

Pain (a triptych)

1.

“There’s this girl at my work.”

“Yes.”

“And, uhm. Sorry, I got. lost.” “_____.” “Yeah, okay. So,” “So, how is your relationship?”

“Well, it’s great. Really. Really great. We never spoke till we bumped into eachother at David’s – it’s a bar, not a . person – and, heh, just, we hit it off. She likes James McDonald and the Dodgers and I’m all about Oakland and we got in this discussion and by the end of it we just picked the best players from both teams and created the Dodgelanders. A fantasy baseball team. You know, stuff like that. Well, I don’t know. Okay, um, she’d make a dish and I’d make one at my place and we’d get together and sometimes it would be a Chinese entre and a French appetizer. But,” a grin spreads , “sometimes we’d both end up making Mexican, you know? Sometimes we’d both orgasm at the same time. It’s, yeah, it was beautiful.”

“Was?”

“Once, we went out to Tower District and our ambling turned into stomping and she kept hissing at me. I probably laughed in that fucked up way; that sardonic superior snide snarky fucked up way. I wish I could control my emotions. And then there was this old lady with a leash that was too long and Liz got tangled in it and the ~~bark~~, the dog barked, non-stop, just yelping and this white-haired lady could barely stand and made creepy noises. Creepy, moans. It was my fault. I mean, we established that it was my fault so it’s my fault. Get it?”

“Nope.”

“But her *eyes*, man! Her *eyes* are what really kill me,” his glaze over. “I don’t think I’ll ever forget them. No matter if she was happy or sad or crying or screaming, the whole time they were saying – I don’t know, it would be presumptuous of me – the whole time they were saying, I love you. I guess not. Did I end it? Did she?”

“I’m guessing she did.”

“Probably. We still got together. She would invite me over. Or out. But never alone. Like she was afraid or something. Afraid of WHAT? And never tell me we weren’t going to be alone. She’d always answer the phone with laughter. Always with her laughing at someone else’s remark. Long laughter, hard passionate laughter. Ecstatic laughter. Laughter, ya know? Who knew if someone else was even there. Didn’t matter if I called or if she called me. And she’d say, ‘sorry I missed your call, Hot Dog. anyway, what’s up?’ Liz. Lizard. Somehow it ended up being that everytime she called me I was in reach of my phone, but everytime I called her she didn’t have it. I wouldn’t leave voice messages. I did once – incredibly pathetic. Right after she dropped me. ‘Baby, I’m so sorry.’ I don’t know.”

“Sounds like fun.”

“We had fun. We’d make big fires on the beach. You came; everyone came. We’d buy this huge bag of marshmallows; like, three feet tall and a foot and a half wide. We never finished a bag. Even though everyone was there, we were alone and everything disappeared. We were in our own place and once in awhile someone would open the silence to something that no matter what we’d all laugh it, because nobody would say something not funny. Those huge bonfires. We wheelbarrowed a ton of logs. It was perfect. Even the immense fire couldn’t keep us warm and we cuddled underneath blankets and stared into twisting, soaring flames – hypnotized by the instability, the constant inconsistency of the fire. We kept it alive.

“And then we’d get closer to get warmer and we’d get too hot, so we’d take a walk with the shoreline, small waves pulling in a tide reaching their peak just a few inches from our feet – the blanket still wrapped around us. And then, hundreds of feet away we’d make our way back to the light, the fire, our beacon.” “Those were good times.”

“And, she met that guy. Was it that guy?” “It wasn’t that guy.” “ALL RIGHT. I ADMIT. I CONCEDE. It was me. I was constrictive. I burdened her with my insecurity. I was capricious and assumed that she would meet every whim with a smile. But sometimes she was tired or sick or just not in the mood and I’d blame her. And insult her and embarrass her in front of everybody.”

“How many times did you apologize?”

“I apologized interminably. But that’s not enough. What’s an apology, you know? I’m sorry. I don’t know.”

“No no. It’s . fine. Marshmallows. But, you work with her?” “Okay, so we work together.” “So, you work together . .

Okay, we work together. So, maybe we never talked. And it’d be nice to get to know her and we’d probably be as perfect as is possible. But, I guess I’m a coward and I tried to talk to her *twice*. I got an erection both times. I don’t think she noticed. You might think it’s embarrassing but I’ve grown so accustomed to it that it isn’t. She wears these suits that look really great. It’s just tough in an office environment, ya know? She has her cubicle and I have mine and there are probably a billion cubicles just on our floor, so it’s tough and understandable. And we talked twice and she didn’t seem interested. Her eyes told me so. I know, okay? I know she doesn’t care, that she wouldn’t want to go out with me or start a relationship. She’s probably in one already. If only I could ask someone else here. But everyone doesn’t know how to talk.

