



TWO MONTHS

[Robin Click](#)

One minute, she was hanging upside down from the monkey bars at the beach, chestnut hair sweeping the sand below, hazel eyes fixed on the sunset ahead. Next minute, she was standing in her living room, same eyes now fixed on her husband working on their messy couch.

“How did it go?” He paused, noticing her frozen in the middle of the room, “What did the doctor say?”

She regained animation after the second question and started to straighten up the room, which he knew too well was not a good sign, so in one big sweep, he cleared the couch by hiding everything under a blanket.

“Babe, what happened?” He was now standing, his frame hard to ignore.

She stopped and sat, searching for the right words.

“They said I -- that I -- can’t have kids,” she lied.

He sat next to her, silent and stagnant for a moment, staring at the hole in his sock that he did not notice when he was getting dressed that morning.

“And I want a divorce,” she blurted out.

“What? Why?” He grew pale, “Because of this? Why would it matter?”

“It matters because I want you to go and live a long and happy life full of love and kids and,” she stopped herself, “I need to take a shower.”

He remained seated for a minute before following her steps down the hallway.

“I didn’t realize this bathroom even had a lock,” he mumbled while unsuccessfully turning the door knob. “I love you. I don’t care if we have kids or not. Honestly, the two of us might be all the kids we can handle anyways. And if we ever actually grow up, adopting would be the grown up thing to do anyways. It’s okay. Even if it doesn’t feel like it right now. We’re okay,” he rested his head on the door, waiting.

“What if I told you I’m having an affair?” Tears rushed in.

“Are you?” His face grew blank, eyes dull, breath shallow.

“Yes,” she covered her mouth to muffle the screaming heart.

He lingered at the door, caressing it with his hand as if to persuade the messenger to change the words with which he was charged -- then left without saying a word.

In the morning, the double bed dwarfed her single body, but the sun rose all the same. Hours slipped by as she cleaned the kitchen, put away her belongings in moving boxes, and packed a duffle bag. Only possessions left untouched were the ones hanging lifeless along the walls. Oil paintings, movie posters, wedding photographs, stray pieces they picked up along the way.

Memories of their wedding felt so real each time she looked at those pictures. The agreement was that they would pick each other’s attire for the big day. So he was in formal kilt wear, while she wore the sluttiest wedding dress he could find. Underwear prohibition applied to both to keep it fair, making it especially convenient to consummate their marriage on the drive from the church to what turned into a week-long reception. And now, she stood there; he, somewhere else.

Days like these are the ones that test our faith in matter, universe, Titans, God. But nothing ever happens on those days to reassure us. It is the day after, if we manage to reach it, that we can feel their presence. On that hard-to-reach tomorrow, her phone chimed with a single question mark text from a number she could recognize but not identify. As modern society permits, she ignored it, but a follow up message soon drew her in: “This is Sean Brown btw since I know how much you like that delete button.”

She met Brown during her bachelorette pub crawl three years ago and made her usual dismissive assumptions about the boy with the lion tattoo. But since then, every half a year or so, he would check in on the sanctity of her marriage as if they had been friends since

birth and he was just waiting for his benefits to kick in. She would say hello, but then hit delete every time. Matrimony was easy. Holy matrimony was a lot harder.

“How about this,” she wrote back this time, “fall in love with me for one month only, no more, no less, for better, or for worse, no take backs,” she put the phone down, went up to the wall calendar, crossed out the 24th of this month, underlined the 24th of the following month, and circled vigorously the 24th two months away.

The phone chimed, “Where do I sign?”

They met at a lake in San Marcos, a tiny body of water that flowed against its undercurrent. Pretending to come across each other for the first time, they flirted shamelessly, drank through the night, and shared the only room they planned to reserve at the only resort in town. In the morning, the clock was ticking. One month, no more, no less.

“You dumb yourself down for us girls, don’t you?” She asked over breakfast by the lake.

“It’s easier to charm people when you meet them at their level,” Brown replied.

“What if I were to tell you I’m smarter than you?” She rushed through in one breath.

He laughed, stopping himself to be polite, “You want me to bring my A game?”

“I do. Is that scary?”

“I’m not gonna lose,” his face grew sad.

“But what if I lose and hold it against you?” She hit the right button.

