

Eoin Ludd 6<sup>th</sup> year.

Freedom

## The Tattoo

I wipe the blood away from the arm of my last client of the day. She has strawberry blonde hair and dead pan eyes. The exact same girl I see every week. It's a cycle the same the same tight wearing, beauty school attendee, breaking the grounds of reality and getting yet another rose tattoo on her arm. Eight years I've worked here in this sad shanty town looking tattoo parlour, everyone getting the same tattoo's day in and day out. I swear one more cross, one more flower, one more star one more and I might just kill myself. I thought this job would be fun, a job where I could use my creativity to design beautiful pieces of art. I guess it's better than then a nine to five although it certainly doesn't pay better. The walk home from the job is always quite nice though, I love this city and its beauty always seems to surpass my expectations every night. The stars in the sky, each one its own single glimmering delight. The fifteen minutes between the parlour and home are the only instances of joy I can seem to find these days.

I insert my key into the door of my luxurious studio apartment and open. The smell would be enough to knock someone out at the faintest whiff. I've become accustomed to it by now. I shut the door behind me, and just as Moses did I part the sea of empty food containers, dirty clothes and whatever creatures exist among the piles. My apartment, to put it nicely is a glorified prison cell, the rock hard bed I rest my weary head on, the toilet with no seat and a fifty/fifty chance of a successful flush, my single mini-fridge, microwave and shared bathroom sink make a beautiful kitchen. I take a seat on the singular chair and open my mini-fridge; it seems tonight it'll be leftover Chinese food again. What a dreary and pointless existence I live.

Well at least these won tons aren't terrible.

I awake to another fruitless day ahead of me. How could one not be overflowing with joy after 2 hours of sleep on a bed made of iron? My monotonous existence makes time both stand still and pass by all at once. Everyday being the exact same leads days to bleed into one another, the repetitive nature of each day is driving me insane, just like Einstein said. I usually skip breakfast, just a coffee is fine for me, and the cafe below my apartment is cheap so it's perfect. I get dressed, brush my teeth and head off to work. I take a left directly outside the building and there it is Le' Montes cafe, I think it's French or something. Pushing open the door I hear the iconic bell of every cafe. I've always liked the person behind the counter, quiet, reserved. Tom, I think his name is. "Just a black coffee please Tom", I wonder if that's actually his or it's just been too long to correct me. "No problem, buddy, that'll be 1.60" swiftly placing the change in his hand I take the coffee and leave.

I swing the door open to the parlour, ready to begin another day of nothingness, I say "hello" to Frank, the owner, and he just nods silently like always. I head into the back and check the fridge to see if there is anything to eat, it must be my lucky day someone left their PB and J in here must be one of the of the other workers, I've never spoken to them. I eat my new found sandwich, finish my coffee and take my seat ready for my first appointment of the day. My spreadsheet however has nothing in the 9:30 slot just a name, it seemed familiar for some reason but I'm not sure where I've heard it from before.

The client walks in my 9:30, Rebecca Parker, her headphones are so loud I can hear her music, I'm not sure what it is but it is very loud. I wave and smile slightly, she waves and proceeds in my direction and takes a seat. "Hi" she has a soft voice, quite the opposite from her roughened exterior, tall, black hair, brown eyes, black nails, tall boots and a full black outfit. She pulls down her headphones to her neck, small ears, I say "Hello" back "You must be Rebecca Parker", "That's me" again her soft voice, and it's a shock. "What can I tattoo for you?" She giggles; I'm not sure why so I just smile, she takes her phone from her pocket and shows me an image of some strange symbol, reminiscent of an Eye of Horus. "What is it?" I asked purely out of curiosity. "Oh, it's just something I drew", an artist that's cool, "Let's just get started then". Another thing I hate about my job is the small talk that people seem to find necessary during tattoos, really what's so about a little silence. She rolls up her sleeves and points at the place she wants it, on her forearm along with many others. I nod and start straight away; looking down at her arm I'm praying she doesn't start talking, as I wipe away the blood on her arm I take a quick glance up at her. Eyes closed, headphones on, she looks at peace.

It's a rather small piece so I'm finished rather quickly. "That'll be eighty-five", she hands me the money and leaves straight away, and the rest of the day carries on like every other. I tattoo the roses and head home, eat something unhealthy and get into bed. The morning comes as quickly as it dissolves, I buy another coffee and head to the parlour, yet again it's the same day I've been living. I take my sea and check my roster, Rebecca Parker; again she's booked in for yet another tattoo, the day after, why? She comes in, similarly dressed, music still blasting out of her headphones, walks over to me and pulls out her phone after a quick hello. It's another silent appointment, she has her music and I have my thoughts no need for conversation. I'm done rather quickly and she rushes out, strange, but I don't mind the money.

