

My Undoing

By Alejandro Pena

When the Old Man used to try and hammer into my head that my undoing would be at the hands of a woman, I'm sure he didn't picture the raven-haired punker crying to herself on the concrete with her back against the steel shutters next to the bar in Williamsburg. Maybe he thought I'd bust a nut inside the first piece of ass to come my way and conceive a child, or fall head over heels for a long-legged redhead. But after my first blowjob in the back of a Greyhound to New York City and three redheads, I was still seed free and unattached.

Granted, the nights alone take their toll on the psyche, but I usually found comfort in counting my bankroll, making sure that the men on every bill face the same direction, and filling my lungs with pot. Takes the edge off. Which was what I was trying to do until those tiny little sobs caught my attention after the clamor of the J train rolled away without me in it (tried to take the edge of the ride into Crown Heights).

Stumbling out of work at the ungodly hour of six in the morning, I usually find myself alone - aside from the stragglers finding their way home that don't have the mind or curiosity to care about a kid and the jets of acrid smoke shooting out of his nostrils, a shitty smirk on his face. The cops who walk the beat knew my face from behind the register at the restaurant and know that I'm the one responsible for making sure their food comes to them bodily-fluid free, so we have our gentleman's agreement that leaves me free to bend rules. Leave it up to a woman with Betty Page tattooed on her leg to ruin an evening/morning.

She sat on the cold concrete with her knees pulled up to her chest and arms covering her face. Her breath puffed out from underneath her hair in short bursts that sounded with her crying and sobbing. Jesus, I thought, way to kill a fucking buzz. I had my mind set to just ignore her until the next train pulled into the station. Wouldn't have been the first time either. The cook's baby's mother had been reduced to tears by him too many times to care, and there I would be, too busy with sweeping to offer my good handkerchief to a woman who didn't have the sense to keep her legs closed. Just smoke the rest of this, I thought. Pick up a porno mag, the paper and some coffee and go home.

"Scuse me, could I bother you for a cigarette?"

Figures.

I looked over to where the punker sat and saw that she had managed to stop choking on her tears to find me and involve me in her shitty night. Of course her face would be marked by things like rings through her nose and lips; heavy mascara that had been reduced to trails racing down her face. But aside from the aftermarket modifications, I saw something in her face that gave my heartstrings a wild-horses tug. I had seen the look on her face time and time again on my mother every time a new boyfriend who had promised to take care of her suddenly up and disappeared taking a piece of furniture with him. Those puffy blood-shot eyes conveying the one thing that could reduce me to a hopeless romantic with a hard-on for haiku: heartbreak.

Something had happened to this woman that could reduce a punk rocker to crying to herself on an empty street at this hour instead of throwing punches in a mosh pit or drinking her sorrows away until she couldn't see straight. The shattered remains of her

cell phone across from her in the gutter whispered to me that it might have been a significant other, but with my head in a haze there were a lot of whispers in my head.

My plans for the evening could still have gone as planned, had I the balls to just say no and walk the opposite direction towards light and sweet coffee, photos of huge knockers and the morning headlines. Instead I put the joint out with the sole of my shoe and started in her direction.

“Sure thing, as long as you don’t mind my having a seat with you.” Evidently the sack of green was taking a heavier toll than usual on my common sense. “I have to roll ‘em by hand. May I?” I asked, pointing to the concrete next to her.

The smile that she bared was both beautiful and sad at the same time. A genuinely pretty smile of pearly whites, but the smile was lost in her eyes, which were still marked with pain.

“I don’t mean to bother you, but it’s been a rough night,” she apologized.

“Yeah, I could see that,” I said.

At this she laughed softly. “I guess it’d be hard to miss, wouldn’t it?”

I introduce myself before I start on rolling each of us a cigarette. She says her name is Rudy, and that it’s a pleasure to meet me.

“I only wish it was under better circumstances than these,” I said.

“What’s wrong with this?”

“One, this isn’t exactly a warm atmosphere,” I said, gesturing towards the street.

“Second, I can guarantee you that the concrete we’re sitting on right now has been pissed on. Probably as recently as two hours ago.”

“What makes you so sure?” In some confused part of my head I was amused that she didn’t start screaming and bolting down the street.

“That’s around the time the Duke came in pleading for a plate of rice and beans.”

“Who’s the Duke?”

“Neighborhood wino.”

“Why do you call him the Duke?”

I handed the first cigarette to her and lit it while I explained that the last restaurant that denied the Duke a handout found their shutter locks smeared with shit the next morning. When she laughed that time, it sounded more heartfelt than the last.

I asked what kind of name Rudy is for a girl. She said it’s short for Gertrude. When I asked, she said she started going by Rudy when she discovered the Stiff Little Fingers and Mohawks.

Finally, I finished rolling my cigarette, which she leaned over to light with a Zippo engraved with a skull and crossbones. While she leaned over, I looked into her eyes and saw that the red had faded to a pink and that her eyes were in fact quite beautiful; a cluster-fuck of green, blue, hazel, grey and a single black dot in her left eye.

