

# Bond and Atlantic

By Sunny Dawn Summers

**I**t happened on the corner of Bond and Atlantic.

It happened in my head, and in my proverbial heart, the core that I call my heart, the general mass of feeling below my chin and above my ankles. It happened there too.

It happened.

I was spinning, dancing with my darling friend Robert at the collapse of his 20s, just as the clock's hands clapped midnight. Robert's hand was on my back, pulling me along. I was laughing out loud.

"I had imagined, for some reason, we'd be dancing at your birthday."

By the time I sat, at the end of the table appeared Carl, Robert's best friend, a strange label for a man to give another man after having only recently met in the neighborhood in Brooklyn. Robert knew everyone, but no one knew him.

There sat Carl possibly, rather probably, sweet faced drunk. He wore a brown turtleneck and brown overcoat.

I don't remember him not in the coat, although I'm sure he removed it. I have the vague feeling that he was always prepared to leave, the momentary passer-by. His lips were raspberry pink and hair wild and curly. He later told me it was the perfect texture for cleaning paint off his hands as he rifled for strands to take the tack from his fingers.

Carl was looking at me when I first looked at him. For a split second I wondered how long he'd been staring at me. Was he there when Robert and I were dancing? Was he there to see Robert slip on my green coat and pose for the crowd?

As I met Carl's gaze we must've been introduced.

Someone maybe said his name. I can't recall.

Immediately one of us must've asked the other to remove ourselves from the crowd to the curb for a cigarette. The curb promised to hide us from being observed in our desire... or my desire... or whatever it was. I was and we were drawn to the curb.

"I don't know what it is about you, or why, but I feel overwhelmingly drawn to you. I am so drawn to you. So enamored. I don't know you at all, but I just can't help myself."

He stared at me, taking it in, drawing me in along with his hand rolled cigarette, into his body, down, in, and back out, the smoke dissipating into the freezing air. You couldn't see his smoke end and his breath begin. He didn't speak.

"I think I'm in love with you."

Surprised at the words coming to my lips, but not disagreeing enough with them to limit their reach into the universe, out they came, arriving warmly, lap dogging their way into the night. I believed what I said.

And now, going back to those words, they *must've* been true.

I've often wondered why, in a moment, for a time, something can be true. We search for a description for our emotions. Labeling them satisfies some analytical need to know what it is. And then it changes. But while the words are hanging there in the air, they're true (even if they aren't). True can change. True is not always truth.

"I feel like I am in love with you."

We spun around each other. I faced the street corner, the cross streets, the building, the curb. I was moving in circles, trying to walk around my words, side stepping them. If I rediscovered the feeling at each step, maybe I could grow to understand it more? Maybe it would be true longer? Moving in the space, around the space, my irrational development continued. I was occupying a tiny human boat in a sea of concrete. I was worth touching, and I let the sidewalk fill my card. I was moving to stay upright, moving to stay aware, moving to be sure I was engaging more than just my heart. I felt the world moving too, the wine and the wind and the everything, pulling me just as Robert's hand had been on my back

moments before, each time I moved to escape or embrace my discovery, even invention, of the man in front of me. I did not know him at all. Not at all.

I must fast forward to the next day and night, mostly because after my brief confessional, there sits blur. I remembered the feeling but not the labels, and now, hard pressed can't produce words accurate enough not to incur injustice. I will mention and only quickly that I have the strong memory of Carl's mouth in my mouth. A kiss, I suppose, but the memory feels more like a surprise touch, or the well caught falling object, the heroic display of finely tuned reflexes.

Yes, I do recall now, he stepped into my space, closed in on me. I pushed hard into the bricks framing the windows. I leaned not for support but to hide from Robert inside. Robert was celebrating his birthday with the anticipation of me naked in his bed at the end of the night, for the whole weekend. This was our chance, our attempt at trying again what didn't work 7 years ago. I knew if he saw me he'd break, even if just a bit.

Carl took one step to reach me... to reach into me. I pushed him back with my tongue, scared of dampening the celebration on the warm side of the windows. A kiss is a sharing of sorts. But that's not what it was. It was a push, then a pull. Three times, maybe. His mouth seemed sticky. I don't know why. I don't remember how he tasted. I couldn't relax. He stepped forward, and in fear, I pushed back. I was everyone's marionette, even my own.

The night continued down the block, a crowd of people ahead of us. We came to the next corner and lingered outside waiting for the boys to return with beer. My arm was strung through his, and I tugged to get his attention.

We stopped.

"This is it, Carl. This is where it's happening. It's happening on the corner of Bond and Atlantic."

I'm tired of the details of that night in my head, exhausted with travel and lack of sleep and reddened with excess wine. Two things are worth recalling.

One. I later sat in a stranger's modern kitchen for a long while, alone. I could hear everyone in the near room, separate conversations, the knocking of the cue ball into its cousins. I stared at the shiny blue cabinets and wondered if they ever cooked in there. Lauren Hill played loudly over the speakers. I had no interest in joining the group. I just sat. I have no idea how much time passed.

Two. When it was closer to sunrise than midnight, I convinced Robert to leave. Carl was sharing a seat with me, I was holding his hand. He said sweetly and innocently to anyone, to Robert, but not to me: "Where is she staying? She can come stay at my place. It is very warm."

The sun rose and made my eyes water. Robert slept heavily next to me in his underwear. I could feel his frustration, remembering him pushing against me, insisting. I couldn't. I didn't. When he finally woke, I turned the tone to humor, mocking my drunkenness, excusing my disinterest.

"I told Carl that I was in love with him last night."

The evening came quickly, and the chilly backroom of a small, empty restaurant became our set. By the time Carl arrived I had convinced myself that my drunkenness justified my irrational behavior and subsequent confessions of love. But then I saw his face.

Skip waitress. Skip drinks. Carl switches seats and becomes my corner. It's dark and I feel beautiful. Skip dinner.

The two of us have hidden at the end of the chairless bar.

I can't break eye contact.

"I can see into you."

We spoke quietly about nothing, eating cigarettes and ice cream and poached pears for dessert. His back was to the crowd. I could sense everyone watching us but didn't take a moment to look.

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