

All You Need Is Love

It was the Summer of Love. Over one-hundred-thousand flower children arrived in San Francisco hungry for a life free from conventions. I came for love, freedom, drugs, and music. “All you need is love,” the Beatles sang—and I gave up everything to be a part of this—the love revolution. “San Francisco (Be Sure to Wear Flowers in Your Hair)” played on my radio. And the Doors seduced me with “Light My Fire.”

But on the shadowy edge of the lovefest, predators hunted for prey. They crept along the fringe like hungry lions. Honing in on their targets, they lured them away.

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July 28, 1967

The Avalon Ballroom was packed that Friday night. A freshman at Berkeley this upcoming fall, this was my first college event. When my friends and I arrived, Big Brother and the Holding Company rocked the stage. Lights swirled and music pounded. The lead singer, Janis Joplin, blew my mind. She sang “Piece of My Heart,” and I drifted away.

A tap on my shoulder was the only reason I took my eyes off Janis. A handsome, clean-cut guy in a light-weight, V-neck sweater gave me a wink, took a hit off a joint, and offered me a toke. He was close to six feet with a medium build. His short dark hair contrasted with the roomful of long-haired hippies, but I knew he was cool 'cause he was getting high.

Just as the encore ended, the guy shot me a flirtatious look. “I love your aura,” he said. “Purples and blues.”

I passed the joint to Ocean

“You don’t look like the kind of guy who sees auras.” I laughed.

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“I know, I look straight—but I’m a hippie at heart. I’m just finishing pre-law, and professors expect us to wear sweaters and ties.”

People milled around us as they moved from the stage.

“That’s a bummer,” I said.

“You want to be a lawyer?” my friend Ocean cooed.

“Yeah, I have an offer from a law firm.” The guy paused, looked my friends and me, and then continued. “Dewey, Cheatum, and Howel.”

“Do we cheat ’em and how,” Leslie exclaimed with a cutesy smile. “That’s the best lawyer joke I’ve heard.”

“That’s too funny,” Kristen added with a sexy smile.

We giggled like school girls. I could feel his good vibes—apparently, we all could.

“So what are you girls up to next?”

“Heading home,” I replied, peering down at my old Wranglers. He looked so sophisticated; I was dressed in flower-patched jeans and a tie-dyed T-shirt. But it didn’t seem to matter to him. He looked at me like I was a cover girl on *Life* magazine.

He casually took my hand and gazed at my palm. “I see you meeting a handsome stranger. And your love line says—”

“That’s ok.” I stopped him, not wanting to hear more. I’d had a gloomy tarot reading recently, and it still bummed me out.

“I’m Ted.” He gave a small bow. “You live around here?”

“We live at Morningstar.” Teri twisted her braid and fluttered her lashes.

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Ted looked directly at me. “Can I give you a lift?” His tropical blue eyes hinted sitting on a beach drinking a Tequila sunrise, and his smile evoked visions of warm, breezy days.

“I’d take you all, but I’m in a Volkswagen Bug.”

“You live at Morningstar?” I asked, surprised.

“No, but I’m happy to give you a ride home.”

“You live up that way?” Teri asked.

“No, I live south of here, Stanford.”

“Morningstar is quite a drive just to take someone home,” I said.

Teed shrugged. “Where is it?”

“It’s north, in the hills between Sebastopol and Graton.” I glanced at the floor and then looked playfully back to Ted. “I thought *everyone* knew where Morningstar was.”

“Geez, I guess I *am* a square. I’ve never even heard of the place.”

“You’ve *never* heard of Morningstar? It’s a commune—where the beautiful people live.”

“You’ve got to be beautiful to live—?”

“Nah.” I giggled. “Hippies, dude. I’ll teach you the lingo.” God, this guy was cute but had a lot to learn about the hippie life.

“I’ve got a couple of tricks to teach you too.” Again, with the wink. “And sure, I’ll take you there. I love to drive.”

My friends gave me a nod. And why not? He was good-looking and charming. Intelligent. Sweet. I could already imagine my parents’ faces when Ted comes to meet them. Their hippie daughter brings home a handsome, bright, soon-to-be attorney. What a great ending to their story of my college days.

“Are you sure? We won’t get there till after midnight, and it’s supposed to storm again.”

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“No sweat.” He looked me straight in the eye.

“Okay—I’m going with Ted,” I said to my friends.