“You know what I bet is scary? Whatever is going to make you disappear after one month, no more, no less,” he turned the table.

“It’s not a matter of scary. Just break ups suck. So maybe if we control them, they’ll suck less? Besides, a sense of urgency makes for a

better story. And,” she was amping up the charm, “when you know something is about to vanish into thin air, you tend to appreciate it a lot more. Or at least you’re *supposed* to. And everything is better when you don’t take it for granted. And and! From what I’m picking up here, you get bored of people pretty quickly, so problem solved?”

“Your excessively long explanation definitely sounds legit,” Brown shut her up with a kiss.

They were in agreement for both the same and different reasons. He was unable to get out of his broken heart, and she was unable to get out of her defensive head. But all our barricades can only ward off foreign invaders. The dragons that lurk inside our castles, we cannot escape. So despite the agreed upon safety of their temporary affair, his usual fears flared up all the same and, once his need for safe distance pulled him back, she woke up next to him with that wrenching sense of loneliness you can only feel when touching someone you cannot reach.

She dealt with this loneliness the old fashioned way, by paying a visit to an old friend.

“So I’m hoping this will tell me how our brief time in this dumpster matters in the end,” she mumbled while looking at a pile of mushrooms that Ray Parker was sorting through in his backyard.

“I hope you’ve done this before because the meaning of life doesn’t usually come on the first try,” he laughed at her.

She has known Parker since high school, back when he was not quite three hundred pounds yet, but was already a professional stoner.

“Then let’s hope second time’s the charm.”

“So who’s this guy you ditched your man for?” Parker took on his usual topic of interest.

“I didn’t ditch him for anyone,” she started, but then realized she needed to keep her story straight. “His name is Sean.”

“An Irish fuck again?”

“I’m married to a Scot, you wanker,” she welcomed the levity of the topic, “you might know this one though, he lives a few doors down.”

“The white boy with the dumbass lion tat on his arm? Zac Effron lookalike? Isn’t he too short for you?”

Laughing through her nods, “How much of this stuff do I need to eat to get to Wonderland?”

“You know a lion is just a giant pussy, right?” Parker pushed a batch over to her, “but since he got your pussy now, you should probably know he’s a customer of mine. The only one I got for actual medicinal purposes. He has some sort of chronic shakes that are painful and the white coats can’t fix it.”

“Ah! Crap. I thought he was just an emotional void.”

“Judgie, judgie, as usual,” he sighed, “that’s the problem with you lawyers.”

“I’m not judging. I just need to understand what’s happening or I start bugging.”

“That’s cuz you a pussy too.”

“Is that a judgment I hear, Mr. Parker?”

“Just an understanding. Now eat your vegetables.”

When the backyard trip ended, awkward reality resumed, and the sick and the dying went back to hiding in plain sight.

“How about I cook us dinner tonight?” Brown hated the idea when he texted it as much as she did when she read it.

“Sounds great!” She sent the obligatory reply.

His apartment was set up for guests, girls, and grownups, always making her uneasy. But it is dangerous to blow someone else’s cover when you are holding onto one of your own. Thankfully, danger is often forgotten with enough red wine.

“So what would you do differently with your days if you were told you have some degenerative disease that will kill you in a season?” She

finally broke away from their leisurely small talk that was in itself a degenerative disease.

“Probably a lot more of this,” Brown finished off his glass and poured another, “maybe a bottle with every friend who counts and then, if I got the balls, I’d actually tell them how I feel about them. But knowing me, I’d just pass out instead, just as I’m about to by the way.”

“Oh, gonna pull the ‘I’m tired’ card so that you don’t accidentally tell me that you are in a shit ton of pain that only Mary Jane can put a cute, little, green bandaid on?”

“How in the hell do you know about that?” his eyes filled with fear, posture grew defensive, and all muscles flared up.

“Does it matter?” Adrenaline filled every inch of her poker face as a fight broke out and the truth spilled, both his and hers.

We are all motherborn and mudbound. Yet these two realities that connect us are the ones we keep from each other as we sit there like stage props and talk about nothing instead. The human tragedy is comic indeed, at least until the booze kicks in and makes us burst at the seams, spilling whatever hopes and fears we hold within. And if you are lucky enough for that to happen in company you enjoy seeing naked, then the sex is always as good as it was that night.