Cubicles. I lied. About her, about the job. I don’t have a job at an office with a billion cubicles or a woman who wears suits that I’ve talked to twice – I’m a sad sack of shit. And I fantasize about . . . you know, different stuff. It’s, is it real? Can you see what I mean?

We can watch French new wave movies. We can have tea on a roof lighted by a sunset. And we can dddaaaaannnnccceeeeee.

“Dad! Don’t you recognize me,” the perturbed man asked. His hand gripped his father’s shoulder. Their eyes aligned; his, bulging out expectantly. The man in the wheel chair replied, “I think you’ve got the wrong man, mister. I was never married, never had kids. It was all just a fantasy.”

The man in the jacket – veins swelling over his hand, clutching that shoulder – advances his head and a pale nurse hesitates but says, “Sir, come on.” “But he’s my *Dad!*” The gray herringbone jacket billows as he twirls. “He has Alzheimer’s disease! Isn’t there,” he screams, “MEDICATION?”

“Jack,” the pale nurse calls. “Get the medication.”

2.

Nearing the front door, a shout stopped me in my tracks. David, the eight year old from across the street shouts, 'Puppy!' in search. What could be funnier. I almost run that dog over thrice a week. It bounds over to me when I leave the house, barking like mad with David's mom marching behind, calling out, 'Lola! Come back, Lola!' I can't remember its name; I call it dog. Maybe they're blaming me – my back tire finally quelled it. Or worse, they'd ask my help. Trashbag in hand, I turn back toward the kitchen. I'll throw this out later. A tepid screwdriver waits on the counter. Half-empty, I pour more vodka in. It's so much cooler writing than living, because at least here I can imagine I'm somehow insensitive. And that I actually add more vodka – I added more orange juice.

Swaying into my class, my seat finds me. My roommate heard me blasting these amazing tunes by this artist, Damien Jurado. Simple acoustic. But great. And he blabs and I say, 'What do you know about music, huh? Wise guy!' And he says, yeah, I know more than you do. I'm a god damned music major! I laugh hysterically. And remembering this makes me laugh aloud in class. Someone smells my breath, and I say: 'Oh yeah! Are there any laws against coming to class after a drink?' And the professor says, Yeah! Very blatant rules against getting drunk! I say, 'Screw it! I'm drunk!'

I'm actually cleaning someone else's house. Their kitchen, now. They aren't home and I've pilfered their liquor shelf. Not a cabinet, shelves really. Deluging with everything. Only one or two were open. So, I'm stuck without a real choice.

One or two, Dave? Which one is it? Because if you're gonna write fiction you might as well get the fucking facts straight.

SHUT THE FUCK UP I MAKE UP WHAT I WANT AND YOU DON'T HAVE SHIT TO SAY TO ME, FUCK! SHIT!

You are a pathetic pathetic.

Meow; I ate the dog.

3.

I sit still and silent expecting. Was that noise a door creaking, a face smiling, a friend bounding up stairs to greet *me*? Even silence becomes a buoyant helicopter blades swirling lingering for that last soldier running out of a burning palm tree forest. Caught up.

Will laughs at the jokes; or at least he's entertained. I don't have the remote control. We lay about for hours. But, I do more than that. I tt-tt-tt-tt-tt-tt-type.

She meets with me; Will tells me I'm pathetic; I believe I am unwanted; she absorbs my anxiety; Will tells me I am a nuisance to her; I stay at home with Will.

I can't look her in the eyes because she has done so much for me and I have done nothing. Years grow weight gains wrinkles show attentiveness wanes. If there was just an accomplishment I could accomplish. Nirvana, a gas can, and a light. I'll ignite!

Love.

A grimy, unshaved (but in patches), black tatty t-shirted man approaches us. "Hi, I don't normally do this, but I'm really low on cash and I just need anything you got. I just got evicted from my apartment and don't got no where to go." "Sorry." But she pulls her wallet and gives up her last two dollars. Two dollars to some people is like a penny to me. And a penny, to some people, is like two dollars to me. The man, nonplussed eyes twitching from she to me, begins to weep. His third thank you didn't suffice for him. Tears. What's my take?

I can voluntarily go days without human contact. Sometimes, before I exit the house I pace and check my hair and change my ugly shirt that once fit well. Sometimes I'll drive in ninety-mile circles avoiding a voice. I tuned to one of my three favorite FM radio stations yesterday to hear applause. After a minute or two, I began to notice its brevity. Its tenacity. "Oh, no, no. Please. You're too kind," I said to my audience. "Now, now, there's no need. Thank you very much. Greatly appreciated. Please, have a seat now." And it continued. And my confidence leaped up and I felt accomplished. "Much too kind. Thank you; thank you all." And then a voice faded in and explained the man who just finished playing a selection of Chopin's Preludes *will* play an encore.

She has such great posture. Everyone in the class leans forward, resting their body weight on elbows except for her. I wonder if she sits so straight on toilets.

Somehow, I ended up with a perfect life and can't seem to function.

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