

The Demon of Ivalo

Thanks and dedications:

To Mom and Dad. To Fabián, that awesome friend I have the luck to have. To my Coursera teachers: Brando Skyhorse, Amy Bloom, Amity Gaige and Salvatore Scibona, whose advice and lessons made me improve my writing. And to all my Coursera peers, who have given me feedback and critiques, as in this story as in the ones I submitted in the previous courses. This story is for each and every single one of you, guys.

Note of the author:

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How can you mend a broken heart?
Or how can you stop the rain from falling down?
How can you stop the sun from shining?
-Bee Gees, How Can You Mend a Broken Heart (song)

Wake up, Andrea. You can't stay in bed forever. However much it hurts, you have to get out of the bed and face your problems. Your problems with Clarissa Morgan,

your girlfriend who cheated on you with her best friend: Jesse Cranston. It's as if you had, "If we are in a relationship, please cheat on me," written on your forehead. It's not the first time you are going through this pain. But, it still hurts as if it were.

You sit in the bed of that hotel in Warhofg, a little Finlander village close to the Ivalo mountain. The mornings are cold, gloomy and grey, just how you like them. They remind you of your childhood, that seems so long ago. Centuries, maybe. Who knows? You don't care about anything right now, anyway. You (and your partner, Dexter Hall) have been sent by the old Axl, your adoptive father, to hunt down a terrible demon who has been terrorizing people in the villages close to the Ivalo mountain, especially Warhofg. Everything was going fine until you realized Clarissa's affair with Jesse. And then, your whole world shattered. No matter how many demons you killed, or how many other hunters said goodbye. She had always been your weakness... And your strength.

You had always done your best to be a good girlfriend, but that never seemed to be enough. Clarissa still had sex with him, knowing you were away, hunting a blood-thirsty beast that liked to rip off the skin of the bodies of its victims and hang it on the tree branches like they were clothes left to the sun to dry. Clarissa never stopped Jesse. She felt she didn't have to, that you would never find out. So, instead, she opened her mouth to receive his tongue and with her pale and beautiful hands tore the clothes from both of them. You weren't there. You didn't see it. But, you knew. That's how she liked to have sex. Slow, deep tongue kisses, soft at first, until she was ripping off every piece of the other person's clothing, so then she would push her partner to the bed, to start the "action," as she called it.

Remember the ugliest part? When she had called you yesterday, and you realized something was going on. Yes, she knew she had done wrong in not stopping Jesse and cheating on you, but she didn't seem to regret it. She said she was sorry, but deep inside she wasn't. She'd liked it. All the ones before her had, too. None had really been sorry. None of them.

You, crying and with a shattered heart, ended the call right there, ignoring her for the rest of the day. You then went to the town's only shop to buy some alcohol, something Clarissa hated because her mother had been an alcoholic. You couldn't even touch the beer. It reminded you of her. Of her, and your exes. A club Clarissa would soon join.

'Welcome, Clary! So, tell us, how did you cheat on her? And how did she find out? Come on, take a seat. We have time. Tell us everything. Oh! And please tell Jesse to come, we would love to meet him too.'

Those words sounded in your head, making fun of you. You ended up buying some chocolate ice cream. Again. It used to make you feel better, at least for a while. Unlike the beer, the ice cream wouldn't cause you a painful hangover if you used too much of it.

'I have important business tomorrow. Once that demon's dead I'm gonna deal with Clarissa. I'm gonna break up with her. If I give her another chance, she's gonna cheat on me again. Like Sophie did. Being cheated on twice by the same person is enough for me.' Those are your current thoughts. Nobody blames you.

Hunting demons used to help you deal with the pain. Once you were more calm, you had that conversation with your "couple". A short conversation that it was just you breaking up with her and telling her that you wanted your stuff back ASAP, and refusing to give her another chance.

