

Gina's Night Out
A Leftover Soup Story by Jim

It was a warm and slow afternoon at Skyline Mall. John and his elderly but spry coworker Thelma sat at their respective desks in the security office. John sipped his coffee as Thelma filled out paperwork.

"Got any plans for the weekend Brown?" Thelma asked without looking up from her paperwork.

"Actually I do! I'm going to see a musical with a very special gal!" John announced proudly. Thelma stifled a laugh. "I had no idea kids still went to musicals these days." John grinned and leaned back in his chair.

"Hehe, well I've always loved musicals since I watched Singin' In The Rain and 1776. This one is a little more modern but I'd like to think that-

"Your date will love it even though taking her to a musical is as cheesy as seven kinds of cheeses?" Max chimed in, she was quite suddenly peering down at John, using the arms of his chair as leverage to hold her up a bit.

"Max!" John gasped in surprise as he was attacked by a kiss. He spun his chair around as she hopped off. He expected her everyday cheeky, yet mischievous grin. However was met with one that was a little unsure.

"...Max?" John asked, a bit concerned. "Everything alright?" Max fidgeted a little bit before walking up to him and hopping onto his lap with her arms around his neck.

"Loverbooy..." She began in an almost pleading tone. "I'm going to have to back out of our plans for this weekend..."

John tilted his head curiously at her, wrapping his own arms around her.

"Well that's a bummer. Is everything alright?"

"Oh yea, something came up and I've got to be elsewhere for the weekend. I promise to make it up to you Loverboy." Max reassured.

"We all will!" Exclaimed a voice. Before John could look up, he and Max were pounced on by Simon.

"Wha? 'We'?" John asked as he felt his hair get ruffled, he looked up to see a smiling Wallace.

"Yup, we offered to be there for Max since she doesn't do too well when it comes to her family." Wallace explained.

"Yea, even though she's having us stay at a motel.." Simon teased with a grin.

"Oh you're one to talk mister 'I'll tell my parents eventually'" Wallace responded as he folded his arms. Simon stuck his tongue out at him in rebuttal.

"Well that's awfully nice of you guys! But you all came down here just to tell me that? I mean, you might confuse poor ol' Thelma!"

Everyone's attention went to the older woman who seemed quite unfazed as she continued with her paperwork.

"Eh, nothing I haven't seen in the 70's." She replied flatly. Max, Simon and Wallace laughed as did John, albeit a little red and bashful about it.

"Well, to be honest, I need a big favor. A HUGE favor." Max began to explain. John arched an eyebrow.

"Yeeea?"

"...I was wondering if by any chance....if you would be so kind...to maybe....just maybe..." Max rambled a bit.

"Maaaax..." John reached over and poked her on the tip of her nose.

"Would you mind taking Gina out on a date..?" She hesitantly asked

There was a moment of silence before John spoke.

"Okay, how did **this** happen??"

"Well, I felt awful about cancelling our girls night out! I was going to take her out since she's been feeling real down in the dumps lately..."

"Max, sweetheart, hun... who's Gina?" John asked, more confused than anything.

"Aw come on you know Gina! You met her once! Remember that one get together we had here in the food court? The tall good looking' gal with the brown hair?" Max tried to demonstrate Gina's height with one of her hands while still in John's lap. John blinked for a moment before looking back at Max.

"Okay, first off that get together didn't really involve me! I was on duty and you dragged me over to meet everyone and then I had to get back to work! Secondly....you mean that woman with the cross pendant?" John asked as Max smiled wide.

"Yea! See? You remember!" Max replied.

"We barely talked! In fact I don't think we said much after introductions!" John protested as Max quickly placed her index finger to his lips.

"That's half the fun Loverboy!" She insisted. John gently pushed her finger away, giving her a stern look.

"...Did you tell her about us?"

There was yet another moment of silence, though this one was a bit longer than the last.

"Maaaax..." Wallace replied in a warning tone. Max immediately buried her face against John's neck.

"Crap! I forgot!!" Max muffled out as John, Simon and Wallace let out a collective sigh.

"How do you forget something like that?? When I date someone, I'd feel a heck of a lot better if they weren't banging someone else! Wait... isn't she super religious or something?" John asked, suddenly very worried.

"No! Well I mean she's Christian, yes but she's not gonna shove her Christianity down your throat!" Max replied, quickly trying to do damage control.

“And she’d be okay with me not being religious? ‘Cause I’m really not...” John asked. The third pause in silence was a familiar one but just as distressing. Especially with Max crying out ‘FUCK!’ Before re-burying her head into John’s neck.

