

Anything For You
By Priscilla Eve Adams

I first met Stan a couple years ago when I moved to this town, and he was the only real friend I made. I was waiting at the clinic, because I had my usual check-up for my asthma, and he sat across from me holding his hand. He had fractured it in a fight and I asked him why he did it and he said, "Well, I'm just a glutton for punishment."

"What's your name?" I asked.

"Stan, what's yours?"

"Erica."

The way he said it made me laugh and think at the same time. It turns out that Stan was kind of the rowdy type, he'd go to a bar, get a little too riled up, and try to challenge someone to a fight. Nine times out of ten, he'd lose. One time, when we were hanging out at our usual pub, The Green Mountain, he had had a few and someone was hitting on this young woman a little too much.

"Hey Jerk-off!" He had challenged the guy, "How about you leave that chick alone?"

The guy turned around and countered, "What's it to you, douche-bag? We're just having a little talk, me and her." That's when the guy put his hand on that scared looking woman's thigh and that's when Stan started swinging. After Stan was pushed to the floor one last time, the guy challenged, "Anyone else?"

Most of the time, these fights happen over a lot more trivial things and I try to encourage Stan to stop. But this time, he kind of pissed me off, too. I got in front of him and he mocked, "Ooo, I'm so scared!"

All I replied was, "You should be."

And I slammed his head into the side of the bar, some blood smeared down the side and Stan pulled me away saying, "Shit, we need to get out of here!" Before I could get a better look.

I never knew if that guy recovered, actually, I just know that I never saw him around again.

A few nights later, when everything died down a little, we had a "victory toast" at a different bar and Stan said, "Man, I can't believe that you just smashed that guy's face in, it was like-" he slammed his hands together and made a cracking noise.

I was a little toasty, too, and stated, "Yeah, me, the asthmatic chick, y'know." and laughed.

He nervously took another chug of beer.

He didn't challenge guys to fights after that, and, due to his track record, avoided those bars where he would. Instead, we started going to little coffee shops and when he finally landed a job, we'd meet for lunch at those places. We always tended to just carry on with small talk, but one day he asked about my parents.

"Well, uh, they're kind of out of the picture. My-my dad is, uh, gone."

"Oh, what about your Mom?"

"Uh...she has-problems."

"Then, who'd you grow up with?"

"Well, uh, all that went down when I was uh-ten and..." I took in a big breath and decided to fess up, because it wasn't making sense at this point, "Okay, so, my Mom was-and still is-addicted to heroin, because of that, she lost custody of me. And, so, because the courts gave her an ultimatum to either get clean or never see me again, she chose the drugs instead. When my Dad confronted her as to why, she told him to "Fuck off and the kid was a mistake." He still tried though, he paid for all of the rehab and the medications costing him a fortune after a while. He ran incredibly into debt and lost his job, but, she rebounded every time. He sat me down one day and told me that he'd have to foreclose on the house. He said that I'd have to live with my Aunt and then he locked himself in the bedroom. I used

all of my weight to force the door open, but he was already on the chair and-

I started tearing up and couldn't say any more.

Stan was speechless for a second, looked like he was going to say something, but didn't.

Then he just blurted, "My parents just got a divorce, but-that-that's intense...I'm sorry for your loss." And then he rubbed my shoulder.

I put my hand on his and said, "Thanks."

Another time at lunch, he asked me, "Can I tell you something?"

"What is it?" I replied.

"Well, not here." He added, as we left the crowded restaurant and went to a lake that is usually very calming. There were some ducks sitting on the lake as we entered through the trees encircling it, he skipped one of the stones lying nearby and we sat down.

He stared at the sky and I waited for him to speak. When he did he was looking away from me, "I once had a friend like you. A good friend who would listen to my problems and help me out. She was always so understanding, but...I couldn't help her...I...couldn't save her from herself."

He sat down, I walked over and sat next to him, "Is there anything I can do?"

"I don't think so...How can you tell someone who's dead how much you cared for them?"

There was a pause, then I asked, "What was her name?"

"Felicia." Then he took out his phone and showed me a picture of a woman about our age with strawberry blonde hair and freckles holding a beer and smiling. She seemed like the kind of girl who was a little nerdy and shy, who you could really confide in.

I patted his back and I told him that I was sorry for his loss, but I felt like I could have done more. But what else could I do? As a friend, but not a super close friend, not like, what it sounded like him and Felicia were. I've always been there to talk, but he's busy a lot of the time, and I'm sure he has other friends or just doesn't feel like talking to me. I stared at him staring at the lake, he said as if interrupting a thought, "Yeah...thanks."

I checked my watch and it was time for me to get back to work, this situation was eating at me as much as it was him, so I needed an excuse to leave it for a while, "I'll call you later."

"Alright, see ya." He added in a more upbeat tone, but I knew that this was eating at him.

I knew this and still I got in my car, still I went back to work and finished my day before arriving home to call him again.

"How are you?"

"I'm fine." He replied somewhat annoyed. "There's-really no reason for you to be concerned."

I could tell from the way he was talking that he had had a few.

"You should really take it easy you know."

"What's it to you? You know that drinking is my therapy, my way of lowering my anxiety."