“They gave you two months” he spoke softly as they were both half asleep, “but that’s gotta be on the conservative end, right? You’re young. You know...”

“There are some pills and treatments that might help a bit,” she paused, “but I don’t want my husband wiping my ass and watching me slowly die.”

“So you leave him behind with a cheating wife instead of a dying one.”

“Easier that way,” she replied, moving only the facial muscles connected to her lips.

“For him or for you?”

She froze again, escaping into the soporific sound of the air circulating through the vents as the upside down setting sun flooded her sight again and tears glossed over her eyes.

“Good morning,” her eyes were wide open when he woke up.

“Jesus, did you get any sleep?” Brown’s was still adjusting to the light.

“I passed out for a bit, but then kept thinking about the same question I asked the magic mushrooms.”

“Which was,” unlike her, he did not look excited.

“Forget the question. I think I have the answer.”

“You know it’s only cuz you’re dying that I’m putting up with this crap,” Brown’s grumpiness was doing its best to cover up his anxiety as they walked down a residential street.

“Drunk man’s words are sober man’s thoughts,” she dismissed both of his moods, “and you’re the one who said you’d do this if you were the dying one...while drunk...so here we are,” she gestured to the front door of a house as he looked down at a bottle of rum he was holding.

“My college roommate? Really?”

“You’d rather start with an ex instead? I personally would enjoy that more actually,” she smirked as he scoffed and headed for the door.

Brown watched her as she crossed the street, realizing that he was going to miss her. That phenomenon repeated some dozen times over the next couple of weeks. Different doors, different bottles, different conversations, different reactions, but same warmth afterwards as he retold the day’s story, through the occasional pain and the subtle tremors, to the girl he was in love with for one month only. She felt that warmth too. When she woke up next to him now, she could both touch him and reach him. That made her happy. But it did not bring her peace.

“Tomorrow is our anniversary,” Brown gave voice to their thoughts. “We still sticking to the no more, no less deal?”

“Not much *more* left for me, and you missed the boat on the *less*,” her eyes were locked on his.

“You gotta come make one more stop with me then, okay? Tomorrow. Not today. Today I have other plans for you,” he pulled her closer.

“Alright. But first,” she stayed close, “turns out the big bummer about croaking is never seeing what tomorrow brings. So tell me, what will tomorrow bring you?”

Brown was reluctant to answer knowing it cannot be easy to hear what you are not allowed to see, but she convinced him with the same reason she fooled herself into thinking she wanted to know, “If I can imagine it now, I will be a part of it then.”

“I’m gonna do what I dread most: stay put with a girl.”

“You know, your tremors are actually pretty hot. Not because shaking is especially sexy, but because you’re so damn strong otherwise. A walking contradiction. The trembling lion. I love that about you. Makes me feel both safe and real. Don’t hide that from the ladies, okay?”

“Most girls don’t see it that way,” he spoke from experience.

“Of course not, but that’s what makes it an air-tight filter. If you’re gonna be staying put with a girl, you’ll need to filter out a lot of pretty faces,” she smiled. “It beats dying,” her smile turned into a laugh.

“Alright,” he kissed her.

“We struggle to sustain the fabric of our reality while utterly unaware of the thread that weaves it. Why do we bother? Is it even possible to reflect on something we cannot see?” She graffitied on a park bench with a permanent marker while Brown was getting them coffee from a nearby stand the following morning.

“I like it! The vandalism. Not the depression,” Brown was in a good mood. “But it’s a perfect opener for what’s about to go down,” he took her by the hand and headed for a cab. “24 Prospect Street, please,” he told the driver as her face grew pale. “You need to get out of your head and blindly reflect, just like the bench says,” he kissed her as she tried to protest his plan. “For once, focus on the what, not the why.”

They pulled up to yet another front door, but this one was not for his resolve, but hers. They both got out and stood on the sidewalk, shoulder to shoulder, looking at the door.

“I do love you,” he continued to look straight ahead. “Now go let him love you too.”

