

These words seem to enter my mind every time I go out to the bar. I leave my house with hopes of meeting people and having a good time. But, it seems I always end up watching everybody else.

It is past midnight and another fucking New Year's Eve is almost done. As I lean against the bar, I begin to notice how stoned I am. My sense of caring begins to fade. I know getting stoned was not the answer, but I just needed a little help getting over Maria.

We dated for only two months, but things moved fast. It seemed just as I became comfortable with us, she ended it. She was not anything special; but she thought I was. What more could I have wanted? Obviously too much, it's over. Someday I will learn not to push. Someday.

The touch of a hand on my shoulder brought me back to reality. It was Maria. I could feel my heart racing just looking at her. I had not seen or heard from her in weeks.

She looked at me and said, "What's wrong with you?" Her voice cut the noise of the crowd. She looked good, too good. I could only look back at her, wondering. Wondering, if she would take me home?

I did not say a thing. I could feel my throat tighten, and my mouth went dry. Was I jealous, mad or just scared? It was all the same to me now. I had always admitted I still cared for her to anyone who bothered to ask. She did not like that, not at all.

She took off mad and went upstairs. I ran after her, but stopped at the bottom of the stairway. I stood there watching her wondering. What the hell am I doing here?

I pulled out a cigarette. The flame from the match felt warm against my hands. Funny, I had forgotten what warmth was like.

The smoke hit my eyes and I welcomed it. I watched the smoke, rise and mingle with every breath. Circling my face then arching across the bar. You can feel it, taste it, and smell it. You are never alone when you smoke. It embraces you, covers you, and can hide you. I guess that is why I love it so much.

As I walked toward the dance floor, two girls began a verbal fist fight. They were both dressed in black. Trembling, one of them looked up, as a tear outlined her face. They exchanged a few frightened glances, and then held each other.

I looked away and saw I was not the only observer. A beautiful tall brunette I met last summer was standing by the mirrors. The night we spent together went racing through my memory. My palms began to sweat. She always looked as if she could use a hug, especially tonight. Maybe it was just me.

I do not know what went wrong between us. I guess it was the wrong time, and as usual, I probably scared her.

What the Hell Am I Doing Here?

I didn't dare, to go talk to Georgia, not with a lit cigarette. She was dead set against smoking. But, I was just happy to have someone to watch. She looked good, too good.

I noticed Missy, her ex-girl friend, heading towards her. Missy had her new girl in tow. I was not sure if word had gotten back to Georgia. Everyone knew Missy was dating someone new but, for some reason it was kept from Georgia.

I wanted to ...I don't know. What the hell could I do anyway?

I saw that familiar forced smile on Georgia lips. I wanted so much to talk to her, but I would not know where to begin. I have a tendency of starting in the middle.

I put my cigarette out and tried not to think. I glanced over to the bar. Hmm, I thought, what should I have? Rum and Coke, white Russian, I could not decide.

During my indecision a slow song started. My whole body grimaced. I got my coat and started to leave. I wanted to say good-bye to Maria but, it still hurt too much. It was time to let go, stop pushing.

As I walked out the door, the crisp air felt good on my face. I began to light another cigarette. The trail of someone's perfume winded past the doorway. Just a few steps ahead I saw her. She was pulling up the collar on her coat. I threw down my cigarette, thinking, "What the hell am I doing here?"