2002

A Faded Escape

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A Faded Escape

Abstract
In lieu of an abstract, below is the essay’s first paragraph.

"We entered the oak double doors and I asked the host for a table in back. I held Marcela's arm and walked her to the table. I pulled out her chair and she smiled sweetly. Her black hair was twirled into a loose bun and her olive skin glowed in the candlelight. She folded her hands and rested them on the checkerboard table. The smell of the oil lamp was faint and a symphony by Mozart played softly."

Cover Page Footnote
REBECCA KALAMAS

A FADED ESCAPE

We entered the oak double doors and I asked the host for a table in back. I held Marcela's arm and walked her to the table. I pulled out her chair and she smiled sweetly. Her black hair was twirled into a loose bun and her olive skin glowed in the candlelight. She folded her hands and rested them on the checkerboard table. The smell of the oil lamp was faint and a symphony by Mozart played softly.

"Anthony, doesn't this remind you of our first date?"
"I remember that night. You were wearing that black dress and..."
The waiter interrupted us, "Excuse me, are you ready to order, sir?"
We placed our orders. Before the waiter went off I called him back.
"Sir, could I also get a Bacardi on ice." I paused. "Make that a double."

A semi-circle bar and the pale glass windows encompassed us. A ceiling fan with tulip shaped bulbs spun over our heads. The breeze from the fan blades tossed Marcela's hair. Marcela could easily have been in the spotlight. She was breathtaking. Her figure was perfect. Her personality was sweet and sensitive as a child's. She had these emerald green eyes, like a cat, and they could see through you. She could see right through me.

"Anthony, what are you thinking?" Marcela broke my trance with her question. What was I thinking? I had a flurry of thoughts running through my head. I had a lot to tell her, but I just didn't know how I could. What were the right words to use? I knew she had to know about the incident, but I couldn't tell her yet.

So I changed the subject, "I just was thinking about you. About the night we first met and how beautiful you looked."

She gazed at me for a minute and then smiled. Her eyes looked down at the table for a split second then met mine and she said, "Thank you."

I took Marcela's hand and gave it a squeeze. I felt proud to have made her happy despite her past trauma. And now I was going to add to her problems. I had always been her support system, and now I felt like I was the one who was going to ruin her life.

Marcela, twenty-one, and her brother, sixteen, had been orphaned when their parents were killed in a car accident. I had been their only family for the past two years. Marcela was close to her brother, Carlos, and she worked two jobs to support them both. During the day, Marcela worked at Gloria's Floral and in the evening she cleared tables at Rico's Pub.

Marcela and Carlos were each other's spirit. Marcela had looked out for Carlos as best she could, but had lost control over the activities he took part in. Carlos was a great kid—just had troubles. He ventured out at night to walk the streets with his friends. Drug deals had become his source of income.

He and his friends played basketball behind one of the old school buildings every now and then, but their other activities were less innocent. Sometimes Carlos used to call me up to ask me to play a game of hoops with him and his friends. I'd meet them at the court, play a few games and go back to be with Marcela. It meant a lot to her that I spent time with her brother. I was older, more experienced, and she knew I was a good influence on him since their father died. He became a brother to me. I made sure to look out for him, not only for Marcela, but because I loved them both.

But the one thing that Marcela and I disagreed about was how her brother lived
his life. Carlos’s activities with the gang were dangerous. I often told Marcela I didn’t
like the fact that she was supporting him while he just ran the streets. He did not have a
job to help with the rent, nor did he help Marcela out at home. But I knew she cared for
him a great deal, so I tried to understand. She was responsible for supporting them both.
I could see that it hurt her to be doing all of the work herself, but she endured because
that was the kind of person she was. She always sacrificed herself for others.

The waiter brought us our food; I took one bite of my fettuccini and set the fork
on its side. My palms sweated as I reached for Marcela’s hands.

“Marcela, I brought you here because I need to talk to you about something.”
My mouth instantly became dry, my heart pounded. I had rehearsed the lines, but
for some reason I lost what I had wanted to say.

Marcela stared at me, waiting for me to speak. She twitched anxiously on the
seat, and tapped her acrylic nail on the table.

“Anthony, what is it? You don’t have to be afraid to tell me.”
I could see that she was getting frustrated. I had never had a problem telling her
anything before. I felt tears come to my eyes, then Marcela took my hand, “I love you,
Anthony. Please tell me what’s on your mind. I don’t like sitting here, not knowing.” I
thought I felt her hand shake, but realized it was my hand that was shaking. She just
kept smiling. I had to tell her. I finally managed to push out the words.

“Marcela...I hated that your brother was in that gang. I hated the drugs, the
scams, and all the trouble he got in.”
She fidgeted in her seat, patted my hand and said, “I don’t like arguing about my
brother. We both know he gets in trouble sometimes. But he’s all I got left, Anthony.
Don’t start on this again.”
I continued, slowly, with tears dripping into my glass,
“I’m so sorry I fought with you about his lifestyle. I love Carlos just like you do.
I kept telling him that the gang life was not right for him. He told me he’d get out.”
She began crying and begged me to tell her,
“What happened to Carlos? You know where he is? Maybe we could just
talk to him about this. Let me call his friend Mark and ask him if he’s seen him.”
I took the cell phone from Marcela’s hand. I stood up and walked over to her and
she stood up next to me. She put her face in my chest and I felt her tears soak through
my shirt. I ran my fingers through her hair and we left the restaurant. We sat on a
painted red bench. I swallowed the lump in my throat.

“Marcela, it was his gun. A rival gang pulled up.”
“Anthony, Carlos would never carry a gun. Our parents forbid us to have them.”
“Marcela, listen to me! Carlos was trying to protect his friends from the shots
fired from the guys in the car. He shot three guys and killed them. Only one of his
friends was killed. Mark was the boy that was shot. It was a street war.”
“Where’s my brother? He must be hiding somewhere. Let’s go. We need to find
my brother before the police do.”
“Marcela, the police already know. That’s why I brought you here to tell you
before they called your place. Carlos was arrested two hours ago and he called me from
jail. He wanted me to tell you about this, not the police.”
She took me by the arm and trembled. She sobbed, tracing her foot in the dirt on
the sidewalk. Her mascara turned her tears black. Her green eyes looked up at the sky
and she began whispering the Hail Mary.

I was at a loss of words. I was the one who put her in this emotional state, and
now I had no words to get her out of it. I picked her up in my arms and kissed her
forehead. Her hand covered her face as I carried her to my car.

I jabbed the key into the ignition, and the tires squealed as I merged into traffic.

Marcela stared out of the car window.

"Cel, I am hurting about Carlos, too. I tried to break the news lightly."

"Anthony, you always want what’s best, but you always have to be right and in control."

"I just want you to be happy. I knew this situation would be difficult for you."

"Now all of this is on my shoulders. He is my brother, not yours. What do you suppose I do about all of this?"

"I want this to be our problem, not just yours. I’m going to be here for you, I need you to know that. Just give me a chance to take care of things."

"I don’t need someone to take care of me. I just need your support. That’s it."

"Well then let’s deal with this together, ok."

I took her hand, and she leaned against me. She palmed my face and her eyes studied mine.