

# Everyone Has A Moment

by Tracie Lark

I stalk the hall, suctioning the cold linoleum floor with my bare feet - back and forth, back and forth - in silence, save for the distant beeping sounds of hospital machinery at the Alfred. *Beep, beep, beep.*

Despite the limp I have accrued from a broken toe, I stand hard and fast in every step, pausing at each end of the hall.

It is too quiet. *Beep.*

I step back behind the curtain cutting off the bed from the hallway and sit on a plastic chair that has olive green covering, and I wail. Even *I* think the sounds coming from my mouth are eerie. *What was I doing here? I want to go home. These people don't understand me.*

Earlier that night, two friends and I had escaped the work week by going to the Espy in Melbourne's finest, St Kilda beach. We had two beers at home, then headed to the pub, ready to dance and let our hair out. We ordered a jug of beer between the three of us and poured a glass each. My small and petite friend Bronnie was feeling quite happy, her friend's band were on their way up in the music world and were headlining the night's event. My stockier friend, Oscar, with the bald head, was as he always was, chilled out and ready to observe the talent of his fellow musicians.

I was feeling quite energetic, in a dancing mood for sure, and when the support band came on, Bronnie and I were already moshing and making friends under the first jug of beer. Sharing is caring, we always say. Bronnie was so excited to see her friends' band play and I was excited for her; she was so damn cute, as in, small and fun. Oscar stayed super chilled and jiggled along a little when we made him.

Two rigid fingers tapped my shoulder and when I spun around, a small bouncer stood below me.

"Excuse me mam, I'm going to have to ask you to leave."

"What? It's 9pm, I just got here and I've ordered my first drink."

"Sorry, I'm asking you to leave?"

In shock, I asked to speak to someone to find out the reason why but was refused any kind of air time.

"Whatever you think then, mate," I stepped towards my friends and he grabbed my forearm.

"This way."

“I think it’s only fair that I tell my friends that you’re kicking me out so that I have a safe trip home, don’t you?” I shook his hand off my arm.

“Fine. Be quick.”

A few minutes go by and I try to regain my breath and ignore the beeping when a nurse walks in my little beige hospital room. She has dark skin and speaks quietly in an Indian accent with her mouth, though it sounds as though the words are coming from her nose.

“Roll up your sleeves please, I need to check your arms,” she says.

I whine back. “Why are you making me wait so long? It’s just my toe and it’s fine now, it’s not even broken. I just want to go home.”

She takes my arm and begins to roll up my sleeve. Her dark brown eyes scan my forearm.

“Are you actually checking me for track marks? Is this what you are doing?” I am openly rude. Mad-like.

I see some words clearly come from her lips this time, “I will just be a second, this is a routine check.” The dark brown eyes say otherwise.

I had told Bronnie and Oscar as well as our newfound friends that I had been asked to leave the Espy and they were all outraged. I asked them just to settle down and that there was nothing we could do.

“Come on guys, screw this place, let’s go.”

I hooked my arm under Bronnie’s and pulled her towards the top of the steps of the exit.

“This is fucked, we’re here to see my friend’s band and I can’t even see them.”

“I know, don’t worry.” I tried to console her.

“No, I will worry. This is shit, I just came all this way from Warrandyte.”

“I know,” I said. Several bouncers had collected around us now which annoyed me so I said, a little too loud, “You’re right Bron, It *is* fucked,” and at that, two of the bouncers grabbed us both and hauled us down the stairs. Oscar pulled out his phone and started filming them man-handling of the small Bronnie and myself.

It all happened so quickly from then. The two bouncers picked us up and hauled us from the step under the two large umbrellas at the small white gate towards the cement path and we landed down on to the gutter. Bronnie went down backwards and I fell on top of her and all I saw was her face as the back of her head hit the gutter.

That scene in American History X where the kids jaw gets smashed against the gutter. That’s how this scene ran through my mind, just as clear and just as shocking. But

real, not a movie. Bronnie's eyes, stared in to mine as the back of her head hit the cement gutter. They closed, then, I couldn't see her eyes, only the lids. "Bronnie," I called. "Bronnie, come back to me. Can you hear me?"

The machines beep at me as the nurse with the dark brown eyes performs her "routine check" and I really lose it then.

"Oh yeah sure it is a routine check! I told you I have a had three or four beers, I am a bit drunk - not even that drunk - but I am emotional, my friend almost died in front of me tonight and I'm in pain and am having a panic attack even being here. This is unnecessary, I don't take fucking drugs!" I'm furious and clearly distorted. I know that. Mad-like. *Beep.*

By the time I had got Bronnie to come-to in that cement gutter, Oscar was shouting to the bouncers for his phone back. I picked Bronnie up and moved her to the side and went to the gate facing the several bouncers standing before me. I saw Bronnie staring up at the stars and leaning on the fence. She was concussed.

"Give the phone back." Oscar was still in a very calm argument with the bouncers, asking for his phone back as they pretended they didn't have it while one of them deleted the footage of them pushing us in to the footpath. The two umbrellas at the white gate ensured that their cameras didn't pick it up for security footage, that's for sure.

"What phone?" One of them said.

"You know very well." Oscar told them.

Someone came scurrying down the stairs and threw Oscar's phone at him. They had deleted the entire footage, as predicted. I stood under the umbrellas peering out to the side so that I could see the security camera. They knew when to push us, when the cameras couldn't see. *Well two can play that game*, I thought. I was angry but remained calm.

I didn't dare touch the white gate under the umbrellas but I positioned myself up nice and close. I spoke with a stern but calm voice. "So who the fuck do you assholes think you are? You could have killed my friend tonight."

