

Red Moon

Erica was organizing a wine and cheese party. If she had invited me to a water and cheese, or a wine and broccoli party, I might have been able to decline. But this was too good to pass up. I had run out of excuses for staying at home on a Saturday night.

I got there at 9 p.m. Erica opened the door after about ten minutes; the music inside was so incredibly loud, she hadn't heard the bell the first five times.

There was a group of empty bottles on the kitchen counter, standing clumsily together like a set of bowling pins waiting to be knocked over. The party was in full swing.

I saw a few familiar faces, and walked over to the main table to get a glass of wine.

“Not so fast,” a voice warned me from behind. Erica was clearly tipsy. “You have to guess where the wine is from, and if you don't, you have to drink this incredibly cheap wine I bought. It tastes like nail polish.”

“Erica, you're cruel. This is my first night out in a long time.”

“Okay, try this. It's amazing. Luke bought it. I don't know how much he paid for it.”

I choked on the expensive Burgundy wine.

“You mean Luke is here? I didn't know you'd invited him.”

“He's my brother, remember? Anyway, he moved in with me after you kicked him to the curb.”

“You know I –”

And then I saw him, standing on the balcony, a half-empty glass in his hand, or was it half-full? He liked to say I was the negative one, and he balanced me out.

“We're playing some games now.” Erica didn't want to listen to my excuses.

She beckoned everybody, and soon we were listening to very detailed instructions.

“First, I want everyone to take a card and a pen. Write *red* or *white* on your card, depending on what kind of wine you prefer.”

That was easy. I liked white. Luke preferred red wine. Erica continued delivering her instructions.

“Now, if you wrote *red*, come stand on my right. If you wrote *white*, to the left. If you wrote *rosé* or some other crap, get out of my house.”

Everybody laughed and moved around the room. I realized Luke was in the left group, but I hadn't even said hello to him, so I didn't want to kick off the conversation by telling him he was in the wrong place. But he was. Like that time we were supposed to meet outside my office but he was waiting outside my apartment. He refused to write things down, and then, when he got things wrong, he refused to excuse himself. I was organization itself and my middle name was apologies. We balanced each other out.

“Now, people in the white wine group. I'm gonna open this bottle of wine, and you need to throw this cork and aim it at this glass over here. If it goes in, you're good, if it doesn't, you either have to drink this entire bottle, or there's a dare. Emily, you go first.”

Damn it. I was awful at these games. A party is supposed to be fun and relaxing, and I was more nervous than before my first job interview, or after I told Luke he couldn't just propose to me at the airport train station because our romantic holiday had backfired since he had, for the third time, misplaced his passport. He had to get his act together. I couldn't be his mother. I was his girlfriend. Then he accused me of never having tried to get along with his mother. And I knew he would never apologize, and I knew he would drive me crazy until my last breath if we stayed together. But I missed him. He understood many things without me having to explain them. He knew I didn't like cut flowers, so he would come home with a big plant, an orchid or a rosemary pot. He woke up fifteen minutes before me so that my coffee was ready as soon as my eyelids separated. He knew *me*. So he'd written *white* on his card just to piss me off.

Of course, my cork landed two feet away from the glass, and I was not going to drink that bottle of wine by myself.

“So what's the dare?” I asked, knowing it could never be as bad as the other option.

“Whenever anyone asks a yes-no question, you have to answer *yes*. For the rest of the evening. Starting now.”

Luke burst out laughing and walked towards me.

“Hi. Are you having fun?”

“Yes.”

“I haven't seen you since... You know, since you made that decision for the two of us. How have you been?”

“Okay.”

“Is that all?”

“Yes.”

“I miss you. Can we go outside to talk?”

“Yes.”

“Why don't we try to work things out?”

“Because you will never admit it when you're wrong and it drives me mad. Because you're careless and it drives me mad.”

“And you are perfect? You don't think it drove me mad every time you found something wrong with every plan I made?”

“So why get back together? Sounds like I made you miserable.”

“You know that's not true. I miss you. There's something about tonight. It's a red moon, there's not gonna be another one for eighteen years, did you know that?”

“Yes.”

“Do you want to stay out here and watch it together?”

“Yes.” I did want to.

“We belong together, you know that. I think one day all the planets will align and we'll make it work. Look, I think it's turning red.”

I was turning red too. We sat in silence looking at the sky.

“Will you marry me?”

“Yes.”

“Are you serious? Or is this part of the game?”