"You know what it means to me."

There was a pause.

"I know you care about me...like a younger brother. I...think I've lost count."

"Goddammit."

"It's not your place to judge me! If you're going to be like that, why don't you just kill yourself?"

"Fine! I'll tell Felicia "Hi" for you."

And I hung up.

My mother's belongings on the table. She had finally overdosed. I mean, it was bound to happen. Heroin was her drug, and when I was younger she actually shot some up in me, which is why my dad got custody of me. But he was driven to suicide, because he was still in love with my mom and couldn't find a way to help her. That was ten years ago, and for the remainder of my childhood I was raised by my aunt, and just a few months ago I received my mother's things.

But that time when she did induce me with heroin, I was taken somewhere else, a dark, dusty plain where I saw all these people with sunken in eyes. They told me later that I had been dead for a

few minutes, so that must have been some realm of the afterlife. I dug through my mother's belongings and in a bible of all places, I found a little vial of black liquid and a few syringes. Would I dare do it again?

One week passed as I heard nothing from Stan, and I kept glancing back and forth at the phone and the bible with the syringes. Even though he hated me, I couldn't stand not hearing from him, I needed to hear his voice, I needed to see his face. Two weeks passed and still nothing, being distracted by my feelings of emptiness without him I had forgotten to take my asthma medication. Three weeks had passed, I decided to do it, my breathing was very shallow. I laid back on a pillow and filled the syringe up, then I readied a vein and shot up, all at once I felt an extreme high. But it felt too extreme and through it all I thought I heard a door open, but I was back, and here was the field.

I ran for what felt like hours in the space, not seeing anything and not knowing where to go, but I got a feeling to run straight then right. I did so and reached my hand out and felt a wrist, it was her, but with deep black eyes and a deep mark around her neck, she must have hung herself. I caught my breath and said, "Stan...Stan loves you."

She hugged me and said with a smile on her face and tears in her eyes, "Tell him I loved him, too."

And fairly suddenly I felt air in my lungs and there was a bright light, a hospital, a bed, I was back in a living, breathing body. There were nurses crowded around me and the pads of the defibrillator were taken away from my body. "She's stable." One of them said.

Someone was holding my hand, I looked over and it was Stan, he got up at once and pushed the nurses aside and embraced me. "I didn't mean it, I didn't mean it." He kept saying through tears.

I was so overwhelmed with happiness about how much he cared that I started crying, too. But I remembered to tell him, "I met her."

He backed up and stared at me, "R...r-r-really?"

I nodded.

"What did you say? What did she say? What-"

"Ok, guy, give her some room, she just came back from the dead, it can wait." A nurse said as she ushered him out of the room.

I was going to protest, but I could still barely breathe, so they administered my asthma medication and made sure the heroin was completely out of my system. After a few days, I had told them a story that I was curious about heroin and forgot about my asthma medication. Because if I had told them I had done it so that I could speak with a dead person, they would have admitted me in a nuthouse for sure. So, before letting me out they just assured me, "Well, don't do it again."

I walked into the lobby of the hospital and Stan was waiting for me, he walked up to me and grabbed my arms excitedly, asking, "So, what did she say?"

I sat down with him on a sofa and in turn asked, "What happened to me? I heard you were the one that found me."

He let me go and looked away, "Well, I...thought I'd come around again to make sure you were okay and to apologize...and you were laying there...dead."

He paused and I took a moment for that to sink in, he continued with, "So, I picked you up, took the heroin needle out, and rushed you to the hospital, thinking there might still be hope."

I teared up a little bit, "So...you...would really be sad if I was dead?"

"Yes!" He almost screamed, "Don't you dare do it again!"

I hugged him and then stated, "Alright, I'll tell you what I said."

He perked up as he paid attention and I said, "I said that you loved her and..."

I wasn't sure whether to reply...what this would mean...what he might do, but I blurted it out anyways, "She said she loved you, too."

He was stunned, he sat there staring into space for too long, "Stan? Stan, are you okay?" I prodded.

"Yeah, uh..." He answered distractedly as he got up to leave, "I'll-I'll call you okay?"

He left and I still called, "Stan!" because I didn't quite believe that he was entirely okay. And I thought about what I had just done as I drove myself home, when I arrived at my apartment I saw that, the police most likely, had ransacked the place looking for the rest of the heroin. Lastly the bible was laying on the floor with a page or two ripped out and the hole in it was empty. Of course, I couldn't keep the stuff, if I wanted to do it again...but I didn't think about it as I made myself dinner.

A few nights later Stan called me.

"Hello, Erica?"

"Yes?"

"Do you want to come over for dinner?"

"Sure. Should I bring anything?"

"No, no...that's fine. I just need you to be here."

"Alright, I'll be over in a few minutes."

"See you then."

"Later."

I dressed in black slacks with a purple blouse and drove over to his apartment, I felt excited, but at the same time I got a really bad feeling. I let it pass over me as I knocked on the door, we greeted each other and he hugged as he led me inside. He said, "It's almost ready, just wait in the "dining room"."

