

My Giselle

By: Ginger Paulson

I enjoy waking up before 6:00 am: making my cup of coffee and watching the sunrise. I am able to get some work done before my partner, Giselle, awakens. There is an ease in the morning that you can't get at night. The start of a new day is so exhilarating that I want it to last as long as possible. On Sundays, I get to the farmer's market and pick out the freshest produce before the rest of the town touches them. I will stop by the bakery on my way home and pick up freshly baked bread that will turn into bread pudding when it inevitably becomes stale. On occasions, I do yoga or go on a walk before 6:00 am, but most of the time, I just enjoy my current read or even the wonders of my own thoughts. In the quiet of the mornings, I can sit with my contentment and be at peace.

Most people underestimate the value of alone time. Not me, though. My mornings are filled with the sweet smell of dew on the grass that only occurs at the start of a new day. By the time my Giselle wakes up, the moisture has evaporated, and she can't appreciate it. I know there is no study on it, but I believe the smell of morning dew can wake a person up faster than coffee (although it helps). My Giselle looks beautiful, laying there on the bed we made together. Staring at her is one of my favorite morning activities.

Once 8:00 am rolls around, my Giselle is up, and she makes the second batch the machine will produce for the day. It starts slow but soon, the house will be filled with voices, laughter, and the stressors of the workday. The peaceful state of the time I had alone will be gone, but I will stay content even as she starts complaining about having to deal with the girl she can't stand at the office.

She gives me a kiss on the cheek before running out the door to her typical Tuesday workday. She starts an hour earlier than every other day, and as always, she is running late. The mornings don't agree with her much.

"I love you!" I call out to her, but she scurries out the front door before my words can reach her. I hope she knows how much I love her and what I would do to keep her.

I head off to work while listening to my favorite artist, knowing that this day will be better than yesterday. It may still have its struggles, but the morning was beautiful, and the world was calm for at least a moment.

Working as a high school photography teacher may seem like an easy task, but the kids are brutal. I don't think I was as cruel to my teachers as they are to me. And when they continue to talk over what I am saying or ask questions I have answered multiple times, I try to keep my heart rate down and my face from flushing with the rage they are driving me to.

There is something sinister in the air in our town of Los Gatos, like the excessive money everyone has is poisoning the kindness of even the students who haven't made a dollar doing anything besides living for another year. I feel as though each of them would feel confident about getting out of an incident most people in the neighboring city, San Jose, would be put behind bars for. I wonder if I would be able to get away with such crimes.

In my class before the lunch period, I was at my peak of frustration. Even the strategies I've learned from a book I found called "How to Keep Your Cool" by James Romm weren't working as well as they usually do: I counted to ten, I went to my happy place (with my Giselle in the middle of the Santa Cruz mountains where no one can bother us, and we are happy). However, Apple Crosby, a sophomore, who was fairly decent in the class besides not wanting to be in the darkroom alone, continued flirting with one of the jocks, Brad or Chase; I always mixed them up while giving them a lecture on Ansel Adams. I warned her three times to pay attention or she would have to stay behind for lunch, each time with my heart pounding deeper into my chest, feeling as though they turned up the heater in the room, because I was beginning to sweat, and it was the middle of January.

When the bell rang, I called after her.

“Miss Crosby, you must stay behind, please,” I announced, and all the students ooohed in response. Her olive-toned face turned slightly pink as she realized I was serious about her punishment.

“I am really sorry about talking during your lecture Mr. Clarkson. I promise I won’t do it again,” her voice shaking with anticipation before asking, “Do I have to stay all lunch? I didn’t bring my own food, and I am starving.”

“Yes, you must stay until you have finished cleaning the darkroom,” I said while trying to hide the grin that wanted to spread across my face.

“A-alone?” Her eyes began to glaze over. “Can i-I keep the door open at lea-least?”

I led her over to the darkroom, “Unfortunately, you can’t today,” I slightly pushed her into the darkroom, her long dark hair almost catching in the door frame, and without turning the light on first, I locked the door. After only a couple of minutes, Apple began to cry out.

“Please, Mr.Clarkson, I have really bad claustrophobia. Puh-please let me out!”

This would help her understand the value of listening to her teachers. I knew her cries for help only made the message sink in deeper, and when I let her out just before the bell rang for the next period, she wiped her tears away and explained that she would never talk during my class again.

After the school day is up, I head back to the tiny townhouse that I share with my Giselle, who works as a receptionist at a dentist's office nearby. She can usually beat me home and begin our dinner, but she ran over an hour late this evening.