“Oh this **can’t** be good...” John muttered to himself. “Does she have a problem with non-Christian folk?”

“No! No way, not Gina!” Max exclaimed before wincing slightly. “She would....just rather date someone who was also Christian. She mentioned something about wanting to be on the same eternal destination.”

“So the date would be sorta misleading in that aspect, huh? I don’t share her religious beliefs, I’m pretty sure not being a monogamuggle is gonna be an issue... when did this seem like a good idea exactly?” John asked.

“Auuugh! I felt so awful about having to break off our evening out together... and her face lit up so much when I mentioned introducing her to a guy. Why did I have to use the ‘D’ word!?”

“I’m sure you have plenty of friends, how come you went with someone you’re currently seeing? Why not a past associate?” John asked, ruffling up Max’s hair to try to calm her down.

“It was all so quick and spur of the moment. I had to think on my feet! The offer to introduce someone just kind of came out. Then I had literally seconds to come up with a clean, neat, proper gentleman who would treat her right and wouldn’t take advantage of her! Sure I trust everyone who I’m with...but you just sort of came to mind first..!” She muffled out, her face still buried in John’s neck. John blushed slightly.

“Gosh ...well....thank you..!” John replied bashfully.

Simon opened his mouth to say something but immediately stopped upon seeing Wallace’s shaking head.

“That still leaves us with figuring out what to do now” John asked himself as he rubbed his temples.

“The only thing you **ought** to do.” The voice of Thelma announced as she straightened her papers and got up from her chair, stretching a bit.

“Tell her before this whole date starts. The last thing she needs is to learn about this after gussying up for her big night.” Thelma walked over to John, her hands on her hips, looking him square in the eye.

“Be honest with her, she deserves to know the truth, but be gentle. Heaven knows it’s probably not the first time she’s gone through something like this. And above all, be a gentleman!” Thelma instructed, wagging her finger menacingly at John before reaching over to his cheek pinching it.

“Aw knowing you, I don’t think any of us have to worry about that last one. Tell me how it went on Monday!”

And with that, Thelma turned around and walked away. Leaving a rather stunned group of friends.

John looked at the piece of paper Max had given him, it had Gina's address scribbled on it. He drove slowly, looking out for the house in question. Max tried to convince him that it would probably be easier to simply inform her over the phone, but John didn't think this was something to simply throw away in a simple phone call. He spotted Gina's house and parked his beat up 1987 Volkswagen Beetle out front. He made his way to the front door, though he found himself staring at it for a moment. He took a deep breath then knocked a few times. After a moment the door opened revealing Gina's mother. "H-hi! You must be Gina's mom! I'm John, I was hoping to speak with your daughter?" John introduced himself, smiling kindly. Gina's mother looked him up and down before looking back and calling for her daughter.

"Gina, there's a nice looking man out here looking for you! Is he the one that's finally going to give me grandchildren?" She shouted non too subtly. Gina rushed up to the front door, shooing her mother away.

"Ugh, I'm sorry about my mother. Uhm...can I help you?" Gina asked, trying not to feel so embarrassed.

"Well uhm...yea actually. We haven't really met yet...I'm John Brown. The person Max mentioned yesterday?" John asked, hoping to jar her memory.

"Ah! Yes, the security guard Max told me so much about! I uhm... I didn't get the date wrong did I? I thought it was for Saturday night.." Gina looked a bit concerned and confused. John rubbed the back of his neck.

"Listen... Max neglected to tell you a few things about me. Things that you should know before this date.."

"...What do you mean?" Gina was obviously taken back by this. There was no turning back now.

"I...well I'm not religious, not in the slightest. I mean my folks are Christian and I respect the religion itself and all of the people who follow it but...I never found myself on that path. I'm...also in a bit of a non-too serious, non-too monogamous relationship. I figured it was only right that you know that first before any sort of dating could commence."

Throughout his entire dialogue, John's gaze slowly lowered until it was to the ground. He waited for a moment before looking back up to Gina who kept the same expression she had before the explanation began. A worried yet stoic expression.

"It's with..." Gina began, not really wanting to finish her sentence.

"...Max...that's right.." John finished for her. With that there was a slam of the door. John scrambled up to it, knocking on it again, trying to talk to her through the door.

"Gina? Gina! I'm so sorry about all of this! It was a breakdown of communication believe me! Max only meant well, you've known her longer than I have, you oughtta know that! She was just really worried about you she uh...told me about your last misunderstanding. Believe me, I know the feeling, that's why I wanted to come here and

be upfront with you now! Aw come on Gina...open the door! Please?" John was met with silence. He let out a long sigh before walking away from the front door, taking a seat on the front steps of the house. Was speaking to her in person really the best idea? John figured he'd be a good buffer since the misunderstanding *did* start with Max. Not to mention he did want to help the poor girl. Nevertheless he felt pretty awful about the whole situation. He pulled out his cell phone, staring at it, debating on who to call and what to do next.

