

Normalcy

Joe's a jerk. That was it, the last sentence I actually heard Hillary say. That had to have been 20 minutes ago. Now I could just hear her tone of voice – concerned, self-righteous, homogenous. Maybe 30 minutes. I felt a tear roll down my cheek...considered wiping it away...quickly weighed the dramatic effect of letting it roll vs. wiping it and decided to let it roll on. Without...so much as a sniffle. Around this time, Hillary's voice broke through again. This time: "...your disability" she explained sensitively. I thought about last night in the checkout line at Safeway when the cashier asked me with no sense of irony or awkwardness if I would like to donate a \$1 to help "individuals with disabilities." I asked, from the seat of the world's oldest and slowest mobility scooter, how I would get it back and she stared at me completely confused. I felt sort of bad and just said "No, thank you." Who gets those dollars? How do you sign up for them? How do you become disabled enough? Where is the cut off mark? Trouble walking? Bathing yourself? Or do you have to be totally incapacitated before that \$1 at the grocery store check-out is yours? I should look into this. I had a feeling most of those dollars went into making signs that advertised the store's generosity to the dis-abled. I HATE that word.

I know Hillary is right. Joe is a Jerk, an asshole, a prick. It is very likely that whatever other points she is making today are good ones as well. Normally when she gets concerned about my boyfriends, she also lectures me about my self-esteem, my motivation, and my treatment of my family. She probably thinks I am crying because I am so shocked by what she is saying, that she has just really opened my eyes to something or other, that I am being inspired to make changes, but the truth is what all of the "How to Deal With Your ____" brochures fail to mention is that when Dr. Important confirms that your life is going to end in 2-5 years all of those buzz words: "self-esteem," "motivation," "respect" – they don't mean shit. Everyone thinks you are very brave when you are diagnosed with a disease that makes *them* sick to their stomach...*they* could *never* handle it so well. Okay. Thank you?

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What Hillary and my parents *can not* understand, and what I don't even bother trying to explain anymore, is that I like Joe BECAUSE he's a jerk. Based on where he parks when we go out he doesn't seem to have **any** idea that I am not supposed to walk more than a block, he has no manners, is only occasionally reliable, and he *gasp* talks about the future! Just writing it feels scandalous! He talks openly about what he wants to do next year, in five years and in ten...but, best of all when he talks about ten years from now he doesn't awkwardly pause or flinch or make a sad face – he just speaks. Period. Just like that - like I am a living person. I put up with his rude, inconsiderate and self-absorbed personality, because he doesn't look at me like I am already dead, he doesn't touch me like I am made of antique china and he speaks to me like he does to everyone else – kind of like he thinks he's in the mafia, its fucking idiotic – and I LOVE that. Joe is so focused on Joe, he doesn't have time to obsess about whether I went out yesterday or if I feel like talking about how that felt. It's not a blip on his radar. When I knock on his door at midnight dressed like a hooker and bite his neck, he gets a blip on his radar, opens the door and invites me in. We don't talk about why I came over ... if it is about my mortality, if I'm directing "misplaced anger" or if my mother knows where I am. Joe is horny. I am great in bed. My impending death is not only beneath my flexibility on topics of conversation, I don't think its **on** the list. Afterwards we lay in bed and talk about 80's pop music and read *Clan of the Cave Bear* out loud to each other. He knows I am also seeing Jim, but I don't think he cares.

Hillary is about 2/3 of her way through. I know this because she just brought up Jim. I didn't actually hear his name, but I knew she was talking about him, because her entire tone and demeanor changed. Now her voice sounded like she was pleading on behalf of an abused, abandoned, 3-legged dog. Jim, on the other hand, would be crushed if he knew about Joe.

Jim is ideal. He is considerate, kind, empathetic, polite, well-educated, kind, polite, dull, boring,

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considerate, sweet, polite, dull and dull. My family **adores** him. My neurologist adores him, for god's sake. *I wish all of my patients were so lucky...*I'm thinking about this just as Hillary is saying that Jim has been looking for me all day. He is worried sick. He apparently left work when he couldn't reach me on my phone, at my parents' house, at Hillary's and when five friends didn't know where I was. He was frantic. Are you kidding me??

When Hillary got his message she had figured out right away that I was with Joe. She called Jim and told him she knew a secluded place I liked to go and meditate and as soon as she reached me, she would have me call him. Where does she get this shit? Lifetime? Next, she came over to Joe's and now here we were sitting in her Audi outside on Market Street. Apparently Jim was waiting for my call. Why had she just lectured me for 45 minutes if this guy was gnawing off his fingers with worry? This was too much. I picked up the phone and dialed his number determined to stop this charade, I was no longer convinced by the voices saying "But he's so nice" in my head. He answered. I tried to sound nonchalant. I tried to tease him for being a worry wart and told him he couldn't assume I was dead whenever I didn't pick up my phone. I knew the joke was in poor taste. It made us both uncomfortable, but it worked – he was no longer concerned with where I had been. I imagined him looking down at me so full of love, so kind. His arms were where I went to meditate. That was the truth. I'll be there in 10 minutes I told him, I awkwardly hugged Hillary and got into my MG and headed for Jim's. I turned the old radio up as loud as it would go. It couldn't drown out my only thought. *Only a few more times, only a few more times...*