"I don't know what you're talking about but if you enter this property again I will be calling the police."

"I'm not touching your precious pub floor. And we just called the police. They won't come near here, they said. So I think its up to us then." I said, still calm, like just before a storm.

Amongst the bouncers was a tall, dark-skinned man who looked like he could have played for the All Blacks. He was quiet and smirked as his bouncer friends entertained me. But not for long.

“Fine then. Have a great night fuckwits,” I said and then I planted my foot right in the big guy’s nuts with all the energy I could summon. He keeled over in agony, grabbing for his balls.

We didn’t need to run, we strolled away down the street at an easy pace in sight of the video cameras. Well, I had started limping after a bit.

We stepped in to a quieter establishment in St Kilda and ordered us a beer so we could talk about what had happened. We had called the police but they didn’t seem to think they could do anything.

I convinced Bronnie and Oscar that I needed to go to the hospital and that Bronnie should too, my foot was clearly broken and Bronnie had been concussed but she refused to stay after I had been admitted.

And that’s how I ended up spending the night stalking the halls of this hospital ward, alone except for this nurse checking me for drugs and eyeing me off with her wide brown eyes every hour or so. Still, the beeping.

She’s pulling my sleeves back down and I snap at her, “Are you happy now? Nothing. I’m not a user.”

Her dark brown eyes stare in to mine and she backs away.

“Where are you going? I don’t want to stay here. I’ll walk out!”

But I don’t move. Instead I stay the night, right through until dawn when the x-rays came back telling me that I have a fracture in my large toe. An old injury resurfaced. I only came here to try to get Bronnie some medical help. I have been going between stalking the hallways looking for human faces and wailing like a baby in the hospital bed all night. I am finally discharged and I catch a cab home.

I didn’t mean to appear insane to the nurse lady, I was so angry that Bronnie had nearly lost her life, her mind, her will to speak and laugh and tell me I haven’t got enough make up on. I was so angry at the police for not being able to help us. It felt unjust.

So I had a moment. “Everyone has a moment now and then,” my nan always says. We’re only human. Our mental health is not the greatest at the best of times let alone after a few beers. Everyone has a mental snap every now and then when they have been treated in this way. I’m not sure why they wanted me out of the Espy, maybe it was my dancing. (Not funny?) Maybe it was because Oscar looked like a dodgy bouncer himself - it is his bald head, you see. I just don’t know.

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I've been working hard and trying to get good at my new job. I was a youth worker but I've taken a change in career paths and become a travel agent. It's much more sociable and has not so harsh of an emotional responsibility and plus, I have a good routine and I get to send people on amazing holidays and meet fun people.

There are some down parts when you lose a lot of money because of a mistake like putting the wrong dates in the system or sometimes you get a disagreeable customer; and there are some up parts, where you win a holiday or find out that you made a family's trip to Bali or Fiji the best it ever could have been. I had a girl come in one day in absolute tears. She told me that her work had been so demanding and she hadn't had a holiday. She was from South Africa so she was far away from her family while she was working in Australia. She was going to Bali and wanted to know if it was a good idea or not. She threw her arms up in the air, crying, unable to control herself. Her fists were slapping the desk and snot ran down her arms. She admitted aloud in the office that she had been depressed and was throwing her wallet and passport on to the desk, pleading with me to book her a holiday. My colleagues were aghast but I ignored them and continued focusing on her, trying to get this done quickly so she could leave as soon as possible.

My caring days were done. I would not be taking on someone's emotional and mental issues any more. I knew now that someone else's problem was not my problem. "Look after number one," my nan says to me. "We all have our moments."

I used a calm and quiet voice. "Well, if you go to Ubud, which literally means medicine then you will be able to take part in a range of activities for healing purposes. Music, massage, yoga, drinking fresh juices by the rice paddies."

She sobbed so much at my desk so I handed her a box of tissues and got her sorted for her trip. My colleagues were relieved when she left the store. I felt haunted by her visit but also happy that I had helped her, shown her the compassion she needed to get some strength together and get up and go. I was happy that I would never have to see her again.

Until now.

She is back from her holiday and has come to see me to plan a new one. She thanks me with happy eyes and I feel proud I guess. She wants to book a few more holidays with me including a holiday now with her family and friends from South Africa.

The EFTPOS machine beeps, telling the store that it is out of paper and I get a flash of being in that hospital ward. *Beep*. Everyone has a lapse every now and then when they are surrounded by idiots. *Everyone has a moment*. As soon as you remove yourself from the poison you begin to heal. *Beep*.

I see this girl sitting in front of me now in a good state of mind – talking her head off and thanking me – but definitely being herself again, and that is nice. *Beep*. A completely different person, really. In fact, she looks different, but the same. Kind of familiar but not. I don't know. *Beep*.

She is rambling about her upcoming trip. I am researching visas for her Asian stopover and I am happy for her, happy that she is taking on a new change and meeting up with friends and family from around the world. *Beep*.

I am interrupting her to explain that in order to book her flight which goes via Kuala Lumpur she needs to check what visas are required for her passport.

She is impatient, “I'm sure it will be fine”, she palms it off and hands me her passport. *Beep*.

“Not using your South African passport this time?” I ask her. She tells me that it has expired and she needs to use her Indian one. *Beep*.

I roll up my sleeves and place my hands on the rest below my computer keyboard and I stare in to her face as I began to type; slowly, I say, “I will just be a second, this is a routine check.”

And I remember.

Her dark brown eyes, staring in to mine.

*Beep*.

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