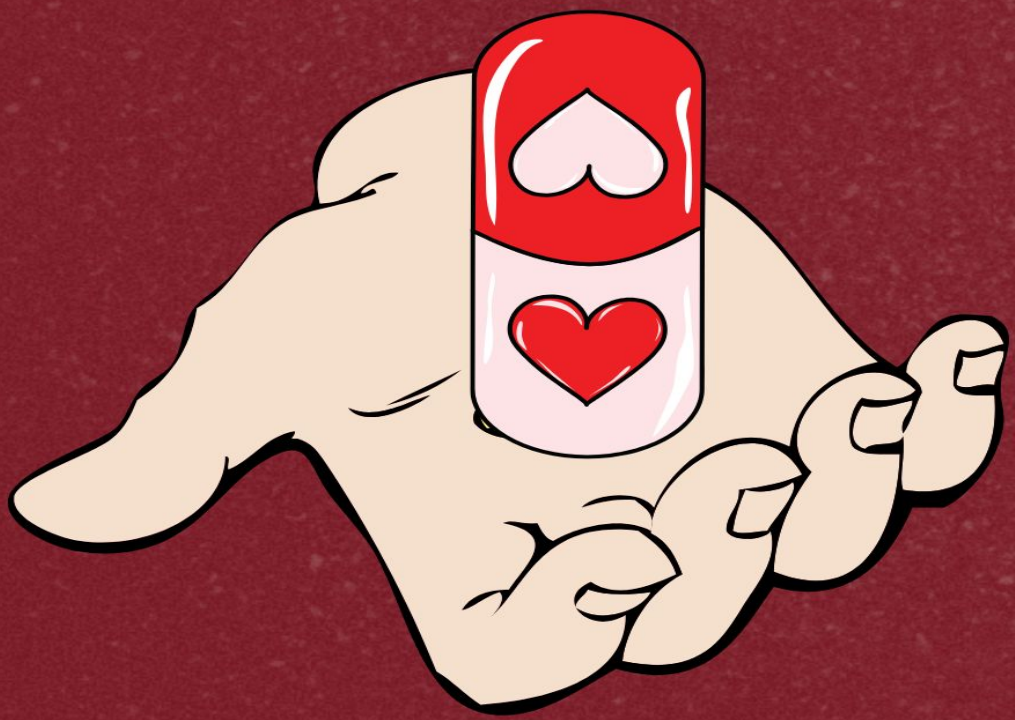
A SHORT STORY
BY MIKE N. STEVENS

Eternal Dose



A Novel

ETERNAL DOSE

MIKE N. STEVENS

Thank you to anyone that reads this.
- Mike N. Stevens

PROLOGUE

This is their story—a story of love and loss, of desperation and hope, of a bond that could not be broken. It is a testament to the power of love, a reminder that even in the face of the greatest tragedy, love finds a way to endure.

CHAPTER 1

JUNE 10,2020

“Art enables us to find ourselves and lose ourselves at the same time." — Thomas Merton”

Ethan stood in the corner of the art gallery, nervously sipping his glass of wine. The room was filled with people admiring the various paintings on display, but his eyes were fixed on one particular piece. It was a painting of a serene lake at sunset, the colors blending together in a way that made it almost look like a photograph. It was his favorite piece, and he was proud of how it had turned out.

As he stood there, lost in thought, he felt a tap on his shoulder. He turned around to see a man with a warm smile and sparkling eyes.

"Hi, I'm Liam," the man said, extending his hand. "I couldn't help but notice you standing here. Are you the artist?"

Ethan nodded, shaking Liam's hand. "Yes, I am. I'm Ethan. Nice to meet you."

"Nice to meet you too, Ethan," Liam replied. "I have to say, your work is incredible. This painting, in particular, caught my eye. The colors are just so vibrant and lifelike."

"Thank you," Ethan said, feeling a blush creep up his cheeks. "It's one of my favorites too. I spent a lot of time on it."