At first, I was just worried something had happened to her. She wasn’t answering my calls, and my heart sank into my stomach every time I heard her voice mail. I must have sent her at least a dozen of them and about a hundred texts. It was unlike my Giselle to stand me up like this.

Did she get into an accident?

No, I'm sure her boss just asked her to stay late at the office.

Fucking perve, he is almost twice her age and probably still wants to fuck her. I bet that's why she gets paid so much. She probably fucked her way to the pay raise where she only needs to work part-time to get by. This fucking bitch better not have fucking done anything with that bastard of a dentist! I swear to God!

The night fell over the world, and the temptation to release the fury that built up during my day was beginning to overcome me. Finally, at around 9:30, I heard the door key unlatch, and she walked in. She was fumbling with her purse, trying to put it down on the table next to the door, and the odor of tequila swayed its way to me in the dining room.

"Are you drunk? Where the fuck have you been?!" I was furious. She knew how I felt about her drinking and especially drinking without me.

"I told you two weeks ago that me and Rebekkah were going to Campbell for some \$2 margaritas and tacos. IT'S TACO TUESDAY!" She was way too joyous for the amount of hatred I felt.

Love and hate is such a fine line that, at times, it's extremely difficult to tell which you really feel for your partner.

I stormed toward her, and before I knew what I was doing, my hand reached back and slapped her right cheek. My Giselle fell to the floor. With a kick to her stomach as she landed on her side, she threw up the barbaric dinner she had with Becky. That whore.

"Who else was with you? Who was there?!" My interrogation was stalled by her trying to catch her breath, but I continued, "Tell me who was there, Giselle, or I swear to God.."

"No-no one was there. It was just Rebekkah and me." She took a deep breath before continuing, "I promise it was just us."

"So there was no one in the entire restaurant? That's what you're telling me? That you served yourself the margaritas and cooked the tacos?"

"I told you about this last week...." She whispered so softly I could barely hear her.

“I think I would have remembered you telling me about this outrageous plan of yours! I know Becky hates my fucking guts. What was she having you get free drinks from other guys, talking about how good life would be without me? She is a fucking whore, and you know it! How can you be friends with someone like her? I bet she went home with someone. GOD fucking DAMNIT, Giselle! What the fuck are you doing to me! I swear you make me go fucking crazy!” The words were falling out of my mouth, and my vision began to have a red tint to it. I grabbed her by her long brown hair and forced her face into the bile she created, just as an owner would do to their dog after they did something bad.

She was crying profusely, and I let go of her hair, taking a small chunk with me. Tears welled up my eyes. I found myself on what I thought was “our bed,” but who knows anymore now that she has developed a sensation for the slutty single life with *Becky*. I made myself into the fetal position to feel small enough to disappear.

I heard her get up from the floor, walk into the kitchen, and what I think sounded like beginning boiled water when I heard our guest bedroom shower start to run. She always goes to the guest bathroom after we have a tiff. I suppose she finds it cleaner since we hardly ever use it. My Giselle loves being clean. She probably takes about a shower a day, or a bath and a shower, depending on how she is feeling.

But I still cannot get it through my mind. How could she make me do that to her? Why would she think that was okay? Doesn't she understand that her being out alone with a slut like Becky will give other men the same idea about HER? My sweet Giselle, why would she do this to me?

In the midst of my tears, she came into the room and held me as I cried on her chest. My tears leave a wet spot where I hope our baby's milk will come from one day.

“I cleaned up the house, and made you some pasta, my love.” She said so sweetly, “you really should eat something.”

“I can’t eat now. Are you crazy?” I fired back, still too upset to look at her milky brown eyes.

“I know, baby. I am so sorry for upsetting you. I shouldn’t’ve gone. Or I should’ve invited you. But I love you so much. You know I would never do anything to hurt you, right?” Her voice was so soothing, like a lullaby putting me to sleep. If only we could be like this all the time. If only she didn’t have to go to work. I wish My Giselle would be just that, mine and mine alone. She is too good for this world.

“What kind of pasta?” I asked, looking up at her eyes that were reddened and puffy by tears but still just like chocolate milk and honey had a baby.

“Yes, baby, go eat, and we will go to sleep. Tomorrow morning, all will be right in the world again.” She said with a grin I can only describe as hopeful, and I thought to myself about how different the nights are from the mornings. How different I am in the night.

