

THE COAT.

The girl with the fairytale hair in the slightly oversized, bulky coat had been working a lot recently and needed to have something else on her mind for the evening. She didn't feel at all like joining the crowd going to the new, stylish club, though. When the big group started to break up into smaller divisions, chatting and walking towards the subway, she just stood still and silent, a bit aside. She calmly smoked her cigarette, and watched them as they left. Her small hand holding the cigarette was sticking out of the sleeve, but the rest of her seemed to disappear inside the massive coat. Almost entirely hidden in it she appeared even smaller than usual and the coat itself somehow matched so well with the simplistic gray houses around, that no one even noticed that she wasn't coming along.

It took a while and lots of laughing, shouting and convincing the ones who were about to go home, but eventually also the last of the group disappeared around the corner. When all noises of conversation and clicking heels on the street had trailed off, she felt relieved. She slowly finished smoking her cigarette, then put it out and turned to the other direction, towards the small, ragged karaoke-bar a couple of blocks down the road.

From outside the bar looked rather uninviting. A bleached-out, red fluorescent sign spelled "KARAOKE" in a sharp and angled font, that must have been in fashion in the 80ies. The "r" was defective, and the sign was too bright, blinking at an irritating hectic pace that always made her think of experimental film art.

She had no intention of actually singing, but just wanted to go for one drink, or two. The bar was the perfect place to sit alone in a corner and watch. She enjoyed the kind of friendly drunkenness that made people sing with imperfect voices.

The bar made her feel safe. Since the guests were there for singing and listening, she was not so much running the risk of becoming a target for desperate drunk men. It had happened before, that they tried to hit on her and became threatening when they couldn't understand and accept that a young girl with fairytale hair would come to a bar just to have a drink; in peace and for herself.

Before going in she smoked another cigarette. The door opened and a wave of voices and music leaked out, washing up a slightly overweight, middle-aged couple. The woman resolutely adjusted the man's coat while he stood staggering. Concentrating on handling his drunkenness, he didn't seem to hear the woman's constantly nagging, yet affectionate voice. But when she was finished he reached for her arm and they stumbled away hand in hand.

The girl with the fairytale hair did not pay attention to that anymore; she was already entering.

The bar was surprisingly packed; she couldn't see any free chairs or tables. As she went straight to the counter to order, she peeled herself out of her large coat, folded it to be as small as possible, and kept the package in her arms.

She ordered a shot of vodka and a large glass of water and stayed at the corner of the counter, holding her coat and sipping every now and then from the vodka and the water. After a while, when she was just starting to wonder whether to go home or order another drink, she noticed that the man who started to sing was her old friend.

With a new drink she joined his table. Her friend's company was a man whose face she remembered from a magazine. He introduced himself as an artist, from abroad, and asked what she was doing. Her answer must have been not satisfactory, because right after he turned away from her and continued to stare down at his glass of wine or around the room, looking a bit uncomfortable, and bored. Maybe he considered himself too sophisticated for this kind of place. She wondered how he had ended up with her old friend, who was sometimes a bit uncouth and difficult to be around. She had always known how to take him and got along well, even if he was often moody and not the most sensitive one. But tonight, her old friend was at his best. He was joking around with everyone

and his punchlines were witty, full of subtle self-irony and entertaining the whole bar. He convinced her to stay by inviting her for the third drink, and she gladly accepted. She did not mind not speaking to the artist. She was not bored.

Shortly before closing hour someone must have requested something sad and slow to sing to, or maybe it was a way to set the general mood for going home. When the song started to play as the last dance, her old friend abruptly pulled her up from the chair, to the middle of the room, to dance.

They made the most romantic couple ever to be seen in the little bar, the tall sturdy man, already a bit lumbering in his movements due to the alcohol, and the small girl with the fairytale hair, a bit overrun by the situation, still stiffly concentrating to hold on to the voluminous folded coat in her arm. After a few insecure steps and without stopping to sway, her old friend decidedly pulled out the coat from underneath her arm. Without even turning his head he placed the bulky cloth in a gorgeous, ignorant gesture behind himself on the artist's lap. Then he tilted his head with a melancholic expression and closed his eyes as they were dancing on their small spot right in the middle of the crowd getting ready to leave, continuously bumping into people or stumbling over their feet.

On his chair sat the artist like a humanized coat rack, looking overcharged and very lost, and finally blending in quite well with his surrounding.