

# Best Night of Your Life

You step into a bar on a Thursday night. You shouldn't be here. You have work tomorrow morning, and though it's not a job that you love, it's a job you need. But the week has been too stressful to wait till Friday, and your friends wouldn't leave you alone about it. Okay, really what happened was they asked you once if you wanted to go out with them. You said no. Then, they asked you if you were sure. You changed your mind and agreed to go. All the same, you end up here.

The sound of a crappy, yet somehow popular song greets you at the door. You're surprised you can hear it over the obnoxious voices of everyone trying to talk over each other all at once. Within seconds, all of that noise combines in one, loud scream assaulting your brain. You realize you should've pregamed before coming and try to shuffle through the crowd, desperate to start on your favorite drink. Everyone around you already smells like sweat and alcohol.

You push your way through to an old, creaky barstool and flag the attention of a hectic bartender. While you're ordering, you accidentally lean on the wooden counter. Your arm rests on a sticky spot of who knows what, and you automatically lift it up again. Curse as the bartender walks away, anticipating the drink that will help make this scene seem fun again. You glance up to see who's around. Your eyes fall on me.

I'm everything you ever dreamed because I'm nothing that ever came to your mind before. I'm not your type, I'm different. Different from everyone else here. The rest of the barhoppers sense that and leave me alone. I'm all by myself, sipping on water and looking out for you. I'll give you the best night of your life.

You don't know that yet, but you're still drawn to me. You sense that I'm important, so you don't approach me right away. You can't. Instead, you wait anxiously for your drink. You spend this time hoping that you'll work up the liquid courage to come talk to me before someone else does.

When your drink arrives, you realize that you've been staring at me for too long, so you look away. There's just something about my eyes that you find irresistible. Maybe it's the fact that they don't look away. Regardless, you find yourself glancing up at me again. I meet your gaze with a smile.

Am I interested in you? You have no idea, but the thought is so frightening that you look back down at your drink. You refuse to focus on anything else until it's finished. Once you've drained every last drop, you're still not feeling brave enough to face me. Yet. You search for the bartender so you can order another one.

You freeze as I put my hand on your shoulder.

"Don't you think that you've had enough for tonight?" I ask.

You fill with indignation. You've only had one drink, and even if you had been plastered, it's none of my business anyway. You turn to tell me off. Pause. You realize that you're glad that I came over to talk to you. Now you won't have to find a way to approach me and that's a relief. Besides, you don't want me to go away so soon, so you let my comment slide. I smile. Your heart melts.

"I don't think so," you say. "I just got here. Besides, what else am I supposed to do on a Thursday night?"

I lean in closer.

"Well, we could just leave," I suggest.

You're surprised by this stranger wanting you to leave the bar with them, when you just met. I don't appear to be drunk, and usually this type of thing takes time to happen. It seems random, odd. Suspicious. And for a moment, you draw back. What if this is a trick, some kind of trap? What if I'm dangerous? Then, you realize that you don't actually want to be in this bar anymore anyway and going anywhere with me sounds like a good idea to you.

"Where do you wanna go?" You ask.

"Wherever the night takes us," I reply.

We leave the bar together as the sun begins to set. The gorgeous shades of pink, purple, and orange decorating the sky make the surrounding builds look even more gritty and boring. I start walking off in some random direction. You follow me. You don't know if I'm going to rob you, kill you, or whatever. For some reason, you trust me. Or at least, you're willing to take the risk.

Until I stop in front of my car. It looks normal enough. Small, black, on the cheaper side. You were expecting something different. You weren't expecting me to walk to my car in the first place. You try to look inside the windows, but the interior is dark. You don't notice personal touches. You can't be sure that there isn't someone hiding in the backseat, waiting to jump out at you.

"So, we're driving somewhere?" You ask, feeling unsure about me at this point. Ready to walk back to the bar and pretend this never happened.

"We can stay in this town if you want to," I offer.

I already know what your response will be. As I say this, you're thinking about how much you've started to loathe this town, especially when you're tired and alone.

Sometimes it seems like these streets have nothing more to offer. You've memorized every crack in the cement and a huge part of you longs to be free, to experience something new.

"No, it's cool," you say. "I'm down to go wherever."

I smile and ask if you'd rather drive, in an attempt to make you feel safer. You decline and climb into the passenger's seat. You kind of don't want to have control tonight. It feels sort of nice to let your fate lie in someone else's hands for once, and I'm more than willing to take the wheel.