"...You went through the same thing..?" John turned around to see Gina peeking out of her front door, hiding behind it. John smiled slightly and nodded

"Yea...a couple of years back. When I was still trying to get into the police academy. I can...tell you about it if you want..?" John offered. Gina took a moment before slowly stepping out to the front porch, closing the door behind her and leaned against it.

"It was a good couple of years ago. I was in love with a girl named Jessica Lockhart. She was the lead guitarist and vocalist to a misfit band known as Mercy's Fist."

"Mercy's Fist?" Gina asked.

"Yea, I never got it either. Anywho, I was at her beckoned call. Day, night, rain or shine. I helped her with rent and gigs...she was...she meant everything to me. My star on stage, my musical muse.." John breathed put the last part of his sentence. He took off his glasses and watched the passing cars out on the street. "One day, I decided to surprise her with tickets to a concert. I figured I'd pop into the studio she rented for practice and spring the gift there. Next thing I know, I walk in on her 'tuning the bass player's guitar' while the drummer watched."

"Ohhhh.." Gina's face scrunched a bit at the thought. John let out a soft chuckle and nodded.

"My sentiments exactly. You know, she had the audacity to ask me to come back later when they were done?" John shook his head and put his glasses back on.

"What did you do?" Gina asked, sitting down and hugging her knees as she continued to lean against the front door.

"The only thing I **could** do before completely coming apart emotionally. I walked over to one of the amps, put down one ticket, took the other one with me, went to the box office and changed seats."

"You still went to the concert?" Gina asked, a little confused.

" You bet your tush I did! Not everyday you get a chance to see the Doobie Brothers play live!" John explained. He turned himself around completely to face Gina, now that he had her full attention.

"I know that miscommunication can seriously lead to a bad experience. For me, it happened due to being lied to by a cheating, conniving, heartless harpy whom apparently used me with little consideration to my feelings. She dated me never really intending to be faithful, she wanted to just use me since I was convenient at the time.

You on the other hand, have friends that care about you deeply! Max may not always have the best ideas, but she means well. And I'm sure if she was thinking straight, she would have mentioned my current situation." John said, hoping to get a response. Gina looked down at the floor for a moment before looking back up to him, nodding quietly.

"Tell ya what." John stood up and dusted himself off. He walked over to Gina, extending a hand to help her up.

"You consider not being angry at Max and I'll take you somewhere fun. Not as a date but just as a fun hang out. Get your mind off of things. What do ya say?" Gina looked at his hand before looking back up at him. John didn't budge, keeping his hand extended until she was ready. Gina let out a soft sigh and took his hand, standing up.

"Nowhere weird, okay?" Gina requested with a half smile.

"M'lady, you'll find that my tastes are quite tame!" John replied with a smile.

Palisades Park was a very low key tourist trap/carnival located at one end of the town. It was right next to Fisherman's Wharf so the sea air and its bounty were sometimes all you could smell. Aquatic odors aside, it still managed to draw enough of a crowd to stay in business. It was early Saturday afternoon. John and Gina approached the entrance to the park.

"Palisades Park?" Gina asked.

"I didn't even know a place like this existed."

"It's one of the neatest places I've found while exploring the town. Reminds me of a place from my childhood... come on!" John waved for Gina to follow him into the entrance. Stepping into the park was like stepping into a different time. Everything seemed as though it were from a different era. The stands, the various food carts sprinkled liberally throughout the park, the general atmosphere. John took Gina to as many places as he could. They knocked over milk bottles, threw darts to pop balloons, shot water guns to fill up and pop even more balloons, rode bumper cars, they took that park for everything it had to offer. The sun began to set as the two walked away from a hot dog vendor each with one of their own. Gina looked at her watch.

"Oh wow, it's getting late. We'd better better start heading back.."

"Wait!" John exclaimed, motioning to the ferris wheel at the end of the park, it was overlooking the ocean.

"Mind if we ride the ol' ferris wheel before we go?" John asked with almost pleading eyes. Gina looked at the ferris wheel and then back to John before shrugging.

"Uhm... okay?"

Since it was near the end of the day, it was relatively easy to get a passenger car. As the wheel began to turn, they began to rise up higher. Gina smiled as she looked around, taking in the sights.

