

## **Blood in the Afternoon**

*(Really bad Hemingway)*

A man should know his limits. A man should drink them. It was a soft knowing night. This kind of night they know at Harry's.

My name is John. I once was a boxer, or was I in the Boxer Rebellion. It does not matter. I am a fighter.

I watched her enter the bar, heavy with smoke. She had tried to quit, but the aroma of Turkish lingered in her nostrils and made her wretch. The memory of the stench of the open air market in Istanbul would always be with her. I noticed her after she sat near the long dark mahogany bar.

"Mary." I said.

"Yes."

"Will you sit at my table?"

"I need to stay here."

"Please, I need your company tonight."

"I am not much company, but I will."

Company. I knew the company of men, real men. This was the company of a woman. This too I knew, and it was different.

"How is your battle with the cigarette going?" I asked.

"How is that nasty wound from the bull."

She knew how to hurt. The bull knew how to hurt more and they still run them in the streets, but I knew they would not run them in Harry's. Not tonight.

"They were not real horns, Mary." I said.

"What were they, then?"

"They were bananas. Yes, they were bananas."

"Those bananas split you wide open well enough."

She had known me in a most intimate way. She knew me as no one else would, but she stabbed me with those words. The blood of my soul warmed the floor that night and her words rushed into my wound to sting like salt.

"I'm a bit angry." She said "Please don't sulk."

"What is bothering you?"

She reached into her coat pocket. I knew her. I knew her better than any man. She was more interesting than any man but she was also more trouble.

Late night at Harry's is a peaceful time. A dozen or so lovers and writers sipping real whiskey with a rum chaser. The air is soft, like a mother alpaca's belly before birth. It is soft with a hint of something violent just beneath the surface. The waiter told us of the war and the crowd laughed. The waiter spoke of the battles he fought and he could not see death about to visit. Mary lit up. The late night crowd at Harry's saw fire. Mary got burned.

Mary was a good woman. She fought well, but in life there are no real winners. She never gave up cigarettes, and Harry's still won't let her near the non-smoking section.