

GIRLS NIGHT OUT

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Ruth was on Bleecker Street waiting for her homies. It was only eight o'clock, the night was young and full of promises. Ruth was an aspiring fashionista/influencer/bullshitter and so were the rest of her motley crew. She arrived in the city nearly ten years ago to go to NYU, only to realize she hated college almost as much as she hated her small town back in Iowa. The city was everything she hoped it would be, right down to the terribly overpriced apartments and larger-than-life people. It was also incredibly expensive. Ruth had a roommate, whom she couldn't stand, but paid the rent on time. Money was becoming a problem. She really couldn't afford to go out anymore unless her friends helped split the bill. She had done the boyfriend thing, the being engaged thing, the random hookup thing. She was almost thirty and her clock was ticking. She was single, broke, and now had to start watching what she ate. This was not the Ruth she envisioned when she first arrived here almost a decade ago.

Life clearly had its own plans for Miss Ruth.....and everyone else.

Her bestie was Addison, whom everyone called Addy. Then we had Celine and occasionally Julie or Norma Rae. They decided to meet at Addy's favorite pub for a quick bite to eat before they hit the town. Celine and Norma Rae were the first to arrive. She gave them both a kiss and they sat down at their table.

"What's new bitch?" asked Celine

"I made a new video today, I'm close to a thousand subscribers. I just need that one video that takes me to the next level," said Ruth.

"Did you hear?"

"Hear what?"

"Addy got engaged!" said Norma Rae.

Ruth felt like she had been punched in the stomach. Clearly, she and Addy were not as close as she thought.

"No....I haven't talked to her since I got back from Iowa," said Ruth trying not to tear up.

"That Wall Street guy she's been seeing for the past year. Can't blame her, he's loaded. They're going to get married in France." said Celine.

"I thought she broke up with him."

"She did.....twice."

"So.....what happened?" asked Ruth, straining to hear their voices over the music being played.

They both looked uncomfortably at one another. Ruth had a thought. It was crazy. That doesn't happen to girls like Addy.

You've got to be shitting me ladies.....say it ain't so.

"Don't tell her we told you. She said she wanted to tell you in person. She didn't want to do it over a text."

"Tell me what?"

"She's pregnant." they both said in unison.

Ruth was still shocked to hear it come out of their mouths. She never envisioned Addison being a mom.

She once bragged that her body count was over a hundred. That doesn't exactly scream for somebody who wants to experience motherhood. She knew Addy had already had one abortion, there may have been another. Ruth had always figured Addy would be the cool single aunt to her own kids. Looks like Addy beat her to the punch. She saw Julie out of the corner of her eye and waved her over.

"She's so happy. She's always wanted to be a mother. It's always been her thing." said Celine.

Celine, I can remember a time not too long ago, when Addy's thing was coke and dick.....but whatever. Thought Ruth as their drinks arrived.

"So, did you ever get that job? The one for the vodka company?"

"No.....they told me they were going in another direction. I'm just not sure which direction they meant," said Ruth.

"That sucks. You should come out to the house this weekend. We can watch the Polo games." said Julie.

"Yeah. We'll have a blast."

Three's a crowd, girls. Thanks but no thanks.

"Ruth.....you aren't going to believe this, but Norma and I were almost attacked by these dogs when we got into the cab. Can you believe that?"

"Dogs? In Manhattan?"

"I know. We barely got in the cab. Giant sons of bitches too. I think they were Rottweilers or Dobermans....or some other giant dog breed. Scared the holy hell out of us." said Celine.

"That's weird. I've only ever seen little foo-foo dogs in the city."

"Yeah, me too. So.....I've got some news," said Celine.

"Do tell."

"I'm moving to Los Angeles."

"Seriously?"

"Yup. I'm working for a clothing company out there. It's like my dream job."

"Wow.....way to go kid."

"Yeah. Chris and I are getting a place together out there. He says he's sick of the city and the winters."

"When are you leaving?"

"Next week. I'm going to miss you guys. You're like my family. Well, my other family."