They giggled again. “See you there,” Teri replied. They each took a hit off Ted’s joint and got lost in the crowd.

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As Ted and I walked down Sutter, he kept the conversation going. “And you are . . . ?”

“Wow. I never even told you my name. Duh.” We passed Fern Street and turned onto Bush. “My friends call me Star.”

“Lovely. Like you.”

I blushed. “Groovy.”

“I’m over there.” Ted grabbed my hand, and we crossed Bush.

“You actually found street parking. Right on.”

“The joys of owning a Bug.” Ted walked over to the passenger side and clicked the door. At first, I hesitated. NOW was clear about self-empowerment—opening my own door would prove that point. But Ted seemed so sincere and respectful; I kept my mouth shut and enjoyed the attention.

He closed my door and got in on the driver’s side.

“What’s with the door?” I pointed to the missing handle next to me.

“Damn car’s falling apart. I’ve had that handle repaired twice already.” Ted started the engine. “So, 101, right?”

“Toward Santa Rosa.” I glanced out the window as we drove down Bush.

“I’m looking forward to checking out Morningstar.” He lit another joint and passed it.

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I took a hit and considered the possibilities. I told him it was cool to stay the night or as long as he wanted to. Morningstar was outta sight. Anyone could live on the ranch. No rent. We grew food for ourselves in the garden. The free store in the Haight got the extras.

He was a psychology major finishing his bachelor degree with a class in Chinese at Stanford. “I’m here for the summer,” he said. “*Ni hǎo. Wǒ zài zhōng wénxué hànǚ.*”

“Meaning?”

“Hello. I take Chinese at the school.” He laughed. “I’m going to the University of Utah for law school in the fall.

We drove over the Golden Gate Bridge. The moon was full, I remember that. And the stars twinkled like carnival lights—I remember that too.

Ted chatted and told jokes all the way to Santa Rosa. We shared another joint, and I relaxed.

“Take this exit.”

He got off 101 but turned onto a dark, side road.

“Why are we stopping?”

“You’ll see—one of my tricks.” His voice was no longer fun and flirty. It was flat. Cold. He slowed to a stop.

Something was off; I felt it in my gut. I thought back to the tarot reading. The Knight of Swords reversed? Did that image represent a man? *Ted*? An empty chill crept down my spine. My heartbeat thundered in my ears. “I want to get out of the car,” I said, motioning to the missing handle. “Catch a breath of air.” *And run.*

I tried to be nonchalant, but my hands shook. *I’ll fucking climb out.* I attempted to roll down the window.

But.

He grabbed my arm, clicked a handcuff around my wrist, and locked it around the steering wheel. I fought him until he cracked me over the head. Things went black.

When I came to, I was face up on the cold ground. Splotches of wild plants surrounded me, and trees stood guard like malicious conspirators. The moon was shattered by the crisscross of branches and leaves above. A rushing river raged somewhere behind me. My head felt like I'd been hit with an iron.

Worst of all—he was on top of me.

He leaned in. The thought of his lips on mine repulsed me. He was no longer the boy-next-door, charismatic Ted. His eyes burned with devastating intensity. Darker than hate. Darker than evil. But instead of a kiss, he whispered in my ear, "I'm going to kill you."

Terror coiled inside me. The world seemed to close around Ted, me, and the broken moon. I screamed.

He covered my mouth and pinched my nose. The lack of oxygen horrified me. I struggled and kicked. Tore at him with my nails. *This is it*, my mind roared. I thought of my parents. My sister. My friends. Coco, my little terrier—and then black.

He was slapping my face, bringing me to consciousness. When I opened my eyes, he started slugging me in the stomach.

"Please. Please stop." I cried. "Don't hit me anymore." I was losing my breath. Almost vomiting. It felt as if ribs broke with each punch.

Straddling my stomach and chest, he mashed air out of me.

"Get off, I can't breathe."

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“You have to relax.” His words slithered like a snake. “If you stop struggling, I’ll let you breathe.”

I held still, and he scooted back. He wasn’t crushing me as much. But he put his hand over my nose and mouth to cut off my air. Again, the struggle. Again, the horror of a cruel death. I passed out.

When I came to, he was slapping my face. He did this repeatedly. Choke. Slap. Revive. Choke. Slap. Revive. His eyes were bleak and hollow—as if they were the entrance to a place where God didn’t exist.

