

## Weakened Night

By: Natalie Unger

"So, how long have you two been dating?" said a warm voice.

"Two weeks," Simon said in an abash manner. "Relationships don't too last long," he added. Stephanie held Simon's left hand.

"This one will last. I have a feeling," she said in the same warm tone, looking at Simon. Simon raised his right hand towards Stephanie. Simon briskly brushed away a piece of blonde hair from Stephanie's face. Stephanie was taken aback and pulled away from Simon. She put her hand up where Simon had touched her cheek. The diamond on Stephanie's hand was catching the light from the afternoon sun.

"I'm happy for you," Simon whispered.

"I'm happy for myself," Stephanie murmured.

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"Simon says you're a runway model. How's that like?" said David as he was chopping up the salad. Clara was more concentrated on the glass doors leading to the patio, where Stephanie and Simon were sitting outside.

"Fine, I guess," she said in her monotone words. She was someone without idiosyncratic character, a very rare breed in the New York jungle.

"It's a job like any other. Just people want to know what you are up to all the time," replied Clara.

Clara was the girl who knew her words would always be cold and lack emotion. This unnerved a lot of people outside of the fashion industry. Fashion saw her as a clothes hanger and desired nothing more of her. She could lack tact in conversation, and often fulfilled this duty at parties. Clara knew if it had not been for her beauty, she would have continued to remain unknown to the rest of the world. She then would realize the lack of personality would be the cause of her early death, because who can truly love a painting without desiring the warm words of never-ending embrace at night?

"I couldn't help but recognize you from the Louie Vuitton print ad," continued David, "Stephanie loved that one. She's in advertising you know. For Madison and Vine."

"Oh," replied Clara. Clara looked at all the chopped tomatoes David made. Clara could see that David was nervous like her about Stephanie and Simon being out on the patio. There were seven fist-sized piles of tomatoes for four salads. She looked from the spectacle of red juices to David and asked,

"Were Stephanie and Simon close friends in college?"

"No, I don't think so. I hadn't heard about Simon until yesterday. Why?"

Clara thought for a moment and replied, "They seem like they were close. It must be just a feeling I guess," Clara said looking down at her Gucci black boots. A piece of chopped tomato got on her left boot. Disgusting tomato ruining the leather, thought Clara. This was generally the length of Clara's thoughts.

David didn't want to admit that Clara was right about their significant others, or rather his meaningful significant other. David sensed something amiss with Simon. Stephanie had mentioned all her boyfriends from college, but Simon never seemed to have came up in that conversation. She had explained earlier that evening before dinner that Simon and her had been "friends" and hadn't dated, and in her words said, "Hence, he wasn't mentioned in the ex-boyfriend roster."

David wanted to believe they were friends, but could see Clara obviously didn't think so. This bothered him greatly because he trusted woman's intuition more than his own.

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Stephanie closed the front door of the apartment behind Clara and Simon. Stephanie and David walked into the kitchen together to clean-up. "Boy, I couldn't wait for them to leave!" cried David.

"I had a great time with them," frowned Stephanie. "The wine they brought with them was amazing," Stephanie said as she was putting the plates away.

"Well...You and Simon were friends in college. You had fun playing catch-up. Clara and I had nothing to talk about. Except..." David said as he handed Stephanie a cleared off dish of the past salad.

"Except what?" Stephanie said in response, in waiting for David's unfinished sentence.

David ended the waiting... beginning with a sigh, "How close you and Simon seemed. She couldn't help but feel that you guys had had a thing for each other."

Expected reaction of Stephanie: "That's ridiculous! Simon! Of all the guys I knew in college. You think me and him? No, no, no," she said with a smile.

David looked a bit worried. Stephanie thought this was adorable. She wrapped her left arm around David and put her right hand behind his neck. She then added,

"David, you are the greatest thing I ever found in this world and I cherish you every day. I want only you to share my life with. I love you." Stephanie looked up and leaned in closer. The closer she came to kissing him, the more rapidly David's fears went away.

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"They seemed happy," Clara said in the cab.

"Too happy," murmured Simon.

"What?"

"Nothing," replied Simon.

Simon looked off into space at New York City's lights. I could have had her, he thought. Stephanie was smart, beautiful, silly, and above all else, she held the title as the best person he had ever met. She had believed in him and what he could accomplished, which he evidently did. Here he was breathing, because she had convinced him that he was worthwhile. Yet, he still felt alone especially riding the cab with Clara. Clara was fun. She focused her attentions on the clothes others wore than the actual people who were wearing them. Clara was easy. Clara was simple. Clara overall, was boring.

Something new, something exciting would always happen whenever Simon was with Stephanie. The moments he had with her in college were unforgettable. His favorite moments were the ones where he had made her smile. Oh, he could really make Stephanie laugh.

Simon in college had loved hugging her when it was for a hello or a goodbye. Back then, Stephanie was so bashful he could feel underneath his arms how stiff and nervous she would become. This made him smile inside. He knew that if Stephanie didn't really care about him, she wouldn't let him hug her.

Clara was special in her ways; Clara wasn't going to be as special as Stephanie anytime soon.

Simon got back to present as the cab stopped in front of a bar. Simon didn't remember hearing their destination.

"Fifteen dollars and sixty-seven cents," said the cabbie with some foreign accent that Simon couldn't decipher at the moment. Clara paid. That was a first. Clara looked straight at Simon. Does she expect me to open the door or something? Simon thought. We've been over this...

"You get out," the words formed in a clear chilling coldness by Clara's voice. This resonated with everyone in the cab. A quite peace came for second and left with Simon's words,

"Why? Aren't you coming?"

"No, because you're still in love with Stephanie. And until you get over her, there's no more us." Simon was bewildered at her. The words that just came out of Clara's mouth were completely unfathomed. This moment was almost esteemed as a Stephanie moment. There would have been more humor in a Stephanie moment other than this moment.

"GO Simon!" Clara pointed with her long airy index finger to the bar and then added, "Get pissed drunk. Think about her for a while, and then MOVE ON. She's happy now. Don't ruin that for her. Because, heaven forbid you ruin my happiness."

Simon stared, and left the cab without a reply to Clara's truth. The car door slammed instantly behind him by Clara. Simon stood on the sidewalk and watched Clara ride in a yellow cab away from him. Her cab soon got lost with the yellow cabs of Manhattan's night.

He drank like Clara commanded. He forgot Stephanie, Clara, and David and their dinner for a short while in his glasses of disappearing scotches. Eventually, when he would order later in the evening, glasses

would slip away in fingers to the young girls passing through to the next party. The later parts of the night went dark for Simon.

A cop in the light of morning reminded Simon not to sleep in the street. Simon's hangover soon turned into sobriety later in the evening. In his sobriety, Simon knew he was still in love with Stephanie. His unrequited love had foolishly missed a window of opportunity, of a long-awaited united kiss on a Manhattan patio, hopefully finding out, Stephanie, may in fact too, love him.

But, how could she love him? I ask you reader, because he had no love for himself in his own heart.