter as his wingman.

“Yeah, I guess so. Well...,” he looked over to Peter first, who stood smiling blankly at Gwen, the joy not reaching his eyes. Shaun then looked at Gwen and something in his expression shifted, a look of smug contempt spreading across his face. Gwen’s breath caught in her chest as she waited for the ball to drop. “I’m not really feeling you. I’d rather hang out with Peter.

So..." he started backing away before he was even finished. "Peace."

That was it. No made up excuse. No niceties to spare her feelings. Just "I'm not really feeling you. Peace." Some fucking coincidence. Her mouth just hung open as her fingers barely lifted in a gesture of farewell. After the two left the booth, she watched them make their way to the exit. But instead of walking through the door, they turned to the right and stood at the bar. They were fucking staying there.

Gwen's heart picked up its rhythm and she felt the sensation of tears stinging her eyes and her sinuses. She watched as Cody turned to get their drink orders and immediately turned again once she saw who she was serving. She looked at Gwen from across the lounge through squinted eyes, her facial expression lethal. The red light cast a demonic sheen over her, which wasn't hard to do. Cody Darwin barely stood at 5'2 but she had a powerful disposition that made her seem like some extraterrestrial life force with no bodily limitations. She was petite and all bones, which made her larger-than-life intensity all the more intriguing. Her long obsidian hair was tied up for work but typically hung, straight as a pin, down her back and to her ass.

She had the most captivating brown eyes, the kind of brown eyes her partners of romances past would write songs about. They were always shifting in hue and in shape between moody, playful, and completely flat which matched her deadpan sense of humor and blunt facial expressions. Her lips were always pressed shut in a thin line, whether after delivering a dry joke or listening to a man flirt with her for the umpteenth time at the bar. Her lips held steady and gave nothing away. She was the keeper of all

Gwen's secrets and traumas. She was her best friend.

Cody broke eye contact with her and continued taking Shaun and Peter's drink orders. Typically, patrons waited at the bar until the bartender made your drink. This was not some fancy club where they served you at your booth. But when she saw Shaun and Peter turn to go sit at an empty corner table completely drinkless, Gwen knew what would happen.

This was not the first time she was humiliated or rejected on a date. It was also not the first time that it happened at The Red Room. And it was not the first time it happened in front of Cody, the one and only person who loved her in this shit world. Gwen knew what was coming and she didn't try to stop it.

She watched as Cody lifted the bottle of house whiskey, pouring golden amber ribbons of liquor into ridged glass cups. She then labored over the garnishes and topped each one with a curled lemon peel. Manhattans again, it is. She dragged her eyes away from Cody to stare at the pathetic melted Manhattan that Shaun ordered over an hour ago; a symbol of her failure to keep a date interested long enough to finish a simple glass of alcohol. How fun for him to start the night over with a fresh drink and great company.

She lifted her eyes up to Shaun and Peter in the corner. Shaun had his back turned but Peter stared right at her. She broke his gaze and looked back at Cody again, not wanting to miss seeing her put the final touches on the cocktails.

With a subtle tap on the lower back, Cody wordlessly notified the other two bartenders of her plan. For a moment, Gwen had a sinking realization that every service worker had this shared language and signal to commit food and drink debauchery if the mood struck. She shrugged it off as the last bartender whipped

spittle from the corner of his mouth and she smiled to herself as Cody took the drinks and ambled over to their table. The two men thanked Cody and watched her walk away, captivated by the sway of her hips and tight ass flexing against the confines of her leather pants.

Just as Peter and Shaun toasted to each other, Peter's eyes flickered up again to meet Gwen's watchful stare. Her grey eyes turned black under the red light and Peter's eyebrow twitched in response to the sight. He lifted his drink once more at a slight angle, a toast for his friend and for Gwen. How sweet. She grabbed the watered-down Manhattan and raised it to Peter in return, her wry smile spanning across her face. Then she threw her head back and downed the drink in two huge gulps.

After setting the glass down, she felt the threat of tears looming behind her eyes again. She quickly gathered her purse and smart black blazer and headed for the exit before anyone could see her cry.

