

What Did Love Have To Do With It?

Susan Hodara



Word Count 624

You never did meet my parents, even after we got married. The introductions were planned – I wanted them to meet the man I was in love with. Living with, although I didn't talk with my parents openly about that. I was happy, and I wanted to share my joy with them.

I had bought the tickets. We'd leave early Saturday morning, catch the subway down to Penn Station, and take Amtrak to D.C. Then we'd ride the Red Line to Friendship Heights, and my parents would pick us up in front of Hecht's, the way they always did when I visited. We would stay only one night.

My father wasn't pleased about you. Polish. Not Jewish. His relatives had been murdered in Poland by the Nazis. What was I thinking? But I believed that if he could meet you, see how charming and smart you were, he'd change his mind.

We packed a suitcase Friday night. It was five in the morning when you woke me up. "My ear," you said. You were wincing, your palm pressed against the side of your head. "It really hurts."

I don't remember what I thought or felt. I might have been worried. I knew you didn't have a doctor to call, and I knew you didn't have health insurance. We were young, I 26, you 23. "We'll have to go to the emergency room," you said.

The apartment was on 76th Street off Broadway – a one-bedroom on the top floor, with a tiny kitchen with ugly metal cabinets that didn't stay closed and cockroaches that scurried away if you turned on the light. It was my apartment, but you'd helped me move in, and then you stayed.

I first spotted you at the film school, where I was a graduate student, and you showed up bearing connections from Poland. I was smitten the moment I saw you: tall, lean, graceful; your straight brown hair nearly touching your shoulders. Your accent. Your cigarettes. Your kind, attentive laugh. We arranged to meet soon after at a gallery opening in Soho. You showed up first, and I arrived to find you waiting for me. There you were, in a long woolen coat, leaning against a brick wall, pulling on a cigarette. When you saw me, a smile lit your face.

We must have taken a taxi, to which hospital I don't know. It was dark outside, and cold. I had never been to a New York City emergency room. I had never been to any emergency room. In the cab, I realized we'd have to cancel our trip to see my parents.

We sat on plastic chairs, waiting till you were called. It was an ear infection. You were still wincing when we headed back to the apartment. I was the one who dropped off the prescription and waited for it to be filled.

Then I called my parents. "Darek is sick," I said. "We won't be able to come."

It didn't end up mattering. We got married at City Hall, and I never told my parents. In less than a year, you were gone, having secured your green card. I should have realized that was your plan all along.

My mother suspected the truth about our marriage, and my father might have, too, but he died without us ever discussing it. Maybe that didn't end up mattering, either.

I can still picture you sitting at the linoleum dining table in the 76th Street apartment, talking on the phone, speaking Polish to people I didn't know. For a wedding gift, your mother sent us a cream-colored linen tablecloth, which I kept but never used. I also kept the navy blue cap that you left behind when you moved out.

*

Susan is a writer and educator. Her articles have appeared in The New York Times, Communication Arts, and more. Her short memoirs are published in assorted anthologies and literary journals; one was nominated for a Pushcart Prize. She is a co-author of "Still Here Thinking of You: A Second Chance With Our Mothers" (Big Table Publishing, 2013). She has taught memoir writing for nearly 15 years. More at www.susanhodara.com.

< The Noguchi is Sold

The Death of a Marriage >

Subscribe

Email Address



Sign Up

We respect your privacy.