You, with your heart hurting as if it was being slowly crushed by some cruel and cold iron hand, cross the room and take a shower. You always act the same after a cheat. Ice cream, sleep, hot shower, Netflix marathon, demon hunting and beer and pizza to end it all. It wasn't a very effective ritual, but it still kept your mind busy.

"You are like a dryer, Andy." your friend Shyle used to say, trying to comfort you whenever you were sad, while she drew circles in the air with one of her fingers.

"You always act the same over and over again. You should try doing something new!" You could imagine her big sweet smile as she said it.

"Am I a bad girlfriend? Or is it just that every time I choose the wrong people to fall in love with?" This question has been rolling around in your mind over and over since the third cheat; Annie. She cheated on you with her own brother. Gross. But at least that had made Rin, Shyle's sister, invite you for some drinks at her bar.

Next step would be blocking her from every social media, but this time was different. You both weren't in the same city. Not even in the same continent! She was still in Australia, probably with Jesse, and you were in Finland, on the other side of the world. Cutting off everything wouldn't be a problem if you were close. She would give you your stuff back, and everything would be over. But it wasn't the case. You would have to deal with that heartache all the way back home and maybe a few more days while you both met and gave each other's stuff back. Well... That was what would happen if you survived this hunt.

You aren't afraid of death, and, if you are honest, you aren't even sure you want to survive this time. Clarissa would probably feel terrible, and you would be free of this pain that had arrived to torment you again, like a bully does at school with his/her favorite victim. And now you aren't sure you are able to get through this cycle again. You run to the shower, like you could escape from your pain by running into that fancy bathroom. Another reminder of Clarissa. She really loved fancy stuff. Even her favourite perfume had a fancy name, one in french you could never spell. But that hadn't stopped you from asking Beth, another of your friends, to help you buy it for Clary's next birthday. Now you guess you will have to cancel it.

Naked, vulnerable, you feel the shower's gentle beads of warm water comfort your body, but they can't heal your pain. Nothing can.

Once you dress up with your warm black leather combat suit, you go to the kitchen to prepare your breakfast. There's not much food left. Only some bacon, onions, some mozzarella grated cheese, some bread and enough coffee beans for just one cup. Great. You decide to make a sandwich after you mentally insult Clarissa. Her, Jesse, and both's sex need.

You put the skillet over the fire, add some oil, and put the long, red strips of bacon on it. While your favorite kind of meat starts frying at the hiss of the oil in the skillet, you take out one of the remaining onions, and with one of the knives that was already in the kitchen when you arrived, you start cutting it in slices, putting it with

the bacon, which you turn around to keep it from burning.

Your phone rings. It seems like you got a new message. Probably from her. Again.

What the hell? There's nothing in it! Oh. You get it. In this chatting application that works somehow like Whatsapp, the user can choose the color in which he/she types (yours is cerulean), and this joker types in white. This joker seems to be Dexter. You, angry, highlight the text so you can read it. Under a black rectangular cape, the words show themselves like a bear that's leaving its cave after hibernating the whole winter. If you are gonna be angry with someone, it should be Clarissa. Not the guy you would probably die with today.

"Ms. Everett." said Dexter's text message. You could hear his voice spelling your name burlesque. He knew you hated being called "Ms. Everett".

"The fuck?" you answer.

"Relax, An! It's just a joke. :P Are you ready? Because I am."

"Yes, I am. Did you eat clown for breakfast? I'm not for jokes, Dex. Come pick me up. I just wanna end this once and for all." Your words, written in cerulean over the white field, for a moment they seem to smile back at you, like making fun of your situation and your weakness.

"Take it easy, ma'am! :/ I hope you slept well and ate good, because you're gonna need that energy. And don't think about Clarissa. You're an awesome and a (I say this as a friend, to be clear) hot girl that will someday find a girl to love you as you deserve. Have you seen how Frannie looks at you? If you return from this mission victorious you'll be the coolest hunter of all! I'm pretty sure that Frannie won't be able to resist your charming personality and black as obsidian hair anymore, and Clarissa will wriggle out of repentance for wasting her chance to be with you. ;)"

"Yeah, yeah, however the fuck. Just pick me up soon or I'll walk all the fucking way to the motherfucking Ivalo mountain myself. And you know I'm not joking." You take the bacon and onion slices out of the skillet and put them between two slices of bread. You decide to keep the cheese for supper. You imagine a dish of spaghetti with that grated cheese and tomato sauce. Your stomach roars in answer.