The second I turn the car on, music starts blasting through the speakers. It's not anything that you've ever heard before. You're not sure if you like it. I pull out of my parking spot and turn the music down a little. As we travel past the familiar streets, you start to wonder just how far away we're going. After all, you do have work in the morning.

"You can learn a lot about someone if you listen to the music they like," I say. "These words are the stuff my soul is made of."

So, you listen a little closer. You try to make sense of words that don't always make sense to you. You gather little pieces together and try to form a person. An idea of who I am. You want to know who I am. Before you're quite sure that I'm not a stranger anymore, I tell you to take control of the radio.

"I want to know what kind of music you like," I explain. Because I live for encounters like this. "I want to know what's inside of your soul."

You're a little wary at first. You put on the music that you'd usually listen to around your friends, an effort to hide your true self. Then, you realize that those lyrics

say something about you as well and you don't want to share a false message. Your guard starts to slip. You show me the songs you listen to when you're all alone in your bedroom, when you allow yourself to be real.

Some of those songs are depressing and you want me to notice that. You want someone to see the hidden sadness that lurks inside of you. You want me to fix it. You know I can't. No one can. It becomes a secret between the two of us, and in no time at all, we reach my favorite, seaside town.

On the edge of town, I stop to get gas. I have to go into the store, because I only carry cash. You wait awkwardly for me in my car, and it all hits you. I'm not there to dazzle you anymore, so you start to see how crazy all of this is. You've never done anything like it. I'm a stranger after all and you don't want to end up on the news for being so naive. So stupid.

As you wait, you try to think of a polite way to ask me to bring you back to the bar. You never even told your friends that you were leaving. They'll probably start worrying about you after awhile... Maybe.

I come back holding a bouquet of flowers. Bright blue carnations. I hand them to you, tell you that they're for you, then I go to pump the gas. It's obvious that they didn't cost me much. The tips of a couple of the flowers are already wilting a little. But the gesture still touches you in a strange way. It warms a part of your heart that has craved to be noticed for so long. Those sparks of doubt sizzle out before they're able to grow into flames that would've destroyed our night.

"Thanks," you say, when I get back in the car. "For the flowers. That was... really nice of you."

I smile at you. It makes me happy to know that I can make you happy by doing such a simple thing.

“I’m starving,” I announce. “Let’s get something to eat.”

You realize you’re hungry as well, but when I ask you for suggestions, you just shrug. You’ve never visited the area before. It’s a second home to me. I suggest a restaurant that sounds nice, with a view overlooking the ocean. You agree but become a little uneasy when we pull up to the place. It’s fancy and everyone inside is dressed up in nice suits, evening dresses. It makes you thankful that you put a little extra effort into your outfit before you went out, but you’re still well aware that you don’t fit in.

As you admire the lavish chandeliers, royal red furnishings, and luxurious place settings, I ask the waitress to seat us on the balcony. I seem to fit in here somehow. In fact, I fit in better here than I did at the bar, leading you to wonder if I had this planned all along. I did, but that doesn’t matter right now. What matters is you and me and this moment. These are the moments that make me feel alive. I hope that it will awaken something new inside of you too.

The waitress leads us out onto the balcony, which is lit by candlelight. Soft music is playing in the background, accompanied by the sound of the waves embracing the shore. The stars are our ceiling. The moon watches this dream unfold.

I make you feel like you matter as I lean across the table and look directly into your eyes when you’re speaking. You’re not used to having this kind of attention placed upon you. Even when you’re with your friends and family, there’s the usual distraction of phones, of someone else trying to butt into the conversation.

You haven't touched your phone since I touched your shoulder. I haven't touched mine. It makes the night more real somehow, when there's no one else there to chat about it with. We're free of distractions, forced to face what's right in front of us. Every second is genuine. It's a precious gift given only to us.

"We should order for each other," I suggest. "So we can try something new."

"Okay," you say. You can see the appeal to this and start pouring over the menu, trying to find something that you think I would like. You realize that you have no way of knowing what I like to eat. "What kinds of things do you like to eat?" You ask. "Give me a rough idea, please?"

"No way. What we order for each other must remain a secret until we tell the servers."

"But what if you don't like what I order?"

"Then, I'll just steal yours," I reply. "Because what I'm ordering for you sounds delicious."

So you decide to order something you think you'd like, just in case we do end up swapping meals. We don't. We only have a short time together, so once the orders are placed, I get right down to business.