She held my gaze until she leaned back against the steel shutters again.

“So, Rudy, what’s your story?”

A local punk rock show brought her into Brooklyn for the first time in her life, having been from some town in Long Island. One thing leads to another and Rudy finds herself ditched by her friends in Williamsburg, stranded without a phone, with no idea how to get to the G train. ‘Course, it takes her three cigarettes to tell the whole story, but she was on a roll and the way she told it, I was kind of disappointed to hear it end. What

I did get from the story is that Rudy doesn't mind playing for both teams, which evidently lead to her friends ditching her.

And she's legal.

I ask her what's on the G train.

"My friends are staying in Astoria."

"The same ones that left you here?"

"The same."

I tell her that she should reevaluate her idea of what a friend is. "If my friends ever left me stranded in a city I don't know, someone would be losing the use of the lower half of their body."

Her laugh rang out, as if a couple of cigarettes ago she wasn't sobbing uncontrollably at the prospect of being alone in Brooklyn.

"Funny, the same guys I used that threat on earlier tonight weren't laughing as hard."

"Are you a bouncer or something in there?" she asked, pointing to the awning.

I told her that I'm not, but whenever things get out of hand, friends revealing to each other that they've been sleeping with the other's wife or gambling debts are asked to be paid back with a heavy hand, I'm the one the boss asks to play peacemaker.

"Why?" she asked. "You have a black belt in Tai Kwan-do?"

"Yeah. And a big bag of candy for whoever plays nice."

When she laughed, I watched strands of her hair fall against her face - her full lips revealing a healthy smile, and the way her nose bunched up at the bridge in between her eyes. I couldn't help what I said next.

"The G train ain't but a couple of blocks up Broadway. I'd give you directions but all I know is that it's the Flushing stop. I could walk you there, this way we both can figure it out." She agreed with a smile that defused my head from being suspicious about her answering so quick.

We walked and smoked. Top five movies are shared, along with albums and episodes of *The Simpsons*. She knows punk is dead, but she wants to go through the phase before life takes a turn for the serious when she graduates. I told her I found myself in Brooklyn after life in an Alabama/Texas border town proved to be a little too heavy to handle. I was vague with details but she never bothered to ask anyway. I took it as a sign that she knew it was best not to ask, the way she just stared ahead and looked up occasionally at the passing addresses.

About a block and a half away from Flushing and in the middle of a conversation about the latest cola innovation, she grabbed my hand and pushed her body against mine. I could feel the curves of her body against me underneath the thin and tattered army coat she was wearing, and the warmth of her breath against my neck.

"I never thanked you for your generosity," she said, the words sending a shiver through my body that I mistook for sexual desire.

"Well, one good turn deserves-" My come-on was cut short by a thick leather jacketed-arm shooting out of the shadow of the doorway behind me, coiling itself around my neck and lifting me off the ground, followed by a horrible burning that started in my back and ended somewhere in my kidneys. A sticky warmth began to ooze and pour down my back while what was left from my high was thrown to the wolves by panic.

All of a sudden, the Old Man's voice was ringing in my ear, again telling me that when I fuck up I'm going to go down and take her down with me.

Through the doorway that the arms had pulled me into off the sidewalk, I glared at Rudy - who was looking frantically up and down Broadway to watch for any foot traffic. I was the mark. The sap. The bleeding Fat Pockets that were going to see to it that Rudy and 'Armstrong' were going to keep up some habit for another couple of hours.

"...take her down with you..." the Old Man's voice echoed.

Now there's an idea, I thought in a moment of clarity.

When the burning in my guts exploded again and the warmth began to spread even faster, I knew that Armstrong was getting ready to finish the job with what he thought would be the decisive gutting. So while he thought whether or not to stab me in the spine or reach around for my chest, I reached into my jacket for the .38. My 'Peacemaker'.

In an instant, I knew that the first wound inflicted by Armstrong was mortal, and to try and fight back would just prolong the inevitable. So instead of firing a round or two over my shoulder into what I guessed would have been his chest or face, I leveled the magnum on Rudy and fired as she turned back to me, the glint of the nickel plated handgun having caught her eye.

The first slug proved to be truer than I could have hoped as it tore her bosom into gore but failed to knock her down. Just to be an asshole and give Armstrong something to remember me by I fired again and caught Rudy in the same left eye that I was staring into all but a couple minutes before, thinking what the Old Man would say if I brought home a woman with hardware in her face instead of the magnum slug.

I kept firing at the lump of carrion that was Rudy as it fell to the concrete, firing on empty chambers before Armstrong finally got his balls back and drew a line of burning deep across my throat.

This is Alejandro Peña's second contribution to Thuglit.com, and writing it scared the living daylights out of him. He is the managing editor for his school newspaper, a hopeless romantic, a fiend for politics, and believes that his generation is entirely hopeless; case in point: drinking games. He wants to dedicate this piece to his brothers, Gabriel, Anthony, Emiliano and Brandon.