Liam smiled, his eyes twinkling with genuine admiration. "Well, it definitely shows. You have a real talent."

They stood there for a moment, both admiring the painting in silence. Ethan felt a strange sense of comfort in Liam's presence, as if they had known each other for years.

"So, what inspired you to paint this?" Liam asked, breaking the silence.

Ethan took a deep breath, thinking back to the day he had painted it. "I was at this lake a few months ago, just sitting by the water and watching the sunset. It was such a peaceful moment, and I wanted to capture that feeling in my painting."

Liam nodded, his expression thoughtful. "I can see that. It's like you can almost feel the tranquility just by looking at it."

They continued to talk, moving from one painting to the next. Liam was genuinely interested in Ethan's work, asking questions and offering thoughtful comments. Ethan found himself opening up in a way he hadn't with anyone else in a long time.

As the evening went on, they found themselves standing in front of another painting, this one of a bustling city street at night.

"This one is so different from the lake painting," Liam said, tilting his head to the side. "It's so full of energy and movement."

"Yeah, I wanted to capture the contrast between the calm of nature and the chaos of the city," Ethan explained. "It's like two different worlds."

Liam nodded, his eyes never leaving the painting. "I love it. You have a way of making the viewer feel like they're right there in the moment."

Ethan smiled, feeling a warmth spread through his chest. "Thank you, Liam. That means a lot."

They continued to talk, their conversation flowing effortlessly. Ethan found himself laughing more than he had in a long time, and he could tell that Liam was enjoying himself too.

As the gallery began to empty out, Liam turned to Ethan with a hopeful look in his eyes. "Would you like to grab a coffee sometime? I'd love to hear more about your work and get to know you better."

Ethan felt a flutter of excitement in his stomach. "I'd like that," he said, smiling. "I'd like that a lot."

They exchanged numbers, and as Liam walked away, Ethan couldn't help but feel a sense of anticipation. He had a feeling that this was the beginning of something special.

A few days later, Ethan found himself sitting in a cozy coffee shop, nervously tapping his fingers on the table. He glanced at the door every few seconds, hoping to see Liam walk in.

Just as he was starting to worry that Liam wouldn't show up, the door opened, and there he was, looking as charming as ever.

"Hey, Ethan," Liam said, smiling as he approached the table. "Sorry I'm late. Traffic was a nightmare."

"No worries," Ethan replied, feeling a wave of relief wash over him. "I'm just glad you made it."

They ordered their drinks and settled into a comfortable conversation. Liam was easy to talk to, and Ethan found himself opening up about his life, his art, and his dreams for the future.

"So, what about you?" Ethan asked, taking a sip of his coffee. "What do you do?"

"I'm a freelance photographer," Liam said, his eyes lighting up. "I love capturing moments and telling stories through my photos."

"That's amazing," Ethan said, genuinely impressed. "I'd love to see some of your work sometime."

"I'd love to show you," Liam replied, smiling. "Maybe we could go on a photo walk together. I could show you some of my favorite spots in the city."

"That sounds like a lot of fun," Ethan said, feeling a spark of excitement. "I'd love that."

They continued to talk, their conversation flowing effortlessly. Ethan felt a connection with Liam that he hadn't felt with anyone else in a long time. It was as if they were kindred spirits, drawn together by their shared love of art and adventure.

As the evening went on, they found themselves walking through the city, talking and laughing as they explored. Liam pointed out interesting buildings and hidden alleyways, sharing stories and memories from his photography adventures.

Ethan felt a sense of joy and freedom that he hadn't experienced in a long time. He was grateful for Liam's company and the way he made him feel alive.

As they reached the end of their walk, Liam turned to Ethan with a hopeful look in his eyes. "I had a great time tonight, Ethan. I'd love to do this again sometime."

"Me too," Ethan replied, smiling. "I'd love that."

They exchanged a warm hug, and as Liam walked away, Ethan couldn't help but feel a sense of anticipation. He had a feeling that this was the beginning of something special.

