Eyes

I met a girl, “That Girl”, the same way anybody meets anybody nowadays, we matched on a dating app. I wooed her with an objectively hilarious joke about her name sounding similar to a well-known natural disaster. We’re all bound to stumble into bouts of prophecy on occasion, and like her hurricane namesake, she would eventually sweep through and ravage my life. I found something in Her that I hadn’t realized I was looking for. She accepted enough of me to make me think the rest could be accepted as well. Before I knew it, my heart wasn’t mine alone anymore. She never asked me for my heart, I don’t think she intended to ever take it from me, it’s quite a slimy lump and although it’s warm to the touch, it’s the wrong kind of warmth. She was the wrong kind of warmth too.

While I was preparing to fully hand over my aorta and all, she had been mourning the loss of the last one she held. When That Girl moved back to college, she broke up with Cory, her boyfriend of a few years. They were on different paths and she couldn’t do long distance again. I helped fill the void of his absence, but unfortunately I played that part with too much familiarity. We were cuddling in her bed one night. She layed between me and the wall, and I teetered over the edge of the bed, over the abyss. I got sick of almost falling, so I moved further onto the life raft, away from the lapping waves. I guess I moved too far up because she promptly demanded that I “Scoot over!” This was a lesson in specificity because she never specified which direction.

“Scoot over Corben.”

I pretend not to hear.

“Scoot over!”

I move towards the wall, like the trash compactor in the Death Star, only this time accompanied by the pleasant scents of her pumpkin spice candle.

“SCOOT OVER!” She yelled at me with a laugh.

Now for my crescendo, fulfilling an unspoken pact to be the funniest objects in the room, the wall and I collectively smoosh her together in a perfect little “That Girl” sandwich...

“Cory Stop!”

Silence...

The wall withdraws.

More silence...

And that silence stayed between us for the rest of the night.

In her defense, it is almost too easy to extract the name Cory from Corben. I think we were asking for that to happen, and the request was humbly obliged by the universe, listening and leering intently. Things stayed unspoken for a few moments, before I awkwardly laughed and told her “Nope, I’m not Him.”

Him is always the coolest guy in the room. Him’s parents let him do sports growing up. Even if the experience of having to go to Him’s older sibling’s soccer games every Saturday morning was dreadfully boring to them, and almost ruined his chances, they still let Him sign up. Him can do a kickflip and a backflip, but never at the same time, stop being unreasonable. Growing up I always wanted to be a “Him.” I saw Him being loved by all and knew that I could be Him too if other people loved me the same. I knew of times I felt like Him. The first time I ever tried a backflip was with That Girl. I landed on my neck the first time, but I hardly thought with my head around her anyways. I landed on my feet the second time though.

A few weeks after the trash compactor incident, having just barely recovered, I was invited over by That Girl for her roommate's birthday. I never needed an excuse to be with her, but it felt to me as though she did. The apartment was decorated the best it could be on a college budget, the sparse streamers hanging from the ceiling added a celebratory flair. There were a few unfamiliar faces, but I didn’t care much to be known by the likes of them. That Girl decided it would be good to introduce me, or it might be better to say she wanted to show me off.

“This is Corben, He’s my honorary boyfriend.”

I think I really fell for her uncanny talent to always say almost exactly what I wanted to hear, but with a monkey-paw’s twist. I was a tall, dark, and handsome trophy that she liked the feeling of having. Her words left me wondering why I was good enough for an honorary title, but not the actual role. I realized that no matter how shiny of a trophy I was, I would never be top shelf in her display case.

Things ended between us a few weeks after that. I wanted too much, and I was willing to give up too much of myself. Realizing that things were over over, I felt fully abandoned, like a favorite toy replaced when a newer, hip, space ranger is received on that child’s birthday. “Bye, Corben, I don’t want to play with you anymore.” The words I could so easily see her saying to me as I stared at unanswered messages I sent, and once again felt that a heart's a heavy burden to bear by oneself. Feelings are said to fade, but I found that the way they fade is closer to a scar than anything else. You can heal, but the memory will always be visibly etched on your skin or your soul. For nearly a year after things ended I was tormented by the question of why? Why couldn’t she appreciate me? Why wasn’t I enough? Why did she abandon me? Why wasn’t I the Him for Her?

Losing that great-value eternal flame had me looking for a substitute warmth wherever I could find it. I played around in the local dating scene telling myself that I would know what I was looking for when I found it, but really I just wanted an excuse to seek out validation. I thought the way I could get over her was finding something better, when I should’ve been looking for someone better for me. What I found in my man-whorish escapades was that there was nothing to be found, at least not where I was looking, or at least not for the man I was being. I certainly felt no confidence that anyone willing to indulge a night with me would be able to show me what I was missing. I was no longer proud of who I was, which was new to me, because I realized at one point in the not so distant past I was someone to be proud of and those feelings came from me alone. Desiring to be proud of myself once again, I put my search on pause and decided that I needed to act like someone worthy of pride and admiration, I needed to become Him.

I was surrounded by amazing people who filled me with awe and inspiration, and all these people loved me for some reason or another. In fact, I was told that I was too good for That Girl, and I almost believed it. It did feel as if I was being told I was too tall to ride a ride, after waiting in line for hours with no fast pass. If I had continued on that ride at my height though, I doubt I would’ve stepped off it with my head intact. Luckily I spared the fellow passengers of that gray matter splatter.

No reprieve from my grief was felt until one day I found her back in my life. It was a gradual reintroduction, and I told myself that things would be different this time, because I was different. I’ll never be able to change the fact that I’m a Taurus and a red flag waving is an invitation to charge right in, but I had learned lessons in my year of mourning. No matter how much you might buff and polish a person's appearance, they’d never show you a true reflection of yourself. Everyone who isn’t thinking with my brain and seeing with my eyes is a stranger to me, and it’s ridiculous to need a stranger to tell me how I feel about myself. Things would be different the second time around because I decided they would be. My decision turned out to be the correct one, not because the way That Girl and I interacted was much different, but I had learned from the failure of my earlier expectations with her, and I saw things differently. This time around I was able to show her a different me, one who was more emotionally self-sustained. Whether she liked the updated version of me or not was okay, because I liked who I was when I was with her. The choice to continue as things were, or call it quits before I got too attached again was difficult for both of us, but that decision was made for us. She and I were faced with an impending deadline, she would be moving at the end of that semester, and so we made the mutual decision that we wouldn’t date. Unspoken feelings weren’t 100% on board, and I eventually voiced my desires to ignore the deadline. What we had was far too real for me, but I knew the newfound shared time we had was only borrowed. Like sand emptying out of a broken hourglass, that time ran out on us. New me could be grateful for what was happening, not anxious for what I was losing.

It took an aching heartbreak to realize that I would experience another, and another. If I didn’t take control of how I felt about myself instead of off-loading that responsibility onto others. Like waves in the wake of a hurricane, I still find my feelings tossed about on occasion, but my experiences have anchored me so I don’t drift too far out of harbor. I know that I’m not defined by who I dedicate myself to. I am responsible for how I feel about myself and I don’t need anyone else to tell me who I am, all those answers are already inside me. I don’t regret the time others tell me I wasted, because I found great conviction in my capability to love, despite that love being unreciprocable. I knew that I had proven something to myself, that me loving her had little to do with who she was as a person and how she appreciated me, but everything to do with who I am as someone worth appreciating.