"Okay." He called it a "dining room", because he had such a small apartment with one fold out table with two fold out chairs in the living room next to one couch and one TV. A few minutes later he exclaimed, "Order up!" as he entered the room with two plates of spaghetti, and a bottle of wine. He poured it out, then sat down, as we ate I took little sips of my wine, but by the time I finished my meal and my one glass, he had drank four and only eaten half his food. Clearly intoxicated, he mused, "Y'know what's funny? Felicia...Felicia wasn't much of a drinker either."

The way he said it made it sound like he missed her and the fact that he was bringing up Felicia...My eyes became wide as I internally screamed 'No!' I knew what he was thinking now and as I got up he laughed as he rushed into the kitchen. He came back with his shirt off and a knife in his hand, I backed away as I stammered "Now just calm down, you don't have to do this."

"But Erica, I want to see her. I want to see Felicia."

He laid down on the floor, knife still in hand, and beckoned, "Come over here."

I was terrified as I inched closer.

"Come on."

I sat down next to him and he put the knife to his chest, "No, stop-"

As I tried to throw the knife away, I was caught in the trap, he had me holding the knife to his chest, clutching his fingers over mine on the handle. I was almost in tears at this point, "Stan, you have so much to live for, you can't-"

"Come on, Erica, I know you can do it, kill me."

"Stan." I cried, shaking.

"You're the only person I can trust with this. You're the only person I trust, period."

"Stan, don't-" I kept imploring.

He took one hand off of mine to wipe a tear from my eye, "Erica, I love you."

The knife plunged into his chest as he heaved in his last breath, and spat blood out.

I couldn't tell you what happened next, in my red dream, but by the time I regained myself I had passed out next to his body. There where hand marks on his cheeks and the word liar written all over his body, both in blood. And then I remembered. I had slapped him, I had screamed obscenities as I marked his body with those words. I was so angry, because those where the words that my father said before he stepped off the chair and snapped his neck. I was angry then for him killing himself, and I was angry now for what I had done, what he had made me do.

I looked at my bloody hands, "What have I done?"

I stared at the knife staring back at me saying "Killer! Killer!"

"Alright..." I picked it up and held it to my chest.

"He'll be so alone in that space...I have to join him." I stated as I pierced my chest, everything going red.

I was once again back in the death realm, like I expected, the dark, dusty tundra awaited me with my black eyes. I was now stuck here, forever. As I started my search for Stan, someone else caught my eye, a tall man with short, dark hair. I ran towards the figure and called what I knew him to be when he was alive "Dad!"

I continued to call the name as he ran to the left, stopped, forward, stopped, and right, he continued zigzagging across the space for a long time. And just as I felt that I may be chasing him for the rest of this existence, he finally stopped me by putting his hand on my head.

I stopped and confessed, "I'm sorry, Dad. I'm sorry that I couldn't save you. And...I've killed someone, I-"

But he stopped me mid-sentence to say, "It doesn't matter what you did. I am still very proud of you, Erica, and I love you no matter what."

He then disappeared into dust, in a process that must be absolution, when the soul absolves all of it's troubles and can finally move on to the next life. I stood stunned by his words, and then I fell to my knees and cried, 'How could he forgive me?' I thought. Unconditional love is one of those things that can't be explained, but can't be denied. I got up after a few minutes, remembering that I had to find Stan, and I ran.

I ran and searched for hours calling his name, until I found him, facing away from me as I approached, he said, "How could you kill me?"

I stood paralyzed at this, feeling the guilt sink in again, as his arm flung back to hit me, I dodged and saw that the person changed into someone who was not him.

"How would you like your face smashed in?" The dark figure had now morphed into the guy from the bar I knocked out. He swung at me, I dodged again and landed an uppercut. Then the dark figure revealed themselves. It was me. Another me, grinning darkly and laughing at the trick she had pulled off, then she said,

"There's no use trying to find him, he's mine now."

"No, he isn't ours, he is his own person." I countered, "You can't possess a person!"

She threw punches at me, "But isn't that why you're here? For your own gain?"

I dodged and blocked stating, "No, I'm here to face up to what I've done. What are you here for?"

"I'm here, because I'm someone you don't like to look at, a side you ignore."

She pinned me to the ground, some dust was kicked up from the black dirt, hands at my neck, I tried to push her hands off, but she only tightened her grip. Then I pushed at what would be her chest and my hand sank into her like mud, I found it hollow, a hollow hole where her heart should be.

"You can never take over!" I resisted.

"Why?"

"Because you're empty." Then I ripped her apart with my hand from the hole, she screamed as she dissolved into white sparks.

With that over with, I got back up and started running again, I felt tired after a while so I slowed to a jog, then a walk, until I was dragging my feet when I finally saw him. He had his back towards me and was sitting on the ground. I approached him cautiously, just in case it was another trick. But, as I came closer I saw that he was crying, he noticed me and cried, "She's not here!"

I sank down to embrace him and let him cry on my shoulder, "She might have reached absolution when she told me to tell you how she felt." I assured.

I unhooked the embrace to wipe away his tears, as he said, "I don't want to me alone."

"You don't have to be, I'm here." I added.

Then we both got up, holding each others hands, looked forward into the distance, and disappeared.