She held her ground for a moment, but then finally hugged him in grateful surrender. He watched her walk up the stoop and pause at the door, which he took as his cue to leave. But she stopped to see him instead. This time, she was the one realizing she was going to miss him. He looked back before crossing the street, they smiled at each other, but she waited for him to turn his back before waving goodbye. She was still learning.

Stuck in front of the door, she thought back on the common notion that every pot looks for its lid in an attempt to fill a void.

“That’s nonsense,” she mumbled to herself. “A lid cannot fill its pot,” she decided to move the rest of that conversation into her head, “it cannot even fit inside it. We may all be pots. And we may all be looking for our lids. But not to fill us. We can die alone and be fulfilled as long as we have substance, be it tea or soup or whatever hell else happens to be the content of our pot. But without a lid, what would happen to our substance in the end? Would it dry out a bit? Evaporate? Burn?”

“For fuck’s sake, get out of your head,” she was speaking out loud again.

The sound of the door-knocker echoed through her body as her throat dried up and ears started to beat with the heart. Then it all grew silent as soon as he opened the door. Rugby built, it was his hair that would disarm the crowd. Wavy, red, it was never long enough to tuck behind his ears, but would drape his face one or two stray strands at a time. The face itself was angular and rough, but the eyes were warm and steady.

“Hey,” her voice cracked as expected, “we need a drink.”

“That’s what I hear,” he stepped aside to invite her in.

Their walk down the hallway and into the kitchen was painfully silent. He grabbed the pot of coffee from the countertop, a bottle of whisky from the cabinet, and mixed their usual Irish coffee.

“What do you mean that’s what you hear?” She watched him as he poured.

“Some mystery friend of yours texted asking where you can find me. And that if you don’t find me, then I gotta find you by end of day. So I figured we needed a drink,” he raised his mug in salut and took a hefty swig.

“I wasn’t having an affair,” she blurted out mid-sip, “I mean c’mon, you know I don’t have the time for two cocks,” she added trying to lighten the mood.

“But you got the energy for it,” his face started to light up, immediately making her regret her ever-avoidant humor.

“No, you don’t understand,” she tried to squash his growing excitement.

“That’s an understatement,” his voice boomed. “Why in the hell would you tell me that you were?”

“Because the truth is crap! I’m dying. And I’m not good at that tupa stuff, John.”

What can you do when you hear that? What should you do? What do you do? However we answer the first two questions, we all do the

same thing in the end. So John clung onto age being on her side, the advancements of Western medicine, the mysteries of Eastern medicine, then he ripped a door off its hinges, cried with her, escaped under the sheets, cried some more. But after the storm, if we stay clear of the whirlpool, we float on.

“Maria,” he whispered to check if she was awake, getting a confirmation grunt in reply, “you don’t need to fight it for me, we can just be.”

“Should we just eat out here?” John stepped out onto the balcony with take-out bags, bringing Maria back into the moment. She nodded and they dove into the food. Perhaps there is a reason our stomachs are so close to our hearts. A full stomach makes the heart spill over.

“So what would you do differently with your days if you were told you have some degenerative disease that will kill you in a season?” Maria asked once more, still circumventing the answer herself.

“I have no idea,” John replied, “probably figure it out as I go along, same as *you*.” That answer made her freeze again, and he saw it. “So what’s it gonna be, babe? What would *you* do?”

“The thought hasn’t crossed my mind,” she desperately tried to make a joke that was immediately stumped out by his heavy stare. “Or maybe it has,” she sighed in surrender.

“Come here,” he gestured for her to sit on him, “you’ve been the protector of all long enough, counselor, time to let me have a turn.”

Her heartbeat rushed into her head again, chest flushed blood red, eyes looked for an escape, but she fixed them on John’s hands instead and slowly settled next to him in the seat, body still stiff.

“Freaking out?” John maintained his heavy look and steady hold, “it’s alright.”

They sat in silence, waiting for her muscles to relax and for her to answer her own question.

“I think,” she stopped herself, “or I feel the reason we are here is to *see* here. And for here to *see* us. Truly see the true *here* and the true *us*,” she paused for a bit. “So if you’d come with me off the beaten path somewhere, see me, and let me see you?”

He kissed her with his whole body long enough for her to get her answer.

“We’ve looked at enough sunsets here,” she continued, “I hear the sun also rises.”

