

## "Turtle"

While you were getting ready, I opened the door and he was poking around outside, waiting for you to come out. He looked like he had been there awhile (Lawrence of Arabia comes to mind), so I asked him if he wanted to come in and wait on the couch. He said oh yeah if it's not too much trouble. Once he was settled, I threw him some lettuce and he munched on it quietly, relieved that had something to do besides sit.

I leaned against the kitchen door frame and watched your new boyfriend angling himself on the edge of the couch, as if getting ready to leap up the moment he saw you. The thing is though, he wouldn't have been able to if he wanted. The color of wet undergrowth, the broad, sectioned shell on his back kept him from getting completely comfortable—in fact it slowed any motion he would have wanted to make, backwards or forwards. He was terrified, I could tell, as if balancing a teaspoon on the edge of a cup. If he fell back completely on his shell, he would need to call out to me to come and tip him forward again so that he could get back on his feet. Sure, he probably could have retracted his head and limbs inside and rolled, but he felt uncomfortable doing it in public most likely. He didn't like to trouble people or make them uneasy. His sitting on the couch was tragically unfeasible then, and to be honest life-threatening if neither of us came to his rescue—but he does it to please you.

You call him 'turtle' affectionately. Probably because he's shy, slow-moving but pleasantly stable. Physically, you couldn't knock him over because he walks low to the ground and is steady in his shell. More importantly though, he's a guy who would help you jump-start your car at 2am, hold you all night when you're crying or help your best friend's mom's dog poop out your keys if it swallowed them. My mom (very grateful to him, by the way) once called him "a compulsive giver". All of these things make up exactly what you need: someone who will be steady when you're not and give you energy when you have none.

You work in the theatre—which takes you all over the world and beats the life out of you—and it comforts you to know that when you land back home, he'll be there early with a car to pick you up and you wouldn't have to talk his ear off on the ride back. He might want to talk, but he knows you're tired and it's enough just being there. Looking in from the outside, I marvel at a man who opts to stay in place while the love of his life (yes, you) comes and goes. I always thought he was a bit of a submarine, really, hiding in shallow waters and always waiting for you to call upon him. I always wonder if what you give him is just as potent.

The two of us went to your play the other night. I drove with him there so we got there a little early and sat up front. The play was an adaptation of the old story *The Love of Poseidon*, in which Poseidon (they always make him look like Santa), god of the ocean, falls in love with a widow, Julia, and courts her after her husband dies at sea. You played Julia, who is mourning the death of her husband, a sailor. Julia sits in her home by the ocean crying day and night, but one day among her late husband's old things, she finds a walkie-talkie. Desperate to talk to him again, she sits up at night taking into it, hoping that he might talk back. He doesn't. Poseidon hears her one night and leaves the ocean to listen to her at her window. Seeing her lovely figure crying by the candlelight, he falls in love with her. Not wanting to see her sad, he inhabits the walkie-talkie, and talks to her as her husband. With a renewed spirit, Julia finds joy in her life once more. Poseidon comes to her every night. After a while she begins pleading to her husband's voice to come back to her, "If your voice can find its way back to me, then why can not the rest of you?" you bellow courageously. Poseidon transforms himself into her husband, but every time he reaches her door, he can't help but change back. He never could make it inside. Angry at himself, he summons the ocean and drowns Julia and her house. The last scene is of you floating in the ocean, peaceful and lovely. I'll always remember you

like that. I guess the story is a way of saying that if you truly love someone, you can't help but show your true self.

Turtle and I meet you afterwards. Dozens of people walk up to you and say things along the lines of, "Wonderful, darling." Turtle stands by the exit with his coat, waiting for you to finish so he can drive us both home. I go up to you and give you a big hug. "You really liked it?" you ask earnestly. "I promise you, dear Julia!" I thunder with a big laugh. We both look over at Turtle and he starts towards her slowly and hugs her. "Who's this?" pipes in Andres, your director, clearly already 2 hours drunk. "Oh, the boyfriend! Isn't she kind of out of your league, guy?" And he pats him on the head and leaves. I see Turtle fume a little bit, clenched. You go to try and talk to him, but he pulls away for a second and takes a moment to even his keel. A blank slate once more, he asks placidly, "Wanna go?"

We head to a bar later that night. The energy is low, and we barely speak. Out of the lull, a slow song plays in the dark and, taking you to the dance floor he pulls you close. He knows this song. He has one arm around your waist, a hand courageously placed on the small of your back, the other hand for a while at his side eventually making its way up to cradle your face. You both swing gently back and forth, leaning in steadily. He holds you securely in a protective current of sound; at the center of a whirlpool he is your one ally against centrifugal force. He pulls you out of space and breathes life into you. Sure of him at last, you tuck your head into him. With wide, astonished eyes you then look up and your lips, upward, meet his, liquid and solid.