

Blue Scented Candle

I accidentally burn my toast. The smell of black charred bread wafts around me and my black dog. She sniffs, nudging her nose into my pant leg, and I pet her.

This morning, Shark walks from the kitchen into my open bedroom door a few feet away. She grabs a neon yellow ball and wags her tail, waiting. It hangs from her mouth, as if it should fall. Before playing with Shark, I throw my toast away in the trash.

Shark wags her tail, as I crouch down. I push her away, teasing her, and she gets riled up. She drops the ball and I throw it across the room. She bolts, her skinny legs skidding across the hardwood floor. Her claws click violently until she sits down, chewing the tennis ball with her back teeth; I laugh happily. She does not return to the kitchen with it, and instead drops it, and it rolls on the bedroom carpet.

The smell is frightening; it is like I have burned the house down. Shark does not seem to mind; she is a Silken Windhound. Sitting on the smaller side, she is a perfect mix of athletic and couch potato.

The smoke alarm goes off.

“Shit!” It sits above my front door, bleeping like a bird before death, shaming me for my cooking skills. Now, I felt judged; I felt scared. I was taken back to how my ex left me.

My ex was the kind of man who would wear a nice white shirt and jeans with his hair slicked back. He had black hair and stood at about 6'1". He smiled around strangers and his family so often, that when he was with his me, he would just collapse. He knew why I lived in a small old house, but he also had a nice white Honda for dirt cheap from his parents. He always made sure to finish the movie with me that we watched together, because he knew I hated it when we did not make it to the end. He was a guy who knew how to cook you a skirt steak mozzarella cheese quesadilla, or a bone broth stew on a cold winter's day. He would always greet me at the car door with “hello beautiful” before kissing me. The sunglasses he wore in the summer reminded me of someone from New York. His eyes were a dark brown and he snowboarded at Brighton, where he took me hiking after the snow melted. Lots of his friends were girls, but I knew that was because other guys never made him feel good about himself, nor appreciated how emotionally intelligent he was. He had a plan. His plan was to become a wealthy, rich man, that could afford an endless supply of Adderall at the bar. He still needed to obtain that laugh of someone who doesn't care about anything. Or, I guess, anyone. Do rich men not need to take care of people? Once, he showed me a picture of a nine-hundred-dollar watch. He asked me which face color he should buy.

“Go with the navy one” I said, because I am good at that kind of stuff. After that, he smiled and hugged me on his navy-blue comforter.

Part of my brain wonders if my ex had a secret checklist. Maybe he was looking for murderous weapons in my corners, and secret drugs in my cabinets. I know he did not find any. I hid nothing from him. I guess I made him feel pretty good. Good enough to leave me.

There are three signs a man will not take care of you.

Number one is the most obvious: a man who does not have everything for himself. Everyone knows where they need to be, to love you. Each must first perfect the art of his own life.

After the first, there is the second sign: if he is not interested in your hobbies or activities. Pretty simple. The less far he dives, the less interested or focused he is on depth. I promise, he will focus on it in the future, when he is ready. You cannot decide the timing.

The third sign, is the most interesting one: a man who does not fear you. The weird thing is, he must fear you. Not the kind of fear you get from someone who won't talk to you or who avoids you on the street. No. That is the fear of a stranger. This; this is the fear of a lover.

According to my father, he will be talking to you on any random Tuesday. You both will be happy. He will suddenly see you differently. He will see you skip on the sidewalk, and then, it hits him. That he *fears* something about you. He fears you because he is in love. He is in love with your messy hair, your imperfect laugh, your un-steamed grease splatted t-shirt. None of it matters any longer. Now, he is in a respectable kind of love. The kind that is more than just sex, for him. He will always want to make you, his best friend, feel better.

So, when you meet a man who takes care of himself, who is interested in your hobbies and activities, and fears you, you have met the love of your life.

I have not found that man yet. No, not yet.

I CAN'T reach the alarm. As I stand on my toes, I can barely touch the top of the door frame. I grabbed the closest kitchen chair, and dragged it across the wooden floor, hitting the fridge, sending my magnets flying. Shark drops her ball, head hanging lower and ears perking down. She goes to hide from the loud sound by running into my room and laying on top of my white comforter. The bed is a safety landing.