The sun was still low when they locked the front door behind them and threw a few bags in the trunk of the car. He was in his formal kilt wear again; she, in her slutty wedding dress. They knew they probably would not return here together, but that did not matter, not today. Today, they were steadfast and alive. Today, they were going to go see the sun rise.

Since the universe has an impeccable sense of humor, some of the most beautiful sunrises in the Golden State are found in Death Valley. At low angles, the red-violet glow of our burning star gives profound depth to those meandering ridges and dunes. The salty hot springs of that valley of death are equally spellbinding if you let them engulf you in their warmth while your thoughts fly off into the starry night. That was their first stop, an historic tavern in Saline Valley, owned by Leo Nidas and his beloved Diane Kes.

“Listen, girl, yuh right about those springs and stars, but it’s tricky,” there was a fearless spark in Kes’s eighty year old eyes, “if yuh want them to really grab yuh, both of yuh have to strip down to yuh bare skin.”

“This place wasn’t a nudist colony simply because hippies like to run around with their knobs hanging loose,” Nidas cut in. “Our bodies are ours for a reason. We owe it to -- I don’t know *who* we owe it to -- but if we want to get anywhere, we first have to get out of our skin,” his wrinkled face glowed with boyish buoyancy.

“Time for a nightcap then, let’em be young,” Kes’s spark turned into a flame as she put her hand on her beloved’s shoulder.

“Don’t have to tell me twice,” John was pulling his shirt off as soon as they were out of sight, “and how is it the two of us never gone skinny dipping together before?”

“There is a lot the two of us haven’t done together that we probably did with others plenty,” there was irritation in her tone.

“It’s not that I don’t want to do some really nasty stuff to you, it just feels like it’d be, I don’t know, disrespectful or something to the *wife*? So we just leave the crazy shit for the crazy chicks,” they were submerged in the water now.

“That must be why marriages have always been such a raging success,” she kept a straight face, “can’t go wrong with all that respect for the wife.”

“What? You want me to, eh, I don’t know, do whatever?”

“You say ‘I don’t know’ one more time,” her eyebrows went up loud and clear.

“Fine. I know exactly what I want to do to you,” he wrestled her onto himself, “and it’s nothing pretty. But you gonna tell me you haven’t been holding back around me too?”

“I’m not gonna tell you that,” Kes’s flame sparked in her eyes. And he saw it.

Exhausted and a bit bruised, they left Death Valley at the end of the week with a sense of relief and comfort that was new to both. You could see it in their faces, muscles both relaxed and lifted, fears and anxieties smoothed away like the sand along those wind blown dunes that were glowing with the rising sun as they drove north.

San Francisco is not the most welcoming of cities, but it is a beautiful one. Not being invited, however, does not have to stop you from finding your way in. So they started their stay there by bribing

their way into Coit Tower at dawn and watching the sun rise over the bay, subduing the sharp skyline with shadows and light.

The allure of the rising sun is fleeting however. The charm that lasts in this city is found at the Palace of Fine Arts. There, the seagulls charge the air with their cries and beating wings while massive statues watch both our world and their own. The male statues stand along the base of the giant dome, facing out, eyes fixed in every direction. The female statues, however, rest at the top of the free standing colonnades, facing in, all looking down at the same mystery somewhere inside the structure. It was while they were gazing up at those curious, stone women that a couple of curious, flesh women snuck up on them.

“What do you suppose that lass sees down there?” Sheryl Holmes asked abruptly, pinning John and Maria down with eyes that went through your skin and straight to the gray matter.

“A parallel universe,” Maria appreciated the unexpected question.

Holmes shifted her probe towards John, letting her eyes do the questioning.

“Their hopes and fears, ma’am” John gave his answer as demanded.

“Marvelous!” Holmes was satisfied and required no further explanation, but her partner was just getting started.

“You have to forgive my dear friend, she doesn’t like to get bogged down with, well, with anything really. Visionaries are quite a bit curt like that,” Joan Watson smirked a bit.

“I’m not curt,” Holmes started to protest, though not for long, “I don’t mean to be.”

“Judging by their reactions, they understand that,” Watson comforted her friend. “I must say, though, your two rather different answers compliment each other superbly! Do you work together by chance?”