You take a bite of the sandwich. Delicious! You truly love bacon, and the fried slices of onion remind you of your favorite hamburger, whose name you don't want to remember now. Another reminder of Clarissa.

You add the small amount of BBQ sauce that's left to the sandwich, increasing its tasty flavor. And the coffee seems to be ready. Nothing like a hot and sour cup of dark coffee on a cold winter morning in Finland.

It seems Dexter has replied. Take a look.

"Ok, ok. Calm the fuck down, ma'am. I'm on the way. Be ready. This isn't gonna be easy."

"It's not supposed to be easy. If hunting that bastard was easy other hunters would have killed it years ago. Or even that group of soviets that ran into it during World War II could've killed it instead of being reduced to bloody meat pieces. But well. I still don't get why the old Axl sent only the two of us to hunt such a powerful demon."

"He said we are his best students."

"Yeah, I know. But... Why didn't he sent more hunters with us?"

“Are you scared, An?”

“Not scared. It’s just that I’m... Kinda nervous, you know? I don’t want my skin to be ripped off and put in the tree branches.” You keep eating. Faster this time. You eat fast when you are nervous.

“Oh, don’t worry! :D We’ll be ok! We’re trained hunters, we have holy weapons and we are two, and that bastard is just one. And don’t come with the soviets again. They were not trained to face demons. Your beautiful pale skin will be safe. ;)”

“Well... Thanks, Dex. How’s Rita?” you write, trying to change the subject. The sandwich has disappeared. “Has she taken this good?”

“Oh, hell no. You know how much she worries every time I go hunting. I’ve told her billions of times that I’ll be ok and that I will return the same night alive and well to make love with her and play with the kids, but as many times as I’ve done exactly that, both she and the kids keep worrying. :/”

“Well you couldn’t expect less. They’re your family.”

“We shouldn’t be talking about families after you just broke up with Clarissa. :/”

“Don’t worry. I’m ok.”

“Are you sure? We can contact the old Axl and tell him you’re not able to hunt right now for personal reasons. He will understand. He knows you better than anyone.”

That was the last thing you needed now. You imagine people’s sarcastic and despective comments: 'Hey everybody! Look! It’s the girl that got cheated on and couldn’t kill the demon of Ivalo and got the whole Warhofg village killed! Let’s give her a medal for stupidity!’

“And let that fucker keep ripping the villagers’ skin off? No, thank you. We’ll kill that bastard today.”

“Ok. I’m on my way. Be ready.”

“Will be.”

And the chat ended there.

The silence in the kitchen was cold and quite creepy. You can’t help but feel watched. Like someone... Or something, is watching you from outside. From the distant frozen woods. Waiting for you. You slap yourself smoothly to make those thoughts go away. But they don’t.

You realize, suddenly, that your cup of coffee has disappeared. You catch yourself wishing you had more food. So you open the refrigerator, looking for some dessert. You find the remaining chocolate ice cream behind the bag of grated cheese. You think for a while that you should keep it for the night, but you end up deciding that it’ll be better to eat it now. Just in case. You always wanted your last meal to include chocolate ice cream.

Another message arrives to your cell phone while you are finishing the barrel. Dark pink letters. It was from the last person you wanted to see right now.

“Andy! Please! It was a mistake! Please forgive me!! I was drunk and I feel like shit right now!! It won’t happen again!! I’m begging you!! Please forgive me!!!! I love you!! Please forgive me!!”

You decide to not answer. Sophie said exactly the same words, you forgave her, and two weeks later she was cheating on you again. It wouldn’t happen again. Like

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