Back at his apartment, Ethan couldn't stop thinking about Liam. He felt a sense of excitement and hope that he hadn't felt in a long time. He knew that their connection was something rare and special, and he was eager to see where it would lead.

As he sat down at his easel, he picked up his paintbrush and began to work on a new painting. The colors flowed effortlessly from his brush, and he felt a sense of inspiration and creativity that he hadn't felt in a long time.

He knew that this was just the beginning of his journey with Liam, and he couldn't wait to see what the future held.

CHAPTER 2

JUNE 15,2020

“Love is composed of a single soul inhabiting two bodies." — Aristotle

Ethan couldn't stop thinking about Liam after their first meeting. There was something about him that felt different, something that made Ethan's heart race in a way it hadn't in years. He found himself eagerly awaiting their next encounter, hoping it would be as magical as the first.

A few days later, they met up for their planned photo walk. Liam had chosen a picturesque part of the city, filled with hidden alleyways, vibrant street art, and charming cafes. As they strolled through the streets, Liam pointed out interesting spots and shared stories about his photography adventures.

"See that mural over there?" Liam said, pointing to a colorful painting on the side of a building. "I took a photo of it last year, and it ended up being featured in a local art magazine."

"That's amazing," Ethan replied, genuinely impressed. "You have such a great eye for detail."

Liam smiled, his eyes twinkling with excitement. "Thanks, Ethan. I love capturing moments that tell a story. It's like freezing a piece of time and sharing it with the world."

They continued to explore, snapping photos and sharing laughs along the way. Ethan felt a sense of joy and freedom that he hadn't experienced in a long time. Liam's enthusiasm was infectious, and Ethan found himself opening up more and more.

As they walked, they stumbled upon a quaint little cafe tucked away in a quiet corner. Liam suggested they take a break and grab a coffee. They found a cozy spot by the window and settled in, their conversation flowing effortlessly.

"So, what inspires your art?" Liam asked, taking a sip of his coffee.

Ethan thought for a moment, considering the question. "I guess it's a mix of things. Nature, emotions, experiences... I try to capture the beauty and complexity of life in my paintings."

Liam nodded, his expression thoughtful. "I can see that in your work. There's a depth and authenticity that really resonates with people."

"Thank you," Ethan said, feeling a blush creep up his cheeks. "That means a lot coming from you."

They continued to talk, sharing stories about their lives, their passions, and their dreams for the future. Ethan felt a deep connection with Liam, as if they were kindred spirits drawn together by fate.

As the sun began to set, they decided to head back. Liam walked Ethan to his apartment, and they stood outside for a moment, neither wanting the evening to end.

"I had a great time today, Ethan," Liam said, his voice soft and sincere. "I'd love to do this again sometime."

"Me too," Ethan replied, smiling. "I'd love that."

They exchanged a warm hug, and as Liam walked away, Ethan couldn't help but feel a sense of anticipation. He had a feeling that this was the beginning of something special.

Over the next few weeks, Ethan and Liam spent more and more time together. They explored the city, went on spontaneous adventures, and shared countless moments of laughter and joy. Their bond grew stronger with each passing day, and Ethan found himself falling deeper in love with Liam.

One evening, they decided to have a picnic in the park. They spread out a blanket under a large oak tree and enjoyed a delicious meal, surrounded by the beauty of nature. As they sat there, watching the stars twinkle in the night sky, Ethan felt a sense of peace and contentment.

"This is perfect," Liam said, leaning back on the blanket. "I can't remember the last time I felt this happy."

"Me neither," Ethan replied, his heart swelling with emotion. "I'm so glad we met, Liam. You've brought so much joy into my life."

Liam smiled, reaching out to take Ethan's hand. "I feel the same way, Ethan. You've shown me a whole new world, and I can't wait to see where this journey takes us."

They sat in comfortable silence for a while, simply enjoying each other's presence. Ethan felt a sense of gratitude for the love they had found, and he knew that no matter what the future held, they would face it together.

