



Indigo's Keys

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Retold Fairy Tales

5 min read

A couple of years ago, in a city not so far away, lived a socialite called Indigo Bartlett. Which you probably already knew, my dear reader. If you are slightly older than Seth, you may even remember the bidding war between the magazines for her baby photos.

As the first daughter of an oil magnate and Hollywood's favorite actress, many words had been written about her before she was even born. Indigo's older brothers had not piqued the interest of the tabloids quite as much. But the camera loved Indigo and so did everyone else. The fact that she seemed to spend her adolescent years commuting between boarding school and rehab hardly diminished her allure. Sobriety and a degree from Cornell secured her a top placement at the annual lists of 'most eligible bachelorettes'. The only act of rebellion she continued was dying her hair blue. Her signature headdress was just a shade lighter than her name demanded.

So if you are a connoisseur of the popular press, you may think you know everything there is to know about Indigo Bartlett. But even she has secrets, which I divulge with great hesitation. Uncovering secrets comes at a great price. But who is to say that keeping them is less costly?

Let us return to young Seth, who lived in that same city not so far away. The odds of running into the likes of Indigo did not seem high. She might as well have lived among the stars. Well, it is called the 'city of stars' for a

reason. People are famously attached to their cars in this place, yet they run into each other more often than in other cities. They spill their drinks over one another, they have fender benders, they fight over the same cab. Et voila, boy meets girl. Or boy meets boy, girl meets girl for that matter.

Seth is a boy who likes girls. It must be said that he is not particularly picky. Who knows what girl he would have met if he had not been a waiter at that particular auction against ovarian cancer? He might have been married to Jennifer or Angela or Fatima. But Seth needed money to live and Indigo needed money to give. So they both entered the splendid venue that fateful day.

In fact, they entered at the same time, awkwardly ending up in the same compartment of the hotel's revolving door. Seth wondered why Indigo bothered with wearing massive sunglasses. Her blue beehive ruined any chance of staying anonymous. With all this wondering, he stopped moving, so the door got stuck. The two extra seconds they spent together made sure that Indigo took off her glasses and studied his face as well as he studied hers. He was already enchanted by her beauty. And unlike so many girls on Tinder, she liked what she saw in Seth too.

I am diverging, as this story is not about how they met, but about the tragic way in which they parted. If you have ever been at a charity auction, you know how the evening was spent. There was the dazzling five course meal, speeches that went on for too long and of course, Indigo herself who made the trinkets she auctioned off seem magical. All the time, she and Seth kept making the eyes at each other. He kept walking in her general direction with his champagne tray. She took more glasses than she might have otherwise. At the end of the night, she wrote her number on a thick fabric napkin and put it in his breast pocket.

If I had been there the next morning, dear reader, I would have begged Seth to delete that number. But I am not sure there was anything I could have done. All night, he had dreamed about running his fingers through that mesmerizing blue hair. As soon as he woke up, he texted the number he already learned by heart. Within minutes, she texted back. That same afternoon, they were frolicking in a classical art gallery outside of the official opening hours. Seth, who was captivated by Indigo's abundant beauty, glanced at the fine arts without saying as much as a word.

“Still waters, huh?”, said Indigo while they lingered before a Dutch painting depicting an old folk tale. “I like a bit of mystery in a man.”

Seth shrugged.

“I think that was the last one,” said Indigo. “This has been fun, don’t you think?”

“Yeah, sure.” Seth tried to hold on to the smell of her perfume, not wanting the afternoon to end.

“Well, I would suggest getting a drink somewhere, but I would hate for our date to be interrupted by the paparazzi.” She took a step closer. Even though Seth was not an expert on interpreting emotions, he noticed a sadness in her eyes, masked with temptation. “Do you know any place... more private?”

Immediately regretting it, Seth suggested his own apartment. What would she think of his lousy building, more frequently visited by pest control than by maids? She would run away screaming. And that would be the last he ever saw of Indigo Bartlett.

If only that had been the case. But she laughed at his pile of dishes and offered to do them for him. Afterwards, they dined on canned soup and cheap Chardonnay. She insisted it beat the shrimp and lobster she had the day before at the charity event. Emboldened by the wine, he leaned in to wipe a drop of tomato soup of her lip with his thumb. She giggled. Undoing her chignon, Indigo draped her blue hair loose over her shoulders before kissing him.

Throughout their whirlwind romance, Seth was blown away by her fierce intelligence. He asked her once why she did not put her degree to use in her father’s business, like her older brothers. He knew never to repeat that question when she pursed her lips.