I step onto the chair and reach the smoke alarm, pressing its off button. It takes a few seconds to stop beeping into my ears, so close.

There's silence. The kind of silence after chaos. A kind of noise, that no one can hear but you and Shark. You sit onto the floor next to the kitchen chair, shocked and hungry, and you cry.

Shark licks my face. The tears let out my stress through endorphins and oxytocin; my lip quivers. Why is everything in my life making things harder? My toast and my smoke alarm. I am alone.

"I can't do long distance" your ex said as you cried into his arms like a baby. Into the man who left you in an apartment where you made toast together. You never burnt it for him. He would help make sure you didn't set the dials the wrong way. He was telling you, subtly, that he

was not ready. But you were blind, and he liked seeing you happy. The tears of love echo from the city view of your bedroom window. You cry harder. It wasn't good enough for him.

Eventually, the floor starts to hurt. You would stay there forever if it wasn't so cold and slick. Is something in you becoming older, like the meat off your bones?

I sniff, picking up the magnets from the floor, and sticking them back on the fridge. My body has returned back to homeostasis. Each magnet is from a different place me and my roommate have traveled. It litters the white surface with memories. While setting them all back in place, my back aches. I was leaning against the wall while I cried. Shark comes out of the bedroom and stays by my feet, an empathetic puppy, who will stick by my side until he can no longer breathe.

I attempt to make toast again, turning the dial down, and removing the lid from the hummus. It seems safe, a warm golden-brown color, and my stomach is so hungry I can't wait any longer. Shark wants a bite, as I walk to the table, pulling back the kitchen chair. The light above me is flicked on, as the sun still rises outside.

I open my phone. My calendar says I am busy; my head says I am tired. Both are true. I turn off my phone and set it a few feet away from me.

I pick up the blue plastic knife and smear hummus onto my warm toasted rye bread; I grab the salt and pepper shakers, putting them on top, then place them back in an open wooden storage nook below the kitchen cabinets.

I devour my toast. It releases a dopamine that brings me back to a better reality, and I smile.

I SOMETIMES forget which direction I am going. I will look in front of me, and wonder where I am. Am I south? North? Am I a bit east, or more southwest? There are so many places to go, and things to see. There are so many people to meet, and I wonder why I forget which direction I am going. Sometimes, I feel scared. A new direction and a new decision, could mean danger. I always know which way is right, though. Because fear just means I am not going backwards.

After eating my salt and peppered hummus toast, I think, *where should I go?* The first option is to go nowhere, to sit still in my apartment all day. The second option, is to go outside, since the sun cures all. The third option, is to find something to keep myself busy, like a new job or a sport of some sort.

I decide to go buy a candle. What type of candle? Which scent of candle? I have no idea yet. All I know is that I want a candle. A nice one, one that lights up my whole apartment with dim beautiful flames. One that has a scent that makes me smile. A candle that I would like to rebuy and relight as often as I want. So, I go to The Wicker Store.

I lace up my white sneakers and zip up my spring fleece. I start my walk. Candles got popular in the 1990's, before I was born. The popularity of aromatherapy and the invented soybean wax, lead to a home décor surge. On the way, there are so many pretty trees. Green leaves, none of them blossoming yet, if they are the kind of trees to blossom. Some of them are very large, in this old town. Others are very small. I like touching the leaves I can reach. Walking to the candle store makes me feel happy, because the thought of a candle makes a home, feel more like a home.

The store is made of wood, not concrete cement walls or even the modern, thin plywood. It is old wood, the kind of wood that could combust at any moment. One misplaced wick, could ruin it all. But it is beautiful. It is painted a dark brown with a well-matching black shingled roof. There is a grass lawn around the concrete cobblestone walkway. Around the house are neatly trimmed bushes; the kind that stay green all year long. It looks like someone could live here, and be perfectly happy, if it weren't for the very large seven-foot glass window that illuminated the candle-filled tables, and a quote on it that said: "Find your fire" in burgundy red paint.

I twist open the circular handle of the door. The door frame was customized to have a body length sheet of glass down the front, matching the large window. Otherwise, the door looks and feels like it was once fully solid wood. In the middle of the doors glass, are golden painted letters in a simple cursive. It says, "Welcome to The Wicker Store". When I open the door, the bell rings. It turns the head of a woman with a brown apron. She has a matching hair clip, and black jeans. Her long-sleeved collared shirt was striped with white and green.