Ruth knew this day was coming. It probably should have come a few years ago when they graduated or decided that bar hopping and pub crawling wasn't a career. Life was pulling them apart. Everyone tries to stay in touch.....at first. Three thousand miles apart makes it tough to stay close. She figured Celine would probably send texts or pics for the first few weeks, then months, then a Christmas Card or two, then nothing. Just online posts and pics. Ruth and Celine's relationship was pretty much terminal at this point.

"She's here!" said Celine as she rushed over to hug Addy.

Addy was the anchor of the group. Julie and Norma Rae were just friends of friends. Addy was the one everyone wanted to be with. She was the life of the party. The first time she and Addy met, they ended up dancing on a bar together. They slept on a park bench that night and have been friends ever since. She was hurt by the fact that Addy hadn't confided in her. Clearly, she was moving on and ready to begin the next chapter in her life.....*without Ruth*.

"Hey bitches!" she said and hugged everyone.

Addy was drop-dead gorgeous. Every guy in the room had their eye on her. She was a bitch, but a nice bitch. Just don't cross her or you were pretty much dead to her.

Addison is a one strike and you're out type of girl.

She was from a small town in Wisconsin and hadn't been back since she moved to the city. For a few years, they were close. They would talk or text every day. They had been there for one another during the breakups with their boyfriends. They would close bars together and take guys home and kick them out in the morning. Addy made a killer breakfast. There was a six-month stretch a few years back when she was homeless. Ruth let her live in her cramped studio.

Somehow, in that time, Addy had gone from being homeless and on Ritalin to being engaged to a Wall Street banker and about to become a mom.

She knew Addy had used sugar daddy websites. She had to pay the bills somehow. She wasn't sure just what kind of arrangement she had with these guys. Were they paying for her company.....or just paying for sex? Ruth didn't really want to ask. Clearly, she was onto bigger and better things.

"I've missed you bitches. Well, I got knocked up....by a rich guy, ten years older than me."

"Addy.....is that real?" asked Celine

"Um, yeah. He works on the New York Stock Exchange. Of course, it's real." she said holding up her hand. She was wearing the biggest diamond Ruth had ever seen. It practically lit up the whole room.

"Are we ready to order, cause I'm starved. Pregnancy will kick your asses ladies. Hell, everything on the menu sounds good."

The girls ordered and ate. The conversation was flowing, except it wasn't flowing in Ruth's direction. Everyone was just fawning over Addy and the small bump in her stomach. Ruth didn't even really want to be there at this point. She was wondering if she would even get an invite to Addy's wedding? What had she done to cross her? Ruth had put up with a lot of her crap over the years. She figured she was at least afforded *two strikes* at this point.

The other girls got up to use the bathroom. They were still in the group bathroom mentality it seemed. Celine had to go potty. Norma Rae just spotted a cute guy. That left just the two of them at the table.

It also left a very uncomfortable silence between the two of them.

"So, how have you been? It feels like forever since we talked," said Addison

"I'm okay."

"Look. I didn't want you to hear about it from someone else. I wanted to tell you in person. It just didn't happen."

"Addy cut the crap. I know you too well. Just tell me what I did to piss you off, so I can fake apologize and we can move on." said Ruth

"You didn't do anything."

"So, why are you being a bitch?"

"Ruth..... I know how hard it is for you to go back home. You got drunk with Norma Rae a few months ago and she told me everything you said. I just didn't want to upset you."

"What did I say?"

"You don't remember?"

"Nope."

"You said you wished you could get married and have a family and leave the city. You said you were still stuck in your college years and you wanted to close this chapter in your life. You were pretty upset."

"I said that?"

"I guess you did. We all decided it was just best not to say anything. We didn't want to upset you. I know things haven't been going all that great for you lately."

"A few setbacks is all. Sure, I'd like to get married, but we aren't still in high school. I thought I would be the first one you called when you found out."

"I haven't even told my parents. We aren't really on the best of terms right now."

"I'm sorry. That must suck."

"I'm not even sure if I'll invite them to the wedding," she said, tearing up.

"What's the real reason, Addy? I know not wanting to piss me off is a good reason, but it's not the real reason," said Ruth

Addy looked as if she were going to respond when Celine and Norma Rae sat back down at the table.