“I’m a lawyer and he’s a graphic designer,” Maria shook her head, “our paths don’t often cross.”

“Your paths may not, but your minds most certainly do. *You*, young man, told us *what*: hopes and fears, while *you* told us *how*, my girl: through a parallel universe,” Watson was delighted. “A good mind is a conflicted one. The paradox of its dichotomy is the source of its ingenuity.”

“Indeed!” Holmes interrupted, “you two would make impeccable business partners,” she waved goodbye and abruptly walked on.

“Figure out what you want to do, lad, and this woman will figure out how it can be done,” Watson smiled at them and hurried off after her friend.

Her words filled the moment with painful tension as both John and Maria realized that the eccentric strangers weren’t wrong, but there was not enough time to prove them right. So they walked, hand in hand, stopping from time to time to feed the ducks and the swans, tormented by what could have been, what should have been, what might have been. At first, the regret tore at them silently. Then, finally, words started to trickle out, and each could now see both the innovation and the contrition in the other.

The bay did not keep them long. Soon they were headed south, along the coast, past the border, and towards the Sea of Cortez, where the sun rises in the west. The horizon glows the same at dusk and dawn, but the air is different when the sun rises than when it sets. Mornings are more tranquil and, at the same time, more energized. Makes no sense, but is nonetheless.

They sat in the sand, as close to each other as two people can without compromising their own posture, lost in the unfamiliar sights, sounds, and smells of the small fishing village. Juan Quixote, well into his sixties, had just finished his morning swim. One side of his mouth stretched so high towards the ear, it practically covered his entire eye

with the wrinkles it created along the way. Without bothering to dry himself off, he put on a warm sweater and proceeded to look for something in the sand, occasionally picking up a rock, examining it, then tossing it aside in dissatisfaction. Sooner, or perhaps later, he found the piece he sought and let out a triumphant crow, finally becoming aware of his captive audience.

“Buenos días,” he waved to them as they replied in their broken Spanish while overcompensating with enthusiasm. “Ah! Americanos! Good morning, amigos! What brings you here today?”

“Salida del sol?” John gave it a try as they stood up to show respect, “the sunrise.”

“Same as me then. Salida del sol! Everyday. Fifty years maybe. Maybe more.”

“Did you lose something in the sand?” Maria was curious.

“Oh, no, no. Not lose. Found!” he showed them the rock he was holding in his hand, “it is for my wife. She is still asleep. The sun calls only me, not her. She tried coming with me, but she was miserable. I could see. And not coming, I’m miserable. So I come and I bring her a piece every day so she knows she’s here and does not feel bad that she sleeps.”

“So you never wake up together?” Maria’s curiosity shifted to John.

“Oh, no, no. Always. By the time she wake up, I’m back in bed, eh, soñador. This rock is how she knows I came here and did what I like. Then she doesn’t feel bad doing what her, eh, busy mind wants her to do in the middle of the night when I sleep and she wakes up.”

“After falling asleep with you first?” John maintained his curiosity.

“Yes, yes, after that.”

“Fifty years. That’s a lot of rocks,” Maria added.

“She has a rock garden now, grows aloe in it, says it helps her skin like the sea helps mine. It is important, you know, to be both one and

two people at the same time,” their maintained curiosity invited him to keep going. “If you make two people just one, then you are just loving yourself. If two people can’t become one, then you are not loving anyone. But if they are both one and two, then you love both. Your wife. And yourself. Yeah?”

“Yeah,” John heard every word.

“Que bueno!” he was happy. “Are you staying or passing through, amigos?”

“Staying for a few days,” John replied, “just don’t know where yet.”

“Ah! Come. We have a room. And a rock garden!” Quixote laughed and waved his rock, “Maria will be happy. What are your names?”

John and Maria stayed in that fishing village more than a few days. They ate, slept, wandered, wondered. Time seemed to pause, at least until she started to cough. John kept his promise though. He said nothing about the onset of symptoms, did not ask her to consider treatment, did not even let his face betray his thoughts. He just kept eating, sleeping, wandering, and wondering, at least until she straddled him one day and hugged him with her arms and legs and heart.

“Let’s go home,” she whispered, “I got some pills waiting for me at the pharmacy.”

He did not reply, just hugged her back and carried her to bed.