“My father trained my brothers for succession from an early age”, Indigo said. “He never expected the same from me. Someone like you would never understand, there is not an ounce of leadership in you.” For the rest of the day she lashed out at Seth with mean remarks, showing the cruel streak that hid beneath all the charm.

Given her hatred for the media, Seth found it surprising that she tried to follow her mother’s footsteps in the movie industry. He was even more surprised she never quite reached the same height as her mother, who won

several Academy Awards. From time to time, Indigo took supporting roles in comedies by entry level directors. They came with a load of press articles, none of which recognized her talent. Indigo would complain bitterly about the gruelling promotion sessions, long days in hotel rooms where journalists tried to virtually undress her with endless questions about her private life.

While she said she loved his apartment, they never returned after the first date. Instead, they hang out at her yacht, a penthouse that belonged to her family, private rooms of premium restaurants. After a few weeks, she invited him to spend a weekend at her cabin in the woods. He expected the cabin to be some sort of luxurious spa that could house multiple families, but it turned out to be a very simple hut, much like the one where he had spent family vacations a lifetime ago.

Indigo had been in a foul mood since their departure. The same morning, the tabloids had published their first footage of them together. Seth felt she expected him to be as outraged as he was, so he pretended he cared. Much of the weekend was spent trying to cheer her up. Diligently, Seth chopped wood, lighted fires, roasted sausages and wrapped Indigo in a warm blanket. By the end of the second night, she stopped scowling and embraced him once again. The next morning they drove up to a very busy diner to eat blueberry pancakes. After a second serving, Indigo invited Seth to come along to her home.

Unlike the cabin, Indigo's mansion was exactly the way Seth pictured it. Of course, he cheated. By now, he had extensively researched Indigo's life on Google. The purpose of this was mostly to find out more about her previous boyfriends. He dug up six of them. None of those relationships was with another celeb, none lasted long. After the flings disappeared into the oblivion where they came from, the press did not bother to track them down. Seth knew better then to ask Indigo how things have ended – he imagined it was by them revealing their similar browser history. He told himself it was different this time: she could not have looked at them the way she looked at him. He told himself the ones before him had not thought exactly the same thing.

But there was more to be found online than Indigo's lovelife, wardrobe choices and court adventures. Seth had also seen pictures of her sleek white mansion, resting on a steep cliff overlooking the ocean. On the screen of his phone, it looked spectacular. When Seth had to take it all in for real upon arrival, he lingered before the door, paralyzed by the magnificence. Part of him wanted to return to his studio, with or without his bewitching companion. Of course, he entered. Another missed opportunity to live in blissful ignorance on his

part.

Not tempted by the vast number of rooms, Seth was happy to spend most of the time in the bedroom, indulged by Indigo. From there, they ventured to the kitchen to prepare meals together. On good days, she would chat away happily while he listened, giving her encouraging nods. When they started to feel smothered between the heap of soft pillows that adorned Indigo's emperor sized bed, they took a dip in the infinity pool. Occasionally, they roamed in the living room, but never for long.

All the rooms had locks on them. Indigo had a large chain full of keys. In such a modern house an automatic system with retina scans might have been more appropriate, but Seth found it endearing she should choose such an antiquated solution.

Indigo was the only one who had to leave their oversized lovenest from time to time. She made an appearance here, hosted an event there. Never was she gone for more than a couple of hours. Seth always waited for her with a silent hunger that pleased her more than anything. His temp agency had called him a few times with more catering assignments. He never returned their calls. After a while, they stopped contacting him. As intimidated as he was by this house, he moved in without realizing it.

"You understand me", Indigo whispered one night. Seth had just taken a shower and was thinking about baseball statistics. He felt flattered, even though his enigmatic lover was severely mistaken. So many questions about her kept him awake through the summer nights. The most salient among them was what she saw in him. With a mind as captivating as her body, with fame and fortune on her side, she could have picked any gentleman she liked. Yet she chose him.

She mistook him for a dark, brooding stranger full of secrets. The most secretive things he had done in his life were stealing candy at Mrs. Cunningham's shop and smoking with his friends behind the bus station. Both times, his mother found out and made him wash his mouth with brown soap. But he wanted to give his beloved her heart's desire. And if she wanted him to be someone he could almost be, he was happy to oblige. So he practised his mischievous grin and remained taciturn.

Seasons change, although our lovebirds hardly noticed the arrival of fall. In their city, the autumn doesn't turn the air crisp. On a beautiful October afternoon, Seth sat at the side of the pool, his feet in the water. Indigo

floated on her back, spread out like a starfish, her blue hair and her matching bathing suit acting as camouflage above the aquamarine tiles. Though she had told him several times how joyful she felt doing this, Seth hated when she floated with her eyes closed. It reminded him of a dead body, about to wash onto the shore. He felt relieved when she swam towards him.