Weeks have gone by and everyday she has been at the parlour. All she has gotten these weeks are her own drawings, a nice change of pace. I've learned some things about her as well, she goes to college, final year, i know because she brought in a bag I got on my final year, we went to the same college. She's twenty-five, must've done 7 years in college so far, has her birthday tattooed on her right forearm for some reason. This fact is important because today is her birthday, and yes, she is booked for another tattoo, as she is such a loyal customer I believe she deserves a freebie. She's also paid me one-thousand nine-hundred and sixty euro the past three and a half weeks, I'm starting to feel slightly bad. Nine thirty comes and she walks in I give her the casual "hi" I've become accustomed to saying, she gives one back, shows me her phone and i get to work. The tattoo is finished soon after, she stands up, waiting for me to tell her the price, as the silence drags on she decides to break it "how much will it be?" "On the house, happy birthday" I reply. She smiles and begins to rummage through her bag; she pulls out a card and hands it to me. It has an address on it, "party later, you should stop by."

Walking home i take out the card and check the address, it's very close to my own place there might be some food there. I mean why not go? It can't be that bad. I find the building, wait why does she have a card with her address on it not even her name or phone number with it, whatever the case I'm already here I open the door and walk up the stairs, she didn't say what time it was on so I'll just assume now is fine. She lives in a nice building much nicer than mine anyway; even the stairs are better smelling than my apartment. I eventually make it to the door,

I knock twice and hear footsteps, and she opens the door, hair still wet from the shower. "Hi", "hey, am I early?" "Yeah by about two hours" What!? 2 hours I can't believe it how am I this stupid. "Sorry, should I go, I can come back later" "no, no it's fine; I could actually use a bit of help setting up if you don't mind." "Sure, I can help" why? Why on god's green earth did I have to come so early? Well at least now I get an early look at the food situation. "Lovely place you have" no it isn't, in reality it looks like a poor man's interpretation of Patrick Bateman's apartment, empty, covered in white paint and only stainless steel appliances. "Thanks I just recently moved in that's why it's very 'American-Psycho' esque". Nice reference, probably shouldn't tell her I was thinking the same thing though. "So, where do you need me?" "Oh can you go in the kitchen and just put the trays in the oven" "I sure can". Perfect I can see everything available to me, pigs in blankets, chips, a whole turkey and won tons my favourite. "This is a lot of food, big crowd coming?" "Yeah I probably did way too much food." Amazing, hopefully she'll let me bring some home for helping. "Oh I've been meaning to ask you, what do all your tattoos mean?" "They don't really mean anything really; I've just always been into art and stuff so I just draw religiously." "That's pretty cool; being a tattoo artist it really helps when someone comes in with something different, I've spent a lot of years tattooing the same thing." It really is cool, Rebecca Parker you really are an interesting one. "So how long ago did you move in?" "Very recently, about 2 weeks I'm a lot closer to college so I thought it was a good idea, I just recently got a job, it's just at a local cafe but it pays the bills" "Ah yes, the struggles of an up and coming artist." After placing the trays into the oven I take a seat on her sofa, its heavenly I immediately sink into the sofa, the most relaxed I've been in a long, long time. "You can turn on the TV if you want" "sure, I'd be happy to" I go onto her Netflix and am immediately greeted by the most pristine watch again I've ever had the pleasure of seeing. All the classics Taxi-Driver, Seven and Good Will Hunting truly an immaculate line-up a lot of my favourites are here. "You've got a good taste in movies" "Thanks I decided to re-watch my old favourites." This girl actually seems to be quite a cool person. Since I'm earning the same amount of money as a 17 year old working part-time, I am unable to afford Netflix. I turn on Good Will Hunting; its two hour run-time should keep me from boring Rebecca to death. Rebecca comes and takes a seat next to me, she's dressed very differently than her usual full black attire, she's wearing a blue cocktail dress with light purple undertones, I'm still just wearing what I wore to work, "I feel kind of underdressed now" "Don't worry about it, I'm overdressed." That makes me feel a bit better. As soon as the movie starts playing she leans back and gets comfortable, unluckily for me that means moving closer to me, I'm not a huge fan of other people touching me, but I'll make an exception because she's being very welcoming. The movie passes by in an instant, we were both very engrossed, not a word spoken during the duration, yet the silence was not one of those of awkwardness you'd expect from two people who barely know each other. The door conveniently gets knocked on just as the post-credits finish, she rushes straight to the door and sings it open, and shockingly Tom is the one who was knocking, Rebecca hugs him and welcomes, clenching a bottle of wine we share an awkward glance. How does she even know Tom? He's dressed very nicely, so I am very clearly underdressed. I stand up as he walks over to me, we share an awkward handshake, his hands are extremely sweaty he must be nervous, "I didn't expect to run into you here Tom, how do you know Rebecca?" "She just started working at the cafe..... wait I don't know your name" "Oh it's um... Dom" No it's not, I've never been comfortable giving my name to those I don't

know well, I'm not sure where it stems from but it sure is there. "Ha Tom and Dom, who would've thought our names would've been so similar." They're not I'm just not that great under pressure; Tom brings his bottle of wine to the kitchen and places it gently into the fridge.

Again someone knocks on the door, Rebecca didn't even get to sit down, she opens it immediately, it's a large crowd, all holding some type of gift. I'm not a huge fan of socializing; every time I try to talk to someone it ends up being a dreadful experience for all those involved.

