

SHE'S GOT YOU
By Miranda Yaver

Zoey often had difficulty getting out of bed, but had an aversion to drinking alone at home, something about the associated stigma even if no one else would know. She would know, and she was always her worst critic, certain meetings with her advisor notwithstanding. She got some small satisfaction out of the act of *having* gotten dressed, brushed her teeth, left her apartment building, but to manage the trek from bed to bar was hardly her most shining achievement.

David sat at their usual table – a rectangular table for two next to a wall with New York memorabilia that suited him – sporting his worn and familiar Clash t-shirt and faded jeans and sipping a Guinness as he perused the menu, which hadn't changed over the course of their many extravaganzas there. He stood up when he saw Zoey come hurriedly through the door, a faint smile sweeping across his face, his dimples coming into full view along with the little creases around his blue-gray eyes. Zoey puts her arms around his neck and gives him a quick kiss on the cheek, trying to subtly inhale his scent.

“Sorry I'm late. The 1 train was delayed.”

“No worries. I ordered you a Yuengling.”

“Oh, thank you so much. Good memory,” Zoey said, though she wished he ordered Brooklyn Lager, which they had had the night they first met at Webster Hall, her tipsy body leaning against his as they listened to Justin Townes Earle. But she smiled at him and took a large swig as she began to tap her toes to the beat of the music playing on the jukebox, moving her shoulders as the distinctive sound of Keith Richards' guitar fills the room.

“No problem. It's good to see you.”

“You too. How was the Met?”

“It was mixed. The actual exhibit was interesting, but not the art I usually gravitate to. But then I figured since I was already there, I'd spend some time with the impressionist and modern art wings since it had been a few months, and it doesn't ever really get old.”

“Oh absolutely. You can never have too much Van Gogh.” A few months earlier, they had wandered slowly through the impressionist wing of the Met, their arms brushing up against one another as they gravitated toward the same features of the same paintings and David compared Zoey to one of Renoir's frequent muses, Gabrielle. Dark, round features (too round, Zoey felt, tucking in her stomach but pushing out her chest, which developed early but stopped at age thirteen), and David thought a beautiful face that reflected Renoir's affection for her.

“Great minds think alike.”

“Indeed.” A hipster waiter who managed to strike the exact optimal balance between being disheveled and appealing came over to take their dinner orders. David was one of the few men in front of whom Zoey would even come close to finishing a meal, and stomach a-rumble, she looked forward to downing her chicken taco salad.

“So, how've you been?”

“Alright. Well, not really, but I'm getting by.”

“Work stuff?”

“Work stuff, family stuff, depression stuff. What else is new?” It felt strange to Zoey to tell the truth when not sitting on someone else's couch on her own dime. She would tell versions of the truth, but tended to omit the core details that her sad excuse for a life, for fear of appearing too fragile or somehow otherwise undesirable. Whether she was actually interested in the man in question rarely figured in to her calculus of putting on a better front. With David, she played a

different game. Or better still, the games were out the window altogether. With David, she had been naked – lights on, no concealer, making love, and in love. No anesthesia.

“Are you okay? I mean, obviously you’re here but I was worried when I didn’t hear from you for so long.”

“You were?” Zoey smiled at that thought. She didn’t like needing people because she disdained being viewed as needy, but being wanted, particularly by David, instilled in her a sense of comfort.

“Sure,” he said as she continued to smile bashfully, looking down at her hands as she cracks her knuckles.

“I had a rough time during my trip out in California and I swallowed a bottle of pills. But nothing really happened other than passing out for a while.” She said these words with a blasé casualness that her therapist had long scorned her for using in relation to her depression and self-injurious behaviors that had elicited in their sessions the word “masochism.” Zoey had taken the pills without much concern for her safety until it was too late, but upon waking up fourteen hours later, the point had seemingly been rendered moot.

“That’s still not good.”

“I know, but I’ll be fine. Promise.”

“You need to take care of yourself. You’ll get through this.” David placed his right hand over hers, and Zoey looked down at it, fighting off the beginnings of a tear as she feels his warmth against her skin, his soft and worn hand giving her a gentle squeeze. When he noticed her unmoved gaze and a sadness in her eyes, he removed his hand and takes another sip before asking the waiter for a refill.

“Thanks. So what have you been up to lately?”

“Still keeping up with yoga and cycling. Saw Booker T. at City Winery last week.”