Indigo let her arms rest on his legs. "I'm leaving tomorrow", she told him.

"I hate it when you leave. Will you be late?" Seth played with a lock of her hair.

"I will be away for a couple of weeks." Indigo auditioned for another comedy the day before they met and got the part. They would be shooting in a far away country. Indigo took his silence for support. "You can stay here, of course. Wait a sec." She got out of the pool and walked to the house, leaving wet footprints on the granite.

Upon her return, she pressed her keychain in Seth's hand. For the first time he noticed a small, golden key among the regular nickel ones.

"Take a tour of the house while I'm gone. Mi casa es tu casa, use any room you like. The golden key is for the little room next to the wine cellar. Please, don't enter that one. It is very important to me. Just don't." She planted a kiss on his lips. "Order as much food as you want, I'll be back before you know it."

How cruel, to pretend that time would move fast in her absence. Of course, our Seth found that the empty promise only made the clock tick slower. Their leisurely existence was paradise when it was the two of them. Alone, Seth was bored out of his mind after one night. On day four of his unrequested me-time, he called his brother Andy.

"Long time man!", Andy greeted him.

Seth tried to explain how things were between him and Indigo, but was once more lost for words.

Andy whistled. "Bros before hoes, Seffy! If you're doing Indigo Bartlett however..."

Seth cringed, yet could not stop himself from inviting his brother over. Certainly, when Indigo said “mi casa es tu casa”, she did not mean he could ask strangers to breach her privacy. On the other hand, she had not specified Seth should refrain from doing so.

Judging by the moment Andy let his BMW roll onto the driveway, he did not pay much attention to speeding limits. He greeted Seth with a fist bump.

“That a new haircut? Suave”, Seth said politely.

“Not half as suave as this crib. Let me in already, ok?”

Seth could hardly take him to the bedroom, so he took him to the living room. The room with mostly glass furniture still made him uneasy. His brother looked more confident than Seth had ever felt himself in this house. Andy went wild when he opened the liquor cabinet. Shaking a bottle, he demanded to know where the fridge was and started working on the drinks immediately. Andy was a self-proclaimed “expert in mixology”, which meant he worked as a bartender. He also was a self-proclaimed “impresario”, which meant that he had a lot of phone numbers he hoped to use someday.

Seth still had a queasy feeling in his stomach, but the cocktails and pizza made it vanish in lieu of a different kind of queasiness. They played video games until they fell asleep. Next morning, they rinsed away their hangovers in the pool and pretty much repeated last night’s activities for the rest of the day. Soon, Seth fell back into a routine that much resembled his previous one, even though it lacked the spark Indigo brought to his life.

After a week, Andy woke Seth up with breakfast pancakes. He dangled the keychain in front of Seth’s nose.

“How did you even...?” Seth saved the keys in the drawer of his nightstand.

“I never thought the day would come, but I’m bored with playing video games”, his brother said. “How about a little recon mission through this shack?”

“No, that’s not...” Seth protested, although Indigo had told him it was perfectly fine. Somehow, he could not stomach the idea of his brother stomping through his lover’s refined estate.

“Please, Seffy! I need to work tonight, let me play a bit first.” Leaving Seth with his pancakes, Andy dashed to the hallway. When Seth followed him, he had already opened the door to a spare bedroom.

“Perfect! No more nights on the couch for me”, Andy said.

Over the next days, they explored the residence further. Andy’s curiosity had infected Seth, who felt closer to Indigo through her material belongings. Andy could take his pick in guestrooms. They discovered multiple bathrooms with baths on golden claw feet. In a room full of musical instruments, Andy found his new calling as a drummer, while Seth took an acoustic guitar to Indigo’s bedroom. Few of the books in the library made sense to the brothers. Every night, they returned to the cinema room to watch cult movies and rock concerts. Seth was taken back when he found a half painted baby room, an antique crib in the corner.

Every day, Andy begged Seth to open the cellar door with the little golden key. Seth kept refusing.

“Bro, aren’t you even a little bit curious?” Andy would say.

“Indigo is a very private person”, Seth would reply.

“Yeah, who is prancing in front of the camera for everyone to see. She is probably being private with some exotic stranger right now.”

That stung. “We talk everyday one FaceTime, I would have noticed.”

“But don’t you want to know her secrets?”

“Just shut up. We’re not opening that room.”

Seth was always able to end their daily discussion, until the night before Indigo was scheduled to return. Because Andy had grown bored with the liquor cabinet, they had been drinking champagne all night. After two movies, Andy started his routine about the golden key again. Just when Seth thought he had convinced his brother, Andy snatched the keychain from the table, took the golden key off it and rushed down the stairs.

