



Stories
from a
photograph

Lisa Lebedovich

paperbytes

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Stories from a photograph

IT WAS LATE in the evening, and the clouds had covered over the sky, so that the only shadows on the streets and buildings came from the bright street lamps. I was sitting on the steps of the Finlayson Pub in Bastion Square waiting to meet my sister. She had recently left her lover, and today was the day she was supposed to have the abortion. I looked across the square and saw a man in a grey suit sitting alone on a small wooden bench, reading the paper. Just then, a young woman dressed in black passed in front of him, and I watched him prop his elbow up on the arm of the bench. He rested his chin on the back of his hand and watched her stroll into the night.

LISA LEBEDOVICH



THE HOTEL romance was too much for her, I think. She didn't like the secrecy, the alias we had to assume in the hotel registration books, or the empty suitcase she always carried as a cover-up. But it was those very things, those small, seemingly insignificant things that I loved the most. That, and dirtying the stiff white sheets with our lovemaking. Tonight she called up to the room and said she wouldn't meet me any more, that she was going back to her husband, and almost immediately my head filled with blood and my stomach started aching. I don't think I loved her, just the idea of her, the taste and the touch of her. Her milky skin, tender, like meat feels in its smooth plastic seal. I'd miss her long limbs wrapping around me like a spider holding its prey, and her soft, velvet tongue on mine. I got dressed and took a walk to the square, where I stopped to sit for a while to calm my thoughts. Just then a beautiful, young woman passed by and her shadow brushed against my leg.

IT WAS COLD outside and I wished I had worn my long, blue dress, instead of my short skirt, but he had given me specific instructions. He said he would be waiting down at the wharf at midnight, also dressed in the same clothes he wore on the day, two years ago, when we first met. I managed to walk downtown quicker than expected, so I stopped at the coffee shop on Brighten for something warm and sweet. A man wearing wire-rimmed spectacles came in and sat across the table from me. I felt him staring at me, but every time I lifted up my head to check, he seemed completely engrossed with the day's paper. I paid my tab and left to meet my beloved, managing to take a wrong turn along the way, so that I had no other choice but to go across the square. And there I saw, for the second time that night, the man in the wire spectacles, sitting on an old wooden bench, contentedly reading the paper. He didn't take any notice of me as I walked by, and I thought it was a shame that we couldn't share a smile over the coincidence.



I REMEMBER THE first time my mother let me go out with you alone. It was our first date, and when you helped me into the passenger seat of your father's convertible, you closed the door on my new yellow dress. Mother was waving at us from in between the living room curtains. We watched a horror movie and you bought me popcorn and when the monster popped out of the closet, you put your arm around me and your cardigan scratched my cheek. Afterwards, we strolled through Bastion Square, which was empty except for a young woman and a man sitting alone on a bench. The night was still and warm, and the only noise we heard came from our shoes scuffling over the pavement. After a while, you stopped, and leaned your back up against a lamp post. You held the side of my face in your hand, your long, slender fingers crawling across my skin, and you asked me if I had ever made love in the back seat of a car.



IT WAS THE middle of the night, and I didn't feel like waking anyone else up, so I caught the bus downtown to walk by myself and take some pictures. I went down an alley behind some fancy restaurant, hoping to find something interesting to photograph, but all I saw was a bunch of trash on the ground — old newspapers, a few empty milk crates, and some leftover food spilled on the pavement. I walked a couple more blocks and ended up in Bastion Square. I had always made a point to avoid crossing through this area during the day, because of the hippies and transients playing music and begging for change, but in the evening the square had taken on a more somber atmosphere. It struck me as strangely romantic and foreign, like a picturesque film still taken from an old French movie.

I noticed a man dressed in a grey suit, sitting by himself on a

wooden bench reading the newspaper. It was the perfect photograph: he captured the feeling of the square, its loneliness and solitude. I got my camera ready. I had to prop it up on the edge of a water fountain for the long exposure. By the time everything was ready to go, there was a young woman approaching the scene, adding a brand-new element. I poised my finger over the shutter button and waited for her to pass into the frame. She walked in front of the bench, and the man sitting there lowered his paper and looked up at her. I tripped the shutter. It was a private moment, his moment, and it was something I had no part in.

THE COOL BREEZE was swimming around under my skirt and I had to hold my hands down at my sides to stop my underwear from showing. I met you at the restaurant and we had a few drinks and you grabbed my hand underneath the table. It was the first time you ever touched me.

We had been friends since high school but you always belonged to someone else. You told me stories about how badly Sharon kissed, how large Claire's breasts were and how Debbie smelled like your mother, and I sat and listened. At Charlie Gardner's big graduating party, you sat in the kitchen and drank beer with your friends and I stared at the nape of your neck, wishing I was close enough to count every hair that made up the two dark paths stretching down the back of your hairline.

After dinner you asked if we could go for a walk, just down the street, to talk like old times. You bought a paper and we sat down on a wooden bench. You told me that you loved me, that there had never been anyone else, and you kissed me, your soft lips pinching mine. I felt perverted — you were a brother to me. I got up and left you alone in Bastion Square and the next morning I saw you at your wedding.



IN THE AD, Patrick wrote that he was tall, dark and handsome; he liked reading, watching old movies; and he was ready to commit. It wasn't too far off from the truth. After two years of devastating loneliness, the short, skinny 35-year-old man from Victoria was more than willing to commit, even if it meant taking out a personal ad in the local paper.

It had been over a week since the ad was placed, and Patrick decided that if there wasn't a message today, he would have to try something else, maybe even the town brothel. He dialed the code to his message box and heard the quiet voice of a woman introduce herself as Julia, and then leave her telephone number. Patrick called her right away and the two of them spoke, for hours on end, about literature, the cinema, their childhoods, and their dreams. Patrick asked if she'd meet him at Bastion Square around eight o'clock next Friday night so he could buy her

dinner. Julia agreed, and he spent the next few days planning what he would say, and which outfit he would wear for their first meeting.

When Friday night came, Patrick went early to Bastion Square, found a seat on a nearby bench and read the paper while he waited. And every time a young woman walked by, he wondered if it was Julia, and if she would be able to recognize him as the tall, dark and handsome man he thought he was.



I HUNG UP the phone and told my wife that there was a problem at the office, that the boss was calling all the department heads in for a late night meeting. She kissed me good-bye, and I left to meet Nicola in Bastion Square. We usually met on Thursdays, so I figured something must be wrong.

Nicola was sitting on the bench outside the old beauty salon. I sat

down beside her and went to touch her, but she pulled away and tucked her hands in between her knees. It was cold outside and there were goose bumps all over her white skin. Then she got up and started pacing back and forth in front of me. “You’re not going to leave her, are you?” I said “no”, and she looked surprised. It was the first time I had ever told her the truth. Nicola kept pacing. I took out my paper and read the business section, looking up from time to time to see if she was still there.

About the Author



LISA LEBEDOVICH is a freelance writer and photographer from Vancouver, Canada. Lisa's short stories, photographs, articles and artwork have been published in a number of magazines, including *Photographer's Forum*, *Geist*, *Exclaim*, *Offbeat*, *Zygote*, *The White Wall Review*, *Chaos* and *The Inner Harbour Review*.

Lisa recently spent some time in London, England, working with *Jeremy Rendell Photography*.

In addition to photography and writing, Lisa is interested in the world of graphic design, where she intends to further her career incorporating art and technology.