“Oh how fun! How was it?”

“Great. It was a pretty long show, actually. I hadn’t listened to *Green Onions* in years.”

“It’s been a while for me too. But such a fine album. I’m glad you got to go to that.”

“Thanks, me too.” Their food arrived and Zoey took a few large bites before offering one to David, who accepted. They sat in silence for a minute as the music transitions from rock to reggae, Bob Marley’s “Get Up, Stand Up” filling the room.

“Did you go with anyone?”

“Yeah, I went with Adele.” Zoey tried not to choke on her food and swallows hurriedly, chasing it with a sip of water.

“Who?”

“The woman I met online about ten months ago.”

“Oh, I hadn’t realized that that had turned into something.” Zoey looked up, trying unsuccessfully to feign nonchalance, and forced a smile before taking a couple more hurried bites to avoid saying something that she would soon regret. Words spoken cannot be retracted easily, and Zoey wasn’t always known for her skill in the art of tact.

“Yeah, my trip to Puerto Rico over New Year’s was actually with her.”

“Oh.” Zoey traced back in her mind the conversation that they had when he mentioned a coffee date with a CUNY professor, and adjusted in her mind the images she had of David on his recent travels, realizing that it was not a week of solo backpacking but rather a budding romance. She mentally fills in the pictures of not a man on a bluff or in a forest, but rather a couple posing on a cliff, sunlight flooding in the background.

“Yeah. We’re thinking we’ll just keep my place for the summer, when it’s warm and we want to go on the beach, and live at her place in Brooklyn the rest of the year.” Zoey knew that she would soon be expected to utter the four most difficult words to say to a former lover – “I’m happy for you” – and she hoped (though doubted) that her poker face had improved over time.

“Where in Brooklyn?”

“Bay Ridge.”

“Wow, that’s a really long schlep out there.” For Zoey, anything in Brooklyn that wasn’t on the 2/3, or *maybe* the F or the L, felt like a long distance commute at minimum, and often like a third world country from which it took far too long to return to the island of Manhattan.

“It’s not so bad.”

“For the right person.”

“Well, yeah.” There had been so many late nights spent on the Long Island Railroad with Zoey’s head leaning against his, and so many nights cut short because one of them was spent and reluctant to embark on a roundtrip schlep.

David had been using his right hand with which to hold his fork and to hold his glass of beer, and it was only now that David raised his left hand on to the table to reveal on his ring finger a white gold wedding band. There were so many conversations that Zoey began, in a flash, to recall. His reluctance to remarry after being rendered a widower. Her own noncommittal as a twenty-something with options that could be kept open. Their obvious age difference. That was what she thought. All that she felt was, *Why wasn’t it me?* Patsy Cline’s words never felt truer or more brutally honest: *The only thing different, the only thing new, I’ve got the records, she’s got you...*

“Well, I’m happy for you. You deserve the best.” The words feel like lies coming out of her mouth, but she had said them, had risen to the call of duty in this adult world that she navigated with more grace some days than others.

“Thanks. How about you?”

“I was seeing someone for a couple of months but after we slept together a few times he decided he wanted to be with someone thin.” The breakup – to the extent that one can break up after only dating briefly – had elicited in her a Valium overdose because it cut to the core of Zoey’s bodily insecurities, but Zoey describes the encounter dismissively, self-conscious about her inability to curb her impulsivity in the aftermath of rejection.

“I’m sorry.”

“Me too.”

“You deserve better.”

“Thanks. Jury’s still out,” Zoey said dismissively while playing with her hands, digging her jagged and uneven nails into her wrist, leaving crescent moon-shaped indentations at which she then scratches.

“Hey, did you see what’s on the schedule for Shakespeare in the Park this summer?”

“No, I haven’t yet. What is it?”

“*Lear*.”

“Oh my god, that’s my favorite. Well, probably second to *Hamlet*.”

“Should be great.”

“Yeah. Well, maybe the three of us – or four, if I bring someone – could go to one of the performances. I’d like to meet her. Clearly, she’s making you very happy.” Zoey wondered what Adele looks like, whether she smiles every day, whether she tosses and turns through the night or

lies peacefully in his arms, whether she rubs his neck when he pulls a muscle after a long bike ride along the beach.

“Thanks. I’m not sure if she’d want to meet you, though.”

“Because we were together?”

“Well, yeah.”

“Got it. Well, I hope you know I’m happy for you and am glad you found someone.”