"I'm totally going to bang that guy tonight!" said Norma Rae.

"Norma.....we've talked about this. You need to be a whole lot selective about who enters your vagina. No guy worth a shit wants to be with the town whore." said Addy.

Ruth almost choked on her food. She couldn't believe what was hearing.

Addison had now become the voice of reason for the group.....that alone was almost terrifying. The girl who let an entire bar full of men do body shots off her was now telling other women how they should behave. Maybe she was growing up after all.

"Addy, I'm not going to be knocked up by a stranger. I'm on the pill." replied a very surprised Norma Rae.

"Yeah, so was I," replied Addy.

The dynamic of the group had changed in more ways than one. The girls were growing up and apart from one another. She and Addy would always remain friends, just not best friends as they had been in the past. Ruth would just be another name in Addy's phone, nothing more. It was as if the last ten years of their lives never happened. Ruth had to wonder what she had done and how she had wronged Queen Addison.

After the meal, the ladies set out to find one last night of excitement before they went their separate ways. Ruth was standing on the corner, waiting for the rest of the group when she saw two large, scary-looking dogs on the other side of the street. It was as if they were staring right at her. These were not typical NYC dogs that you could fit in your purse. These were big and nasty. The kind you would find guarding a junkyard. Their icy, cold stares sent a shiver down her spine. These were another breed entirely.

The kind you would see in a horror movie. The kind that would rip you apart in seconds.

She turned around to see what was taking the girls so long and when she turned and faced the street, the dogs seemed to have mysteriously vanished. Where the hell did they go? Had she just imagined the whole thing?

"Alright....my pregnant ass is finally in gear," said Addy with the other girls in tow.

"Where to?"

"Let's go to Archies. One last time," said Addy.

Archies was a local dive bar that was frequented by just about every poser and wanna be in the city. It's the bar where the two of them first met only two days before classes. Ruth's parents had dropped her off in the city that same morning. She had a fake ID, as did Addy. They were only 18 and hanging out with men two or three times their age. Ruth felt more comfortable around those men than she did boys her own age. She had never had an intelligent and meaningful conversation with people before moving to the city. Everyone here seemed to be accomplished and intelligent. Most of the time she would just sit and listen. Back home, she was her class valedictorian. Here, she was just another small fish in the ocean.

Archies was packed. It usually was. They sat down in their old booth and ordered drinks. Addy ordered a diet coke.

"I remember the first night we came here. I banged the bartender that night. He was twice my age. God, the stupid shit we used to do." she said, sipping her coke.

"I remember puking in the bathroom that night. First time I ever heard the words *puke and rally*." said Ruth.

"God, the hours we wasted in this place. I thought this bar was the most amazing place in the world."

"Now look at us. We're telling other girls not to act like us. We're sounding like our parents." said Ruth.

"Oh, I'm going to say hi to Manuel. I'll be right back," said Addy. She grabbed Celine and Norma Rae and disappeared into the crowd."

"Ruth sat alone in the booth and looked across the bar. She remembers having sex on one of the bar stools with her then-boyfriend. She did a lot of very young, very reckless things in this bar.

She had never even kissed a boy until she came to the city. Now, it was time for all of them to move on. It wasn't just crazy expensive, it just wasn't the same. She was older and much wiser than she was ten years ago. The city had served its purpose. The two were ready to part ways.

She turned and saw a very large dog walking slowly towards her booth. The other customers just seemed to ignore it. It walked right up to her booth and sat down on its hind legs in front of her. Ruth wasn't quite sure what to do. The dog had fangs.....big fangs. The kind you would find on some long-extinct animal. It was huge. She wasn't sure what kind of breed it was.

Its breed was just plain fucking scary.

"Hi boy. Who let you in here?" she said, trying to pat his head.

The dog let out the most menacing growl she had ever heard. It was a noise that should come from a lion or tiger. The thing that really threw her off and made her recoil instantly was the fact that this very evil-looking dog.....*had no collar or tags*. A stray dog in upper Manhattan was almost unheard of.

"Did somebody order a dry Martini?" asked a waitress from the other side of the booth.

"What? Um.....yeah. Who the hell let that dog in here?"

