

Influence

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The thing about a breakup is that the word alone bears a resemblance of perfection in that in truly leaves a person broken. It's in this state that someone can find justification for the preposterous. Even in the worst of relationships, where it should be all sunshine and rainbows that it ended with how bad you were treated, the dumpee will still feel like their world has been shattered. It's an inevitable reaction to losing the familiar, whether it was good or bad doesn't matter. The point of it all is that you lost that special someone, even if they weren't that special to begin with. Funny how that works, isn't it? Hindsight hasn't reached its peak yet, so you're left thinking that the end of a relationship is, in fact, the end of the world. This blissful state of agony, a beautiful-bullet wound, was the wondrous world of my life.

I've spent the last week in varied forms of the fetal position, eating piles of junk food, while watching the quintessential collection of romance movies. My preference was the combined one-pound bag of peanut-butter *M&M's* and *The Notebook*. I didn't care how cliché it may be to watch a *Nicholas Sparks* movie, and shoveling handfuls of chocolate in my mouth, after a breakup. It was filling the void, and, at this time in my life, I didn't care what I looked like. Yes, I'd become a hermit with brightly-colored-candy wrappers lining the floor, and cinematic-love affairs was my coping mechanism.

This lasted six days before Claire was on my porch beating down my front door. Although, it took her screaming like a lunatic before I was willing to let her in. I wanted to ignore her, pretend I wasn't there, but that was hard to do with my car in the driveway, and the fact that she could see me through the glass of the door. Plus, with as loud as she was, I'm sure she'd eventually piss off my neighbors, which would just be another headache altogether.

After finally opening the door, and her barging in, she took in the view of what I'd become. Briefly turning up her nose at the trash before taking on downturned cheeks and sympathetic eyes, she practically shoved me into the shower. While I washed, she cleaned the mess that had been left in my wake. I fought her on it with everything I had, but, in my current state, I was no match for the fierceness of her determination.

I couldn't truly be mad at her though, even if the movie WAS just getting to the good part. So here I was, seven days after being dumped by 'he who shall not be named', and feeling the sun on my skin for the first time since it all happened. The sun was angling downwards, but still fairly high since it was only mid-afternoon. It was warm, but not as muggy as it normally was this time of year. It kept us from being drenched in sweat, which wouldn't have helped the mood that Claire was trying to alter. I still wasn't happy, but she was putting up everything she could as a potential distraction, which must have been hard since my mind kept wandering.

"Kiera!"

"What?" I said jumping.

"I asked you a question."

"Um, I wasn't listening."

"Yeah," said Claire, "I kind of realized that. No more sulking for that douchebag. We're here to enjoy the sunshine and people watch."

"I'm trying," I said, "but it's not that easy."

"It'll come in time," she said with an understanding look. "I wanted to know if that spot over there would work," she said pointing to a patch of grass that pushed into a cluster of trees just off the path.

Getting me out of the house, Claire chose to bring me to Shawnee Mission Park because she knew how much time I spent here. It was my frequented place for relaxation with a good book. Losing

myself in a story, surrounded by nature, was a favorite past time of mine. I could be found here three, or even four, times a week, but this past week had been against the norm; obviously. "Looks good enough to me," I said.

The spot was slightly elevated allowing for a breath-taking view of the expansive-grass field below. Completely encased in thick woods, the void was invisible to the outside world. The path down from the parking lot wound among the trees to the clearing Claire brought me to. While she unfolded a blanket for us to sit on, I peered into the valley, watching a few people jogging along the walkway. On the far side was a couple exercising together who occasionally glanced at each other, bringing them both to a smile, and it supplied another sudden-emotional knife that caught me off-guard.

The sharpened blade sticking from my side was an immediate deluge into exactly what this little trip was supposed to be avoiding. My boyfriend, ex- boyfriend...I needed to remember ex-boyfriend, and I would do cardio together on the weekends. Staying healthy was important to both of us, and there was a time where we were exactly like that couple jogging together. Why can something so simple send you tumbling down the rabbit hole of regret?

Alice would've had a better chance at figuring out how a raven is like a writing desk than stopping the unwanted correlations your observations make. The double-edged blade dripped crimson down my side as it sank me further into that world of hate and regret. On one side, there were so many happy memories, but right now they were overshadowed by the gut-wrenching pain it caused. I would've given anything to feel his arms wrapped around me right then, and I hated myself for it.