Eating is a great way to connect to someone, as food is familiar. A comfort. So I decide to take a chance and ask you about your past, which has grown to be unfamiliar to you. That upsets you. You don't admit to that out loud. You don't want to ruin the night.

But you don't like to talk about your past. No one does. You want to talk about your past, you want to share all of the feelings you've collected and harbored. Feelings

that have hurt you. You just don't think you'll ever find anyone to listen and not judge you for the things that have happened. I listen.

You tell me first about the pleasant memories you have from when you grew up, the fun things that are nice to think of. Then, your words get darker. A frown flickers across your face. You start to tell me about the unpleasant things, the things that you regret, the things that you're not proud of.

I don't remark on any of this. I don't offer you words to help erase the pain. I honestly can't say that you're not as bad as you think that you are. I just listen, and by the time our food comes, you feel as if a weight has been lifted off of you.

You ask me about my past, because I asked you about yours and you feel like you should. I don't tell you everything, but I tell you just enough. I tell you about how hard my parents worked, how I often had to care for my three, younger, siblings. I describe how close we were but admit that the connection wasn't enough to fight the overwhelming sadness.

Sometimes I still felt like I didn't belong in this world. I struggled with depression, silently. I had to escape. I studied business in college. I started to win the daily battle. I changed my major to literature. I learned a new way to live.

You want to ask me if you're the first person I've ever done something like this with. You don't want to ask me if you're the first person I've ever done something like this with. Don't want to know if you're just another face that will be replaced by tomorrow night. You know that you should ask, you need a dose of reality. To know you're not special before you get hurt. The check comes before you can.



We split the bill and leave the restaurant, holding hands. You like how my hand feels in yours. How it feels comfortable to walk beside me down the cobblestone sidewalk. You like how my eyes shine under the streetlights and you like the colorful place I brought you to. You like me. I like you too.

I convince you to go with me into a small bookshop that will be closing too soon. I lead you to the poetry section. We search through multiple books in an attempt to find the precious pieces of poetry that capture how we feel.

You don't know it, but I work here. I've read all of these poems before. But I like how your face lights up when you find a poet that gets you, so the experience feels new to the both of us. Since we're the only ones there, we read poems out loud to each other and don't feel guilty at all. We laugh, we smile, we frown. You can feel the intensity in the air when the words bring us together. I can feel it too.

The shopkeeper feels bad. He doesn't see people get so excited over literature that often, so he waits fifteen minutes after the store is supposed to be closed before he tells us that he has to start closing up soon. You pick a book that resonates with your soul. I do the same. We pay for them, and you don't notice, but I give the shopkeeper a few extra dollars for being so kind.

Once we're released into the custody of the night again, we swap books. It was an unspoken agreement, we had planned to do it all along. You want to know that long after this night ends, I'll still be reading your thoughts, listening. I will. I hope you continue listening to me too.

"I want to go to the beach," you say, because suddenly you have the urge to be next to the ocean.

“Then, that’s where we’ll go,” I reply.

We drop our books off at the car first. You don’t know the path to get to the sand from here, but I do. I lead you over the wooden planks. I stop just before the sand meets civilization.

“Shoes,” I say.

We take our shoes off. It’s been awhile since you’ve felt the earth beneath your bare feet. You’ve been busy. Taking time out to relax hasn’t seemed as important as the list of other things you have to do. I see the value in relaxing, in connecting with the simplest parts of nature. So, I try to show it to you.

I take your hand and we run down to the water. Your toes reel at the icy waves that harass our feet. I don’t stop. We crash into the ocean together. The dark water is a shock to your body. It clears your mind of all the stress and wraps you up in a cold but soothing embrace. You fall back. Nature catches you. We tumble in the current, swimming after each other, leaping in the waves, acting like little kids again. Then, the playful banter stops.

You look up at the stars, truly noticing them for the first time in forever. You marvel at the wonder of those brilliant balls of fire, battling the darkness. The moonlight becomes a spotlight as I emerge from the water. I steal your attention away.

We’re already close, but you take a few steps closer. You want to kiss me more than you’ve ever wanted anything in your life. You cup my cheek with your hand. I place my hand over yours. We reach towards each other at the same time and meet in a kiss.

It’s a simple kiss at first. Until you realize that this was always how kissing should be. Our lips set each others hearts on fire and the kiss becomes more passionate. You

don't know if you're trying to drench the inferno or feed the flames. All you know is that your lips are consuming mine, my lips are consuming yours and its the sweetest thing you ever tasted.