"Hello, how can I help you?" Which is a funny way of finding out my why. Why I walked into this store.

"I am here to buy a candle!" I laugh. "I am not sure which one."

"Well, I can recommend you my favorites" She starts to tell me which scents she loves the best, and for which occasions they should be best used for. One works best for the laundry room, and another works best for the bedroom. One has a nice scent for the kitchen.

"What if I want one for everything?" I say and she looks at me.

"That will be an impossible task." I may have come into this store with too high a demand. I think for a minute, for the words that I really mean.

“Okay.” I pause to think. “What about a candle that is meant for the entire apartment? You know, the kind a mother always had while you were growing up.”

She nods. “We have a good section for you. Just a table, really. You see, candles go through so many different seasons. It is hard to find the one that is ready to be depended on full-time.”

“Oh, trust me” I sigh. “I know.”

“Be prepared for a higher cost too. The more reliable candles like that usually cost more. Just like the flashy new ones.” I did not realize that I had come in here for their most expensive candle. I would be gambling, because there is a chance I was putting too much trust into her advice; I might not like this candle. The way it smells, and the way it feels to light it. Would it be safer to go with something on clearance, or even something flashy for the same price?

She stops at a small, tan wooden table of large three-wick candles. She blows dust off of one of them and then wipes off some of the others. There are a few that are dust-free, set up on a pretty display, having been admired by others but still not yet purchased.

“I want you to close your eyes.” She says, starting to speak softly and slowly, like a mother soothing her child. I feel like I have entered into a great smelling yoga studio for my olfactory system. “Picture your apartment. Picture yourself opening the door when you get back today. When you enter, and you relax, what do you dream of it smelling like?”

With my eyes still closed, I smile. I think of all the things that make me happy. The smell of the ocean. The smell of fresh rain when it is warm. The smell of a freshly pressed book. The smell of my mother’s conditioner. A warm cat’s fuzzy head as it lays on your chest. Fresh grass as you lay staring up at the clouds.

“It smells safe, like calm. Like life, in a peaceful way. Happy relaxation, but also like jumping into water. Crisp dew in the morning when the birds start to sing. The feeling of a warm shower on a winter night. The smell of clean dishes, and the feeling of your lips after someone has slowly kissed you.” As I speak, she looks at me. In only one minute I have just told her a great deal. All because I wanted to buy a candle. One at this exact right time. I open my eyes.

She stares long and hard at the table, and I watch her eyes as they search the closer candles, then the farther ones. Her eyes work their way up to the table’s display. Her hands reach out into the center and grab the top of a golden metal lid. She uses her other hand to support the bottom of its matte glass body. Through the thick white glass, I can see it is blue. She has picked out for me a blue candle, the color of a dark sky. In the light, it seems to look brighter, just like a sky would.

One of her hands opens the lid, the other lifting the candle up to her nose, to sniff. She nods in approval, smiling. “I think this is the one.” I take the lidless candle from her, holding it with both hands. The wick inside is a matching blue, and it feels warm from her touch. I rotate the candle, to read the scent: *Marine Life*. I hold it up to my face and smell it.

It smells like blue. It smells like walking with Shark in the rain and boiling warm water for my black tea. It smells like a freshly mopped hardwood floor. I make a humming noise, like I have just eaten a good bite of food.

“This is it” I say, nodding, because I just know. You know these kinds of things easily. I feel like a kid again. I forget how sad it feels to say goodbye: how hard it is to live alone; how I woke up this morning and burnt my toast; how I set off the fire alarm and climbed on top of a kitchen chair.

I bought the candle, and ever since then I have been the happiest candle owner in the world. I go to The Wicker Store to repurchase the exact candle every couple of months. Just one of the three-wick candles is so strong, it carries across my entire apartment. When you know, you know.

Sometimes, I do forget to light my candle. Sometimes I leave the house too often and am too tired when I come home. But other times, the candle brings me perfect bliss, and I come home in good moods, and I make great food with the smell of my candle all around me.

It might be a weird coincidence, but with my candle lit, I never burn my toast.

References

National Candle Association. (n.d.). *History of candles*. [https://candles.org/history-of-candles/
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