There wasn't a logical reason that I'd wish this upon myself, but here I was doing exactly that. He wasn't worthy to breathe the same air with me, but to fill his lips on mine, and his fingers running through my hair, was the opiate I yearned for. I could smell him now, the soap he used, as I imagined myself in his embrace with my head on his shoulder. I would've happily stayed in that moment, but Claire, with the strength of Arthur removing sword from stone, dragged me out of the hole. She brought me back to reality, even if only momentarily, asking, "Which one do you want?"

"Huh?"

"I've got two of them, one ham and the other turkey. Which do you want?" she asked holding out two sandwiches she'd pulled from her backpack. That's when it happened again, the wound began seeping without warning. He always ate ham and cheese sandwiches; it was his favorite.

"I'll take the ham," I said grabbing the wrapped sandwich. Even though I preferred turkey, eating the ham made me feel closer to him. I took a bite and stared at the sandwich realizing how stupid I was, but I couldn't help it; I missed him. Even after swallowing, I still gazed at the ham encased in sourdough, wondering what he was doing.

Was he feeling as miserable as I was? Did he miss me? He could be texting me right now, but Claire made me leave my cellphone in the car. How would I know if he was trying to get ahold of me right now? Did he want to get back together? The knife twisted in my ribs slicing into my kidney. It was more likely that he was having the time of his life...with her. They were probably fucking right now; planning their marriage between thrusts. I could see him, right now, burying himself inside her as they laughed at my misery. I set the sandwich aside in disgust, and grabbed one of the granola bars instead.

"Where's Danny?" I asked biting into my snack, saying anything to distract myself from their naked bodies writhing together.

"He's probably working on the car. It's been making an odd noise lately. He understood we needed some girl time though."

"Must be nice," I said.

"What?"

"Being married to a man that isn't a complete and total dickwad."

"I just lucked out Keira, and you will too. You just need to get past this rut, and you'll find your Prince Charming. I guarantee it even if I have to mold the man out of clay myself."

I couldn't help but chuckle at the thought.

"Well will you look at that," she said.

"What?"

"We've chipped the first piece off of that my-life-is-over-and-I'll-never-be-happy-again funk off of you. Now we just need a hunky fireman to hose the rest of it off of you."

Another smile as I laughed again. "I appreciate the company, and the distraction, but I do keep going back to analyzing what happened. I mean, why did he start banging that stupid slut? Was I not good enough? What is wrong with me that someone would just toss me aside like that? Maybe I'm ugly."

"You aren't the least bit ugly, and nothing," Claire said turning me to face her, "absolutely nothing is wrong with you. The 'dickwad', as he will now be known, is the problem. It has nothing to do with you. He was undeserving of the incredible woman you are, and this was the universe removing him from the equation. Now you can find someone that can appreciate the person you are."

"Claire, if I didn't know better, I'd think you were trying to be that next person to get into my panties."

"Well they are nice panties," she laughed. "But, alas, I'm a fan of the cock." My mouth dropped open in shock. "Yeah," she said pointing at my mouth, "that's the face I usually make when I get to play with one."

"Oh my God Claire," I said smacking her arm as we both laughed hysterically. "What would your husband think?"

"Who cares? I just drag him to the bedroom so mommy can have her fun." We continued laughing throughout the picnic, and, as time went on, I realized I was thinking less and less of him. There was still the occasional flash of something that reminded me of what we had, and what was lost, but it was getting easier. No matter how much I had been forcing myself to be miserable, which never makes sense why we all do this to ourselves, her company was doing wonders. It took her dragging me by my ankles out the front door, my fingernails digging grooves into the floor as I tried getting back to the couch, but it was having the desired effect. I was feeling better; more me.

The relationships, or bonds, we make with the people around us is a remarkable entity in itself. This woman beside me has been at me with everything she's got to wipe away the despondency, and show me that there are always chances for another turn at bat; tabula rasa. Focusing all your energy on something painful makes you forget all the rest of life's offerings.

Then, something as simple as a friend taking you to the park can flip the dime on its head, and show you what you've been missing. It's reminded me how thankful I am to all the people in my life that make a difference in it. I have people around me that will step to the brink in order to manage the fallout of whatever happens to me. Even though we may need a reminder from time to time, we should all realize that we're luckier than we know.