As she passed the bar, she stole a glance at Cody who nodded curtly and continued drying a glass. In her periphery, she saw Shaun and Peter look up at her as she put on her jacket, the slit on her dress reaching agonizingly high toward her firm buttocks. The dress inched even higher as she pulled her blonde waves free from her jacket, the fabric caving in the front at her groin, displaying the shape of her thighs. A virgin attempting to test a man who rejected her. How pathetic.

She dropped her arms and tugged at the hem of her dress. Then she opened the swinging glass door, took a breath, and turned her head to look at the men one last time. They were already staring at her slack-jawed, Shaun burning red with the anticipation of confrontation. She nodded once and walked out into the fresh

autumn air with a whoosh.

She walked to the street corner and took an immediate right, the tears flowing freely down her flushed cheeks as she made her way to the back of the bar where the employees took their countless smoke breaks. Cody was already waiting for her, lighting an American Spirit and tucking the light blue package into her coat pocket.

“What pricks,” Cody muttered holding the cigarette between her lips. “I’m sorry babe,” she said, taking the cigarette in between her fingers and coming in to hug Gwen. Because of their size difference, their hugs were reminiscent of a child hugging their mother. Cody’s head came up snugly between Gwen’s breasts as Gwen cradled her in return. It felt great to hug the one person she cared about most, but she often wondered what it would be like being the small one. Being the one who got to be cradled for once.

With an unsteady hand, Gwen wiped away the tears. “Thanks for doing that,” she said, twisting her lips into a smile and peering at Cody through squinted eyes.

“I would do it a million times over,” Cody promised, moving the cigarette to her mouth and slowly inhaling. As she held the smoke in her lungs, she offered Gwen the cigarette with a raise of her eyebrows.

“No thank you, you enjoy it.” She stood in silence watching Cody burn through her smoke break. She wrestled with the thoughts in her head before finally asking, “Codge, do you think something is wrong with me?”

“Don’t be ridicu—“

“Seriously. What am I doing wrong?” Gwen gasped with a sob. “I see how they stare at me. I’ve ground up on enough

erections and tasted the tongues of tens if not a hundred men to know that they want me. And yet every time..."

"Gwen—"

"No. Every time something happens. Whether they suddenly lose interest or they become sick or they disappear altogether... It's like I'm fucking cursed," she cried out, her shoulders raised up to her ears in exasperation. Cody eyed her, cautious but sympathetic. As always she had her lips sealed together. Gwen let the pent-up energy come out of her body and her shoulder slumped down in defeat. "I just don't know what I need to change. I'm so sick of being alone." Fat, hot tears slowly glided over her high cheekbones like they were made of molasses.

"You don't have to change anything," Cody snapped. The intensity of her delivery stung but the unconditional love between them softened the blow. "Don't ever change anything." Cody fixed her brown eyes on hers. They burned with flecks of gold as she stared, unblinking. "The audacity. That these mediocre men's actions mean anything. That it is a reflection of you and your worth at all. They don't know you and the shit you've been through." She frowned deeply as she spoke and Gwen continued wiping away the tears that wouldn't stop falling. "The man who deserves you will be so unspeakably devout to you, you won't question your worth for one second. Everyone else is a distraction," she narrowed her eyes and spat, then took a final drag of her cigarette before putting it out under a firmly-laced, black combat boot.

Gwen shook her head, looked at the ground, and allowed the corner of her mouth to turn up into a slight smile. She raised her gaze at Cody whose eyes were now gleaming with satisfaction. "What would I do with out you?" Gwen stepped towards Cody to

embrace her petite frame in hers once again. They separated but maintained a hold on each others' forearms.

“Well, there'd be two less douchebags drinking Manhattans tainted by the spit of three disenchanting working class heroes,” Cody lowered her chin and raised her eyebrows. “And with that, I must get back. They'll need a refill soon. I love you.” She flashed a wicked smirk and gave Gwen's arm a reassuring squeeze before letting go and turning to leave.

“I love you more,” Gwen replied, watching Cody open the employee exit door.

“Impossible,” she said over her shoulder and disappeared into the building.