"Dog.....where?"

"Right there."

Ruth turned back only to see that the giant dog had vanished into the crowd.

"I'm not crazy. There was this giant dog in here, I swear."

"Well, he ain't here now. That's fifteen bucks for the martini."

Ruth paid the girl for the drink that was never going to get drunk. She was the three of them over in the corner. Ruth didn't need to hear what was being said. She was no longer part of the group. She had been ex-communicated from their little hive. One way or another, she was going to have it out with Addy and find out what was on her mind. The two of them had a few blow-up fights over the years but had always made up for it a few days later. They were both proud and stubborn and didn't like to admit when they were wrong, but valued each other's friendship even more. That is up until now.

Ruth decided to go outside and have a vape. She thought it absurd that the anti-smoking nazis had equated vaping with smoking. There's no such thing as second-hand vape. She loved nicotine but hated smoking. It was an odd relationship.

Me and nicotine is the most successful relationship I've ever had! She thought to herself as she stepped outside the bar and avoided a large group of drunk college students. She turned the corner into an alleyway and took a deep drag off her vape pen. She instantly felt better. Nicotine makes everything better. She was not going to get through this without it.

She saw two large dogs in the shadows. She was only ten feet away from other people, but she felt miles away. She backed away from them and backed into a group of drunks. She turned and ran back inside, just to look back and see two dogs chasing after her. She closed the door of the bar.

"What's the matter?" asked a waitress.

"The dogs. There are wild dogs outside," she said, trying to catch her breath.

"Wild dogs? In Manhattan?"

"Jesus, they're huge."

The waitress stepped outside. She came back a minute later.

"There are no dogs outside. I asked a bunch of people if they saw any and they all said no."

"Well, they were out there. They almost got me."

"Look, are you going to buy a drink, or just cause drama?" asked the waitress.

"Huh? You must be new here, so I'll pretend I didn't hear that."

"Do you want me to repeat it?"

"Wow.....you know the owner of this bar, Tom Schwartz? Yeah, I dated him for a while when I was your age. I spent the night at his house a few months ago. Would you like me to call him?"

The waitress had enough sense just to let this one go.

"We've had a lot of trouble with homeless people in here. I just don't want to have the cops here again. Every time they show up, we end up having to close the bar. No one wants to drink around cops." she said and stormed off.

"Bitch." said Ruth under her breath.

She's just jealous she didn't bang Tom too. He likes to make all of his new hires feel welcome.

She walked over to Celine and Norma Rae.

"Hey, you guys said you were attacked by dogs, right?"

"Yeah, it was scary as hell."

"So was I."

"What? When?"

"Just a few minutes ago. What the hell is going on?"

"I don't know. That's weird.

"Yeah....*a little too weird.*"

The girls told Addy what had just transpired. Ruth was still shaking.

"That's fucking weird," she replied.

"Yeah.....it seems no one else can see the dogs either. So, are they real or not? Cause they sure seem real."

"Well, if no one else can see them, how can they be real?" Addy replied.

"Have you seen them?"

"No."

"Maybe they're saving the best for last. We weren't imagining them. That thing was gigantic. No way would I just imagine I was being attacked by a mutant dog." said Celine.

"Maybe we should just call it a night. I can't drink anyway and you guys seem to have a lot going on. We can postpone this for another night."

"Yeah, maybe it's for the best."

"Should we call Animal Control or something?" asked Norma Rae.

"Something tells me they wouldn't be able to find the dogs anyway," added Ruth.

"Look, I'm going to head home. I'm just not feeling it tonight."

"What? Ruthie, this could be the last time we'll all be together," said Norma Rae.

"Norma.....come on. We haven't talked in months. This is the first time I've seen Celine in almost a year. It's just time for us to move on." said Ruth, almost shivering from the drizzle and wind.

She could see Norma Rae was hurt and wasn't sure how to appropriately respond. Her lips tensed up and her entire face became distorted.

It was as if something else was coming out of her body and taking over.

"Addy was right about you all along," she said coldly.

"What do you mean?"

"Nevermind. *Bitches gonna bitch I guess,*" she said and walked away.