The following day, I awoke at 5:15 in the morning. The sun hasn’t quite decided to be out yet, and I lay in bed gazing at my Giselle. My sweet Giselle. Her olive skin has been highlighted with blue along her right side, from where my hand touched her without kindness. I promise I will never touch her without kindness again. She deserves the world, and I am determined to give it to her even if it’s the last thing I do. I will make her happy, she will be mine, and we will be happy.

After thirty minutes of staring at the delicate features of my Giselle, I peeled myself away from her warmth and made coffee. My thoughts on this day are consumed with the events that occurred only hours ago. I am very disappointed in my Giselle, but I will show her that I love her by taking the day off work, calling out for her, and taking her for a beach day. She can get anything she wants while we are out, and we will watch the sea lions on the boardwalk—her favorite beach activity.

My Giselle finally awoke at ten o’clock in a complete panic.

"IT'S TEN O'CLOCK! Why didn't you wake me up? I am going to be late for work!" She ran into the bathroom, beginning the shower so it would be warm for her when she entered. I walked up to her, turning the shower off, as I grabbed her waist and kissed her full lips.

"We are taking the day off, my sweet. I am taking you to the beach," She pulls away from my embrace as I tell her our plan.

"Oh, okay. That sounds nice."

"So lay back in bed, and I'll bring you coffee and something for breakfast," I said as I went back into the kitchen to pour her a cup of coffee with a touch of cream and some cinnamon, just how she likes it.

It is her or no one. Everyone else is worthless.

We arrived back at our house at around five o'clock. Giselle insisted on making dinner, and she made a feast of my favorite German meal and the only good thing my mother ever gave me: smoked pork chops with sauerkraut and mashed potatoes. *Oh, how I don't miss my time in Walldorf.* When it was all ready, we sat down at the table, and I gave a toast for our day.

"My sweet Giselle," I said. "You are everything to me, and all that I do, I do for you. I hope one day you will understand why I sometimes get a little out of control, but all I want you to know is that I love you, and I will never, in my entire life, let you go. You are mine, and I am yours." Our wine glasses clinked, and we sipped to our love.

My Giselle brought out a drunken chocolate cake for dessert and served me a healthy portion, claiming that she was too full from dinner to eat anything else. It was so rich and smooth, with the liquor coming through just enough to make the feeling of the wine a touch stronger. This version tasted a little different than expected, though there was a hint of almonds.

"Did you put almond extract in this, my love?" I asked.

“Something along those lines, but you know this recipe is a secret,” She replied with a slight smirk that was hard to notice. “Are you feeling okay? You look a little flushed.”

“Yes, I feel fine.” As I spoke these words, I noticed my heart felt like it was about to pop out of my chest. I took another bite of the amazing cake my sweet Giselle made for me and realized that there were two, now three of her. “I think you put too much alcohol in this, my love.”

“No, no. That is the secret ingredient,” she told me as she stood from the table, grabbing the bottle of wine I held at my side of the table so she wouldn’t drink too much. She took a drink straight out of the bottle and continued her statement. “This will be our last night together, Steven.”

“What are you talking about?” The feeling in my stomach was becoming too much to bear, and I threw up next to our dining table. I couldn’t tell if it was the food, the wine, or my Giselle telling me that we would no longer be together that caused me to lose my composure.

“I can’t do this anymore. We have been together for ten years, and I have never done anything to make you feel like you couldn’t trust me, but you have treated me like a poorly trained dog for far too long. I wish I could understand how you could do this to me when I told you about my past! Everything that he put me through, and I know you went through your own abuse! But it still just doesn’t make any- I can’t come up with more excuses for the injuries you caused, and I know that you will never let me leave without a fight that would most likely end my life.” Tears began falling down her face with what now seemed like happiness, but it was difficult to tell with her replicating herself more and more. She took another drink from the bottle of wine and went on, “Steven, you- you deserve this. I never deserved your cruelty, and I will never have to put up with it again.” She paced around and grabbed the chef’s knife from the kitchen counter. At this moment, I began to understand what was happening.

“You think you are going to kill me?” I said, now knowing the fragile state of My Giselle. “You can’t kill me, Giselle.” *She loves me too much, right?*

“I love you, I didn’t mean to hurt you last night, but I was just so upset. I promise it will never happen again.” I hoped she would put the knife down and call the ambulance at these words.

“You have said that every time! EVERY SINGLE GODDAMN TIME! And I will no longer be your hostage!”

My Giselle ran towards me, and the knife entered my chest.

I hear My Giselle call the ambulance and tell the beginning of the lie she told them.

“Help! My boyfriend! I don’t know what happened....” *At least she still called me hers because she will be mine forever.*