“Wow, I had no idea our town was so beautiful. Did you always know about this place John?John?” Gina looked over at John whom looked a little pale, clutching at his seat.

“John! Are you alright?” She asked, suddenly concerned.

“I....might....be terribly afraid of heights..” John breathed out, trying to calm himself down. Gina became wide-eyed at this revelation.

“Why on Earth would you take me on a ferris wheel if you’re afraid of heights!?” She asked, looking around, unsure of what to do. John smiled warily.

“I wanted to...because this is the best way to illustrate a point I wanna make...”

“A point?” Just as Gina asked that, the ferris wheel stopped with them at the very top. John took a deep breathe, motioning out towards the ocean.

“Ya see that?” John asked, his teeth were slightly clenched

“It’s the ocean, what of it?” Gina asked.

“The ocean makes up about 71% of our entire planet, ya know. That’s more than half and we still haven’t scratched the surface of exploring it...” Gina looked out towards the ocean for a moment before turning back to John.

“Okay?”

“There’s still so much to discover, so much we don’t know about our planet...about life.” John took a large breath before slowly exhaling. His body calmed down a bit, his teeth unclenched and he looked at Gina with a half wary smile.

“There are over seven billion people on this blueberry of a planet we call Earth, and in this universe alone, billions of galaxies like this and in all of that...and perhaps more, there’s only one of each of us. It can get discouraging, believe me I know, but you can’t give up! The only way you won’t find someone is if you stop looking..” Gina looked down at the floor of the passenger car for a moment, nodding gently.

“It just gets hard... you know?” Gina added quietly. John chuckled nervously, still clinging to his seat.

“You know what’s hard? Calculus, getting rid of brain freeze when you eat ice cream too fast, charlie horses, that burning feeling in your eyes you get when you stay up late writing a paper...love, heartbreak, sorrow, tragedy. These are all hard things to deal with. The important thing is that we remain resilient, that’s the wonderful part of being human.” John pried one of his hands off from clinging to his seat almost like a cat. He placed a hand over Gina’s and gave it a reassuring squeeze. Gina looked over at him and gave him a small smile than before. It wasn’t quite a full, joyful smile, but she certainly looked happier than before.

“But you know what I’d love right about now?” John asked. Gina looked at him curiously. “What’s that?”

“To get the heck down from here!!” John shouted down at the ferris wheel operator. After everyone disembarked from the ferris wheel, John and Gina made their way back to John’s Bug. There was a lot of small talk on their way back to Gina’s home. Things like

the quality of the hot dogs, the possibility of some of the carnival games being rigged, accusing the ferris wheel operator of recognizing John from grade school and keeping him at the top just for kicks. These were all entertained until they pulled up to Gina's house. He climbed out of the car first, rushing around it to open the door for her. She smiled and climbed out.

"I hope you had a good time tonight." John said hopefully, closing the passenger side door after her. Gina walked towards her house a bit before turning around to face John and his car.

"I actually had a great time. It's been a while since I had a chance to just go out and have fun." She replied with a genuine smile.

"Ya still creamed me at knocking over milk bottles though!" John replied with a chuckle.

"Yea well, it was pretty easy. Especially when I go up against someone who can't aim straight!" Gina replied with a smirk. The two paused for a moment before laughing. As it died down, John leaned back against his car.

"Well I'm glad to hear it Gina... and I meant what I said back there." He added.

"Oh I know. I've always known, really. It just that...what with my religion, me being too tall and not quite beautiful it's ...frustrating sometimes." Gina sighed out. John crossed his arms, arching an eyebrow.

"Look, I don't know where you're getting all that from. You're religion is a part of your life. Anyone who doesn't respect that, doesn't deserve your time. Being tall is cool! I mean you can reach stuff others can't! Plus you're like an exotic amazonian, that's attractive in it's own right! As for beauty? You **are** beautiful, inside and out, don't you ever think otherwise. If the frustration ever gets to be too much again, give me a ring. Heck, give me a ring anytime!. We could even do something with the whole gang!. All you gotta do is let us know." John assured with a big grin. Gina grinned back, walking up to him, giving him a peck on his forehead.

"I will...thank you, for everything. Have a good night." She said. John blushed red.

"Oh! I uh...my pleasure...! You have a good night too.." He replied bashfully. Gina giggled, she turned around and headed back to her house. John watched to make sure she made it inside without further incident. Once the front door was closed he nodded to himself with a smile and climbed back into his Bug. He looked in the rear view mirror, touching his hand to the spot where Gina had given him a kiss. He chuckled goofily to himself before starting the engine.

"Today was a good day..." He said to himself before driving away.