

A table for one: He came into her restaurant twice a day, without fail. Then, he was gone.

Gabriella DaPrato

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I've tried to write this 10 times, but the only thing I've gotten out of it is my becoming amicable with the backspace button on my keyboard.

It's in that rewriting and drafting that I realized some people cannot be encased in foggy glass, in poorly thrown together words. Scott was one of those people.

If we ever had to divide up the universe, Scott would get the sky. Scott would get the expanse that is everything bright, everything glowing, everything happy ...

I met Scott Rusoff in the most turbulent minute of my life. I had just started working fresh out of high school at a lovely, homey breakfast place, Turning Point of Doylestown.

He was a customer — eccentric, unforgettable, and certainly a force of energy. He soon became a *regular* regular. Twice a day, without fail.



Kate Luff, left, and Gabriella DaPrato, center, both servers at Turning Point restaurant in Doylestown, with customer Scott Rusoff. Rusoff ate at the restaurant regularly and became a staff favorite. He died in December.

When he didn't know what he wanted, he let us pick. He liked his iced teas with lemon, his hot teas with amber sugar sticks. He lived alone, he ate alone, but when you mean so much to so many people, you aren't alone.

On Dec. 21, I received a call from a coworker in tears. Scott had passed away from COVID-19.

Since then, I have cried. I have shouted. I have stared quietly at his favorite table, his favorite chair at the bar, an emptiness and quietness that doesn't feel quite right.

I've stood at the host stand, waiting for him to come in, to shout for me, to shout for the baristas, Natalie and Kate. I've asked what I could do over and over and over and I'm laying awake at night praying for an answer.

Scott, I wrote this poem for you. It's not much, but it's what I know how to do.

The girls and boys at Turning Point miss you. You were a sunshine, you had more gentleness and generosity in your fingers these past two years than most people have their entire life.

Thank you for the laughs and the love you breathed into the restaurant. Rest now. I won't let you disappear without people knowing you existed.

a table for one (scott's poem)

his laugh wasn't swallowed, it cannot be buried away, it cannot be unheard. there is a permanency to his energy, like the utensil scratches left upon the plates soaking in the dishwasher. he was sunday morning breakfast; the coldness of winter fading away behind a closing front door. did you have a good night, scott? yes. his normal answer (some things never change...and that is okay. there is grace found in routine.)

rarely in existence can one find such individualism built into such a world of routine ennui. i watched him live a life with boldness built in his bones. and it's in that self expression that he gave me permission to live the same way. in the butting heads and carefully crafted controversy, i'd always ask, are we going to be okay, scott? and the answer was always yes. a heart built with so much light cannot be lost in our darkening woods.

and i search for his name a million times over, but i can't find an obituary, i cannot find a receipt of his presence in my life. does he have someone to write it for him, can i, will i? it shouldn't go unwritten; a life riddled with such trumpet blows and crashing thunder cannot be rendered silenced. and now there are those dishes in the sink that have been soaking for weeks, and i wonder if anyone is going to get to them; i wonder if anyone is going to tend to the fireplace, if anyone's going to make the coffee in the mornings. and i wonder if he's met my father, the supervisor's brother, the barista's best friend, the line cook's shared flesh and blood; the humans he's heard us sob up elegies about, the people tattooed on our arms? the angels waiting to meet him, to thank him, for making their promised ones still on the universe's carousel laugh, for being something worth the grief clouding the air.

there are fingerprint engravings in the dust at his usual seat, the one that's been empty unless compulsory. no one knows who wrote it, but i have my sneaky suspicions, my glinted guesses. it reads one sentence,

are you safe now, scott?

the answer is yes.

like always.

Gabriella DaPrato is a former Teen Takes panelist and a 2020 graduate of Villa Joseph Marie.

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