Ruth just wanted to go home. She had zero desire to be there. The time had come for her and the rest of the girls to part ways. She felt as if she should say goodbye to Addy. She figure she owed her that much. The other two could fuck off for all she cared.

She went back into the bar and saw Addy with her arms around some dude. Typical Addison. Monogamy was simply not a word in her vocabulary. She stood in front of her for almost a minute before Addison acknowledged her.

"Hey, kid. I'm going to take off. Just not feeling it tonight."

"Oh come on. We're all together. You should do some blow with Raoul here. I would, but I've got a little bun in my oven." she said, patting her stomach.

So very thoughtful of you Addy. I almost feel sorry for your unborn child. She thought to herself.

"You're really leaving? Why?"

"Addy, I feel like shit. Mother nature is kicking my ass."

"You used to be so much fun. What happened to you?"

"I grew up. Happens to the best of us."

"Jesus. Well, fine. Give me a hug. Keep in touch. Remember the night we slept on top of the bar in here?"

"I just remember waking up the next morning with a killer hangover."

"Fine. Look.....I can't invite you to my wedding. It's just.....I don't think you belong there. I hope you understand." said Addy.

"If that's what you want Addy. I guess the last ten years don't mean shit, huh?"

"I guess not."

"Fuck you, Addy. Have a nice life," said Ruth.

Addy grabbed her by her arm and spun her back around.

"I made a little deal with the devil, Ruthie. I got to be happy, finally. I just had to give them something in return. I gave them you." she said. Ruth noticed her blue eyes now looked pitch black. As if someone else was inside her body, looking out.

Ruth pulled away and quickly walked out of the bar. She was officially over these girls. She found a cab and it took her back to her apartment. As she got out of the cab, she saw two small dogs stop and look at her.

They were eyeballin her. Daring her to make the first move.

At least that's how it seemed.

It seemed as if every dog in the world was now watching her. Stalking her, waiting for the right moment to strike.

She passed out on her couch watching TV. She slept straight through until seven o'clock the next morning. She felt sick to her stomach. She wanted to text Addy but didn't want to at the same time. Last night had been like a bad dream. She had no idea what had happened. She and Addy had a few fights over the years, but it had always been when they were both drunk. Neither one of them drank last night.

What happened last night was something new. This was uncharted territory. New and very scary uncharted territory.....and what did the hell did she mean by Addy gave them me?

There were a lot of questions that needed answers, but Ruth didn't even want to ask. It was just easier at this point to simply walk away and never speak to these girls again. She was hurt. She had put all of her eggs into the Addy basket and the basket was now broken.....along with her eggs. She just wanted to know what she had done to Addy to warrant such hostility. Friends drift apart, it happens all the time, but this was something else. The look in Addy's eyes last night was pure hatred. The kind reserved for victims and their attackers.

She made herself a cup of coffee and walked out onto her balcony. Her roommate had gone to see her parents in New Jersey and wouldn't be home until Sunday night. Ruth looked down and saw two very large, very angry-looking dogs down below. They were just waiting for her. They were running out of patience.

Ruth remembers months ago that Celine commented Addy dabbling in witchcraft while they were waiting for their lunch at a cafe.

"You know Addy when she does something, she goes all in. She don't half-ass anything."

"What?"

"Yeah, she said witchcraft was for village fags. She wanted something more hardcore. She tried demonology. I actually thought she was kidding."

"Addy's into witchcraft?"

"Forget I said anything. Sometimes I think she can hear me, even when she's not here. It's like she lives in my head." said Celine.

"I think she lives in all of our heads," replied Ruth.

"Sometimes.....sometimes I think she's not a nice person," said Celine, whispering.

"Why are you whispering?"

"Because....I don't want her to hear me. I've seen her get mad. It ain't pretty. No telling what that bitch will do. She's crazy." said Celine as she ate her waffles.

Ruth didn't really think much about the conversation until now. Celine was right about one thing:

*ADDY WAS CAPABLE OF ALMOST ANYTHING. THAT'S THE VERY DEFINITION OF EVIL.
IT'S CAPABLE OF ANYTHING. NO MATTER HOW HORRIBLE THE RESULT.*