I get up from my seat a look for the seat most distant from the seating area; I'm looking to avoid as many conversations as humanly possible. Rebecca hugs everyone coming in the door they all head to the kitchen to leave their presents.

It's an hour later and everyone has slowly proceeded to the seating area, I've successfully avoided conversations with them so far. The girls are all dressed to the nine, extremely loud and slightly annoying, the guys all dressed to impress are overwhelmingly masculine for no reason, not a single one of them have their shirts fully-buttoned up besides Tom, they want to show off their unbelievably toned chests. They've been surrounding Rebecca all night, there is definitely no way I am going to talk to anyone here besides Rebecca, maybe Tom. The laughing of friends enjoying a party may bring a person joy, but all it brings to me is a piercing headache, I stand up and head to the bathroom, I'm not sure where it is but asking Rebecca would be too much of a risk. I head into the hallway trying to make as little noise as possible not to bring any attention my way, there's three doors in the hallway, it also smells delightful must be the lavender scented candle, I have a thirty-three percent chance of getting the right door first try, this reminds of that stupid Monty Hall problem. I chose the door on the left, I guessed wrong it's her bedroom, I take a brief look and am immediately stuck in a trance, there's beautiful art sprawling on the walls, each one on a torn piece of paper taped to the walls.

I decide to step inside and take a closer look; they're all spectacularly beautiful in their own unique way, each piece completely different to the other, I don't even notice Rebecca sneak up behind me. "Hey" "Sorry I was looking for the bathroom" "That's ok" "you're extremely talented" "you think so?" "Definitely, these are unbelievable; this is some of the best work I've ever seen." I said all of this without thinking; I'm being completely honest they truly are breathtaking. "I've noticed you haven't talked to anyone all night" "yeah I'm not really the biggest fan of social gatherings" "that's ok we can just stay in here and talk for a bit if you want" "I would

love that." I said that without thinking, I'm definitely coming on a bit strong, god I have definitely freaked her out. "I'd like that too" apparently she doesn't mind. We spent the rest of the night talking about everything and nothing; I haven't had this much fun just speaking to someone since college. Everyone left after a short while due to the absence of the birthday girl, she didn't seem to care at all, she might not have even liked them, just didn't want to spend her birthday alone.

The next few weeks I've spent a lot of my time with Rebecca I head to Le' Montes during my break instead of the morning so I get to see her, she takes her break at the same time so we can talk. Since she's come into my life I have been finding the days less monotonous and feel as though she's brought more meaning into my life, she doesn't get tattoos as much but even so I still get to see her every day in the coffee shop. Today is a special day, she's graduating college, I've decided to bring her somewhere very special, the rooftop of my building, I've spent the last two weeks sprucing it up, I swept the roof free of all the leaves, cleaned the disgusting deck

chairs and brought up a table from the lobby. I've been saving money to get her a nice gift and buy some over-priced food, she deserves it, balancing her life with work and school must be extremely difficult for her as well as doing her art. I meet her for lunch after her graduation, she's smiling ear to ear "congratulations on graduating" "thanks, I never really thought this day would come to be honest, it's been surprisingly difficult." "Yet you passed with flying colours, I think you need a celebratory dinner" "I definitely wouldn't say no to one." I place a card with just my address on it on the table with 'go to the roof, 6:30' written on the back and leave. It's already five-thirty so I rush and pick up the stuff I've been saving for this day, a lavender scented candle, the same one she has at her apartment, a picnic blanket and her gift. I head straight to the roof and set everything up, place the picnic blanket on the table and the candle on that, sit down and patiently await her arrival. The door creaks open and I see her, she's wearing a stunning dress and high heels "you're overdressed again" "my deepest apologies, but it's your fault, you didn't set a dress code." I giggle and direct her to her seat, the secretary at the door of my apartment building brought in the very expensive dinner, and I had to pay her to bring the food up too. She places it on the table and leaves, we eat semi-silently little inklings of conversation, but yet again it isn't an awkward silence. After finishing the meal I place the bag containing her gifts on the table, she opens it very quickly almost shaking with excitement. Rebecca takes the first gift from the bag, a DVD copy of Good Will Hunting, she smiles almost as much as when she graduated, taking the other gift from the bag her hands begin to tremble, I assume out of happiness, she takes and out and doesn't say anything. "It's a sketchbook, you can't keep using torn out pages to draw on," she doesn't say anything just moves in and hugs me. It's an embrace of true friendship, and appreciation. "My names Brandon by the way" she deserves to know my name. At this point I feel a weight lift from my shoulders, for once in what I thought to be my miserable life I feel free, Rebecca has given me purpose, a reason to live, the small, pointless things that used to invigorate me to my core now don't bother me. I don't wake up feeling like my existence is meaningless; Rebecca has transformed my fruitless life into a journey through an apple farm and she doesn't even know it. With a "thank you" in my ear, I get to hear that soft voice that brings me so much overwhelming joy and just like that I am free from all misery.