As the night grew colder, they packed up their picnic and headed back to Ethan's apartment. They stood outside for a moment, reluctant to say goodbye.

"Do you want to come in for a bit?" Ethan asked, his voice hopeful.

Liam nodded, a warm smile spreading across his face. "I'd love to."

They spent the rest of the evening talking and laughing, their connection growing stronger with each passing moment. As they sat on the couch, wrapped in each other's arms, Ethan felt a sense of completeness he had never known before.

"I love you, Liam," he whispered, his voice filled with emotion.

Liam looked into Ethan's eyes, his own filled with love and tenderness. "I love you too, Ethan. More than words can say."

They shared a gentle kiss, their hearts beating in perfect harmony. In that moment, Ethan knew that he had found something truly special, something that would last a lifetime.

As the weeks turned into months, Ethan and Liam's relationship continued to flourish. They supported each other through the ups and downs of life, always finding strength in their love. They celebrated each other's successes and comforted each other in times of sorrow.

One day, Liam surprised Ethan with a weekend getaway to a charming cabin in the mountains. The cabin was nestled in a secluded area, surrounded by towering trees and breathtaking views. It was the perfect escape from the hustle and bustle of the city.

"This place is amazing," Ethan said, his eyes wide with wonder as they arrived at the cabin. "How did you find it?"

"I have my ways," Liam replied with a wink. "I thought it would be nice for us to get away and spend some quality time together."

Ethan smiled, feeling a surge of love for Liam. "You're the best, Liam. I can't wait to explore this place with you."

They spent the weekend hiking through the forest, taking in the stunning scenery and enjoying each other's company. They cooked meals together, played board games by the fireplace, and shared stories late into the night.

On the last evening of their trip, they sat on the porch, wrapped in blankets, watching the stars twinkle in the clear night sky.

"This has been the best weekend," Ethan said, resting his head on Liam's shoulder. "I don't want it to end."

"Me neither," Liam replied, his voice soft and tender. "But we'll always have these memories, and there will be plenty more adventures to come."

Ethan looked up at Liam, his heart full of love and gratitude. "I can't imagine my life without you, Liam. You've brought so much happiness into my world."

Liam smiled, leaning down to kiss Ethan gently. "And you've done the same for me, Ethan. I love you more than anything."

They sat in comfortable silence, savoring the moment and the love they shared. It was a perfect ending to a perfect weekend, and Ethan knew that their love would only continue to grow stronger.

As their relationship deepened, Ethan and Liam began to talk about their future together. They dreamed of traveling the world, creating art, and building a life filled with love and adventure.

One evening, as they sat on the couch, Liam turned to Ethan with a serious expression. "Ethan, there's something I've been wanting to talk to you about."

Ethan's heart skipped a beat, a sense of unease creeping in. "What is it, Liam?"

Liam took a deep breath, his eyes filled with emotion. "I want us to move in together. I know it's a big step, but I can't imagine my life without you. I want to wake up next to you every morning and build a home together."

Ethan felt a surge of joy and relief. "I'd love that, Liam. I've been thinking the same thing. I want to be with you, always."

They shared a tender kiss, their hearts beating in perfect harmony. It was a moment of pure happiness, and they knew that their love was meant to last.

The next few weeks were a whirlwind of excitement as they prepared to move in together. They found a charming apartment in a vibrant part of the city, filled with light and character. It was the perfect place to start their new life together.

As they unpacked boxes and arranged their belongings, they couldn't help but feel a sense of anticipation for the future. They decorated the apartment with their favorite art pieces, creating a space that reflected their love and creativity.

One evening, as they sat on the couch, surrounded by the warmth of their new home, Liam turned to Ethan with a smile. "This feels right, doesn't it?"

Ethan nodded, his heart full of love. "It does. I can't wait to see what the future holds for us."

They shared a gentle kiss, their hearts beating in perfect harmony. In that moment, they knew that they had found something truly special, something that would last a lifetime.