“Thanks, me too.” She looked at him with a wistfulness that is not reciprocated.

“Shall we split the bill?”

“No, I’ve got this. I was a grad student once.”

“I can pay my half. I’m not *quite* that broke.” Even in poverty, Zoey never enjoyed letting men – even David – pay for her, feeling that it amounted to surrendering her power and ability to say no. The one who has the money, who pays, has control, and Zoey needed all the control she could get. David never understood that, never saw that her desperation to assert financial independence was not a rejection of his generosity but rather a mere assertion of her sense of self within – rather than actually apart – from their relationship.

“I’ve got it.”

“Well, thank you,” she eventually said. “I’ve got it next time, okay? Pinky swear?”

“Deal.” Zoey and David lock fingers in a pinky swear, the sacred vow of heathens such as they, though David had been known to break such promises in order to pick up the tab more often than agreed upon because he knew of Zoey’s medical bills. David puts his credit card in his back pocket, added a 22 percent tip, and signed his name. David wrote in an even mix of printed and cursive letters, his l’s hooked and his d’s with unusually long tails, a handwriting style that he developed when he was thirteen and bored. It had since stuck with him over the decades. They walk toward the door and David held it open for her as they braced for the cold night air.

“It was good to see you.”

“You too.”

“Love you. Goodnight.”

“Goodnight. Get home safely.”

“You too.”

Zoey wondered whether he had missed those three key words – “I love you” – or whether he had simply chosen to ignore them. They had taken so long to say in their relationship. The four words “I love you too” were far simpler, less complicated, less daring. She was never the first to say it, had wanted not just for “love ya” but “love you” to precede it. Never before had these words not been immediately reciprocated. Time had never felt so long in waiting for these words that never came, and she wished that David had hair to brush across his forehead a la *The Way We Were*. Instead she simply stood frozen, a pang of sadness in the pit of her stomach.

You never really know when it’s the last time you’ll be with someone, Zoey thought to herself. Your hands explore, you run your tongue over their curves and taste the salt of their sweat, you close your eyes and soak in the orgasmic delight of intimacy, run your fingers through their hair and hold them through the night, lovingly but in a way like there will be many more nights to come. Like a habit. If you knew it was the last time, you would have savored their taste, their scent, the way they felt against your skin. Instead, those sensations are lost in the moment of passion and disappear into nothingness, a distant blur of what constitutes memory of true love. She remembered that it was after drinks at PJ Clarke’s that they went to the Empire Hotel, all art deco and earth tones and semi-tacky animal prints that worked well enough individually but not together. Time felt slower, the minutes fuller. She tried to remember the feeling of his hands

wrapped gently around her waist, his index fingers curving into her spine as she tucked her head under his stubbly chin and they danced slowly across the room, the sound of “Harvest Moon” playing softly in the background. He was with another woman now, a woman near his age and who didn’t slice her own skin for satiety amid anxiety attacks, and had seemingly moved on while Zoey stayed seemingly stuck where she was just over a year ago when the two of them were one. She knew this time to remember the way that the stubble of his beard felt against her cheek as he leans forward to give her a hug goodbye before disappearing across the street to the downtown subway platform.

When Zoey returned home and kicked off her shoes, slid her pants down and tossed them to the side, she crawled into bed, remembering the weight that she had once felt on the bed when she shared it with him. She hugged her knees to her chest, sliding over to “his” side of the bed and rocking softly from side to side, then retrieved the blade from her nightstand drawer as a tear slides down her cheek onto the pillow. She wondered how long it takes to detach associations between people and the things that remind us of them. *Horse racing. David loves to watch the Kentucky Derby, and they watched a race together at an Irish pub near the 72nd Street subway, one of those places she’d walked past a hundred times and he seemed to know was worth going into. Webster Hall. The venue where they met at the Justin Townes Earle concert. Brooklyn Lager. The first beer that they drank together. Grassroots Tavern. The bar that they shut down after the Townes Earle show, talking about The Godfather and singing Warren Zevon. The Beats. His favorite poets, who they talked about for hours on their second date in Morningside Heights, where they traced the landmarks of Ginsburg’s and Burroughs’s goings-on from their Columbia days. “Harvest Moon.” The last song that they danced to together.* Nothing felt safe, everything loaded.

Zoey would never really get used to these feelings, but she hoped she’d eventually learn to turn the hurting off.