After we part, you look at me like I mean something to you. I look at you the same way. In this moment, we mean everything each other. We started the night as strangers. We're not strangers anymore. We walk back to the shore. You wonder what happens now. I take your hand and lead you down the sandline.

At first, it's unpleasant. Your clothes are soaked. They drag you down as they hang off of you, just as the burden of your past always has. The night has a chill to it and you'd really rather just go inside. We start talking about our futures. You're so excited to share your dreams with someone that you forget about the discomfort and open up to me completely. Almost.

A strange part of you, buried deep inside, wishes that I'll be part of your future in some, small way. You feel as if you know me more than you know most people, but we haven't known each long enough. It's so silly. Strange. So, you don't say that. Out loud.

I tell you about my dreams of opening up my own bookstore on the coast. I describe the house I built in my head, the cozy abode that overlooks the ocean. I list off all of the places I want to travel to, and they sound so much like where you want to go, that it almost seems like we're meant to be.

We walk back to my car. I tell you I have to use the restroom before we go. This gives you a great idea. While I'm gone, you slip into a tourist shop and get me a cute, little souvenir. It's nothing too grand but when you hand it to me, I smile just like you smiled when I gave you the flowers.

“I love it,” I say, and thank you with another kiss.

We get in the car, hand intertwined the entire ride back to the bar. This time we don't listen to music. We don't say anything. We sit in silence and reflect on how this night has been. You don't want it to end. I don't want it to end. It can't go on forever. I park right next to your car. You don't get out. We sit in silence for a good ten minutes.

“You can come back to my place if you want,” you offer. I smile.

“Sure, I'll follow you there,” I reply.

You're still reluctant to get out of my car. Reluctant to let me go. This night has been so crazy, so out of the norm that you're afraid I'll disappear. Afraid that I'll abandon you. You don't dare say that. You don't want to sound clingy. We just met and you hate yourself for feeling that way. You give me a kiss, just in case you never see me again, then walk to your car.

You check your rearview mirror constantly while you're driving, to make sure that I'm still behind you. I am. I follow you all the way to your home. The closer we get, the more relieved you feel. You can't help but give me a hug once we get there. It betrays your secret insecurities. I don't ask who made you so afraid to rely on people.

As you open the door, you fumble. Hope that I won't notice. You let me in and glance around, trying to discreetly make sure that everything looks okay. My eyes scan every inch of visible space in an attempt to get to know you even better. We take off our shoes. You search for something to put the flowers in.

“Do you want a drink or something?” You ask, after the flowers are properly taken care of.

“That would be lovely,” I reply.

You grab some snacks, pour out a couple of drinks, and direct me to your living room. We find some random movie that neither of us have seen and curl up on the couch. It feels natural, like this should be what happens every night. You like the warmth of my body against yours, the way it feels to hold someone close. It calms you. You feel at peace. We fall asleep wrapped up in each other's arms.

We wake up once the movie is over. Look at each. Then, we laugh. We help each other off of the couch. You lead me to your bedroom. We lay in your bed and just cuddle for awhile. You feel close to me. I feel close to you.

Then, the kissing starts. Our hands wander over each others warm skin and it feels like you're not so alone anymore. We're together, connected. You have the urge to explore every last part of my body. My curiosity matches yours. Touch for touch we push the boundaries. We create a bond. You feel alive again, even though you never before noticed that part of you had died in the first place.

We fall asleep naked, two hearts beating as one. You've never felt this close to anyone, ever and though it's been crazy, you never want this wonderland to end. It's reassuring to you that something like this exists in the world.

I kiss the top of your forehead as you doze off. Your eyelids flutter. I smile. You sleep soundly, dream sweet dreams. You don't think about the fact that you have work the next morning. You don't wonder about your friends. In that moment, I'm the only thing on your mind. This night belongs to us alone.

You wake up happy, with thoughts of what the day will bring running through your head. Maybe you'll make me breakfast. You consider perhaps calling out of work, if

I decide to stay for longer. We can explore something new and bound to be amazing.

You roll over to reassure yourself that I'm still there.

I'm not.

You look around the bedroom frantically. You check the bathroom. Both rooms are empty. A certain, painful, desperation fills your heart. You run into the living room. The kitchen. I'm nowhere in sight. Dread. You look for a note that says I'll be back. You don't find one. Pain. Dread. Pain.

Finally, you get brave. You glance outside. You can't tear your eyes away. My car is gone. I'm gone. You slide to the floor, eyes glued to the vase of blue carnations sitting on your kitchen table.

You're all alone once more.