

“Do you mind?”

She didn't smoke these days, normally, but these words would require it and she handles the lighter like that is the case.

She empties the glass in front of her and she takes a long first drag and doesn't look him directly in the eye sitting across the table and says “it was 2009 and he was the only love I've ever truly known. We were together for 2 years. He was Israeli and I met him living on the streets in Austin on a night I didn't expect to fall in love. We gave ourselves 4 months and if we were still feeling this way, we would take the trip. Of course, we made it and off we went to Costa Rica two weeks before Christmas. We stayed in his father's house near Haiko beach and we drank cowboy coffee and surfed in the mornings and challenged each other to memorize bible scripture and cooked meals together and drank German beer in the nights. One night we crawled into a sleeping bag together there on the beach, must have been 9, maybe 9:30. We made love and we were ambushed. They taunted us in Spanish we didn't speak but it was clear they wanted money. Merry Christmas, right? Did I mention it was Christmas time? We didn't carry cash. We never did. They didn't like that.”

She's almost done with the cigarette and “Can I have another?” The nervous laughter holds back tears.

She strikes at the lighter more confidently, takes another long first drag and says “one of them

grabbed my hair in a fist on the side of my head and made me watch the other 4 swing clubs at him. He fought them off, for the most part, but they kept at him. I yelled Haret, which means stop in Hebrew, when I felt the gun press to my temple. I think it was an oozi, yeah an oozi. They tied us up and he said he didn't think we were going to make it out of this and that he would fight them for as long as he could, but he was already going limp. I could see it. Two of them dragged me away down the beach towards the water and did what they did to me. I tried to fight but they had a bamboo rod tied around my legs to keep them spread and eventually I checked out. You know, I walked that stretch of beach by myself again in 2015. I had to remember the rope burns and the sounds of them laughing while they did what they did to me and how I was far enough away from him to not hear the thuds that knocked him unconscious. I had to remember how suddenly I didn't feel them around anymore and how I lifted my face from the sand to see them running off into the distance. You know, for healing, to move on. When I got back to him I thought he was dead and he told me to leave him and go for help. He couldn't walk or move and the skin on his feet was peeled off. I still don't know how I did it, but I carried him back up the beach to the first restaurant we saw. It was open and I'll never forget how the hostess dropped everything in her hands and so did everyone else and ran to us. They brought a bowl of water to clean our wounds and we held each other and wouldn't allow them to separate us."

"I have to remember, you know, for healing, to move on."

“Do you want anything to drink because I need another?”

“The driver of the ambulance was drinking and we weren’t strapped in and the hospital wouldn’t see us because we didn’t have our papers. So, we sat in limbo in the waiting area and he ripped a page out of the phone book and made a paper football and we took turns flicking it at each other’s hands formed into a big U. He recited my favorite Robert Frost poem, the Witch of Coos, to me so I would stop crying. The local news aired our story and my parents got wind of it and they came right away and shoved him against the wall and said how dare he put their youngest daughter in a situation like that.”

“We began to recover and we were going to stay through new year’s then fly to Africa but it didn’t work out. We paid the hospital bill and the ambulance bill and we ordered room service like we were something of the Divine, like we were in a movie, like none of this had happened. We drank and tried to make love and it was different now and he was trying to take my pain away and it felt like a forced habit and it felt like he was just going to a job, punching a time clock, and trying to help the woman he loved. He was scarred and I didn’t know yet I was scarred. 2 years passed and I told him we needed help and healing and he wasn’t ready and I was. I told him he needed to take a break and that it was too much and I was ready to take care of myself. It was the hardest experience of my life. I left him in that house near the beach with my car and all of my clothes because I wanted him to know I was coming

back. I needed him to know that even though I wasn't."

"He found me 7 years later, just showed up on my front step. I dropped to my knees and I remember going numb and we spent the night together and in the morning nothing had changed. He hadn't healed and I was well on my way to it and we didn't even say goodbye when he left, not a see you later. We knew that was that and I still have scars behind my knees from that bamboo rod and I have others nobody can see, but scars mean healing and I can sing about it now and write about it now and I can sit here and tell you about it and that's something. That's something. Cheers."