Seth, whose tolerance for alcohol was far lower than his brother's, could not stop his brother in time.

"Shit", Andy said at the gruesome sight of the cellar room. Taken by surprise, he dropped the key in the puddle of blood on the floor. The blood belonged without doubt to the six bodies hanging from hooks on the ceiling. In three of them, Seth recognized earlier boyfriends, even though their faces hardly resembled the pictures in the tabloids anymore. The other three were maimed beyond recognition. Seth was sure they were his other predecessors.

Sobered up, Seth picked up the key and ran upstairs. He dialed 911 when his brother took his phone and hung up.

"What are you doing?"

"Calling the police, duh." Seth tried to take his phone back.

"Think", Andy said. "Indigo is rich and famous. She probably has the police in her pocket. Why else do you think she has not been arrested yet?"

"Do you have any better ideas?" Seth asked.

"As a matter of fact, I do." Andy took out his own phone and started texting. "If the world knows what she's been up to, the police must take action. I have some friends among the paparazzi. They'll be happy to spread the news."

At the same time, Seth's phone buzzed. "It's Indigo. She took an earlier plane. She's on her way from the airport."

"Shit. You do something with that key, I'll clean up our glasses."

Seth cleaned the blood spatters of the key in the kitchen sink. But he was not the vat of secrets Indigo suspected him to be. Surely, she would be able to tell from his face.

"Andy, are your friends here yet?" he shouted to his brother in the living room.

“No, just a bit more patience.”

With the key back on the chain, there was little left to do but pacing through the living room. Andy pressed his face to the window to see if any headlights showed up in the dark.

“Andy, do you see them coming?”

“No, you moron, I would tell you.”

When finally two headlights showed up, it was Indigo’s taxi. The driver put her luggage in the hallway and left them to their own devices. Seth felt his heart pounding in his chest as Indigo hugged him. “I missed you”, she whispered in his ear.

“Well, well, look who we have here.” She stretched her hand out to Andy.

“I’m his brother, Andy. Nice to meet you.”

Of course, Indigo was not fooled by the pale brothers with their alcohol breath. But she was all smiles. She took off her coat. “Seth, I need to hang this in the wardrobe, do you have my keys?”

“Yes, of course.” His hands trembled as he handed her the keychain.

“Andy, are they there yet?”, he whispered when she was out of the room.

“I know as much as you do bro, any minute now.”

Indigo returned, asking Andy for a glass of champagne. “As my brother probably told you, I am a very private person. So there is just one little thing I need to check.” She turned off the light. From her purse, she took a small can and sprayed liquid over the golden key. Immediately, the blood splatters lit up. “Luminol doesn’t lie,” she sighed.

Before the brothers realised what was happening, she took a handgun out of the same purse and shot Andy.

Seth fell down on his knees. “Please, Indigo, it was his idea, I never wanted...”

She flicked the lights back on. "But you did."

"And I am so, so sorry, I..."

"No, I am the one who is sorry. I thought you would be different."

"I am different!"

"You did exactly the same," Indigo said. "All my life, every part of me has belonged to the public. I never had any privacy. If you truly loved me, you would have understood. All I wanted was one secret."

"It can be our secret, I still love you." You may think this is the crazy talk of a man who is trying to save his life. But Seth really meant it. Never mind the bodies in the closet, he loved this woman with all of his heart.

"It is too late." Indigo put the gun away and took a knife from under her belt.

She pressed it against his throat. At that moment, flashes lighted room, surprising them both. Outside the window, three lenses showed up. Andy's friends had not come in time to save him, but they did save Seth's life. When she realised what was going on, Indigo retreated the knife from her admirer's throat and plunged it through her own chest. Andy held her in his arms while she bled out, sobbing more over the loss of his deviant mistress than over his own brother's death.

The pictures the paparazzi took were sold to the highest bidder. This was Indigo's father, of course, which is why you have never seen them. I myself belong to the very limited circle of people who took a glance at them. The family fortune made the police investigation go away. You may have read that Indigo Bartlett died during a home robbery gone wrong.

Seth's silence was bought with the mansion. The market value had decreased anyway after the press wrote about the "robbery", so it was a bargain for the family. Maybe you wonder why Seth would want to live among the ghosts of his lady and her lovers, with his brother as an extra. I have wondered the same thing. But somehow, Seth could not part with the memories of the summer he and Indigo spent there. He clinged to his bloodthirsty sweetheart, even though thinking of her hurt on so many different levels. So he lived in her house ever after.

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