“How would you prefer to be strangled? Like this?” He covered my mouth and pinched my nose again. “Or is it better for you like this?” His hands clamped my throat.

The realization of my impending death shrieked in my mind. I was tired of going unconscious and then being slapped awake only to see this monster glaring into my eyes. I blinked, tears rolled down my cheeks, and the sudden gift of quiet acceptance flowed through me like an ocean tide. In and out. A rhythm as gentle as a sleepy sea. I became peaceful. Death meant escape. From him. *From this.*

Back to unconsciousness. He knew how far to go when he choked me and did it until I tasted death. It was a sick game. Like he enjoyed watching me die. The torture of coming to was brutal.

He slapped me from blackness to alert.

“Good girl. Good girl, don’t die on me yet ’cause you’ll miss the best part.” He grabbed me by my ankles and dragged me to the end of the table, pulled down my pants, and jammed into me. Just as he finished, he leaned toward me, put his hands around my neck and choked me. I didn’t struggle. I simply let go.

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His body gave off a terrible odor. Like perspiration, but uglier. Once again, I could barely breathe. Dark, then awake. I was on the ground now, surprised that I was still alive. A menacing cloud had drifted across the moon, but I could make out his silhouette maybe thirty feet away. He was halfway in his car and fiddling with something in the back.

It's not as though I'd planned an escape—but as adrenalin pumped electricity through my veins, I jumped up and ran. I didn't get far because my pants were in a wad around my ankles. I tripped after a couple steps. Was it luck—God's intervention—that I rolled like a log down a sharp embankment and into a fast-flowing river? In moments, the cold arms of the water swept me away from Ted.

How long was I somersaulting in the restless river--legs tangled in my jeans? I sucked air each time my head broke water. My eyes stayed shut. The water tasted dirty. It seemed like forever until *thud*—I crashed against the bank. Using broken branches, I dragged myself out of the water. The cold air stung like a hive of angry bees.

Time was precious. *He could come through the trees any second.* My entire body trembled, and the drenched, twisted jeans fought me. Fuck. Fuck. I finally got them up. I wanted to scream. Find the road. Flag someone down. But I was smarter than that. My best chance was to follow the river until I ran into people who could rescue me.

I stumbled along the riverbank. A branch broke somewhere behind, and I froze. Oh God, *it's him.* Then silence. Death had choked me with its bony fingers. Released me. Had come at me again. Was it following me? Was it waiting ahead?

I kept moving. Colder—my body ached. I felt like lying on the ground and surrendering to sleep. Instead, I pushed on.

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A light flickered in the distance. *Ted with a flashlight hunting me down?* Had he circled ahead? I was a dizzy butterfly, wings soaked in dread. Should I turn back? Was he following me? I climbed higher, hoping a road was somewhere above.

Car lights appeared. Came toward me like the yellowed eyes of a rabid beast. *Oh God, a VW.* I ran, tripped, slid across gravel. My hands burned from the road, my face felt torn. The car pulled beside me.

“Are you okay?”

A woman’s voice. *Thank God!*

“No,” I gasped and then screamed like a trapped rabbit.

She jumped out of her car. Helped me up from the ground. Walked me to the car and guided me into the passenger’s seat.

“We’ve got to go. He could show up any minute.” Panic spilled from me.

She hurried around the car, climbed in, and pulled away.

“What’s happened? Is someone after you?”

Behind us, car lights came into view.

“Hurry. *Please.* Hurry.”

She sped up.

“Do you need to go to the hospital?”

“Are we far from Morningstar Ranch?” I muttered. I couldn’t stop shivering.

“It’s about an hour south; I’m happy to take you there. I’m going to Sebastopol.” I nodded. Peered in the rearview mirror.

The car lights were gone.

“Oh my God,” I moaned.

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“Jesus, what happened to you?”

I shook my head. There were no words . . .

“You’re sopping wet. I’ve got sweats in the back. We’ll stop at a gas station, get some coffee, and you can change.”

“Okay.”

“I’m Marie.” She clicked on the radio. As we raced down the dark, lonely road, “All You Need is Love,” played, and I broke into sobs.

“It’s okay. I’ve got you now. You’re safe,” Maria said, her voice filled with kindness.

Up ahead, the sun kissed the cranberry sky as the moon sunk into the past.

Marie smiled, put her hand on mine, and we headed into the light.