

A chalkboard with the text "WE HAD BEEN FIGHTING" written in white chalk. The text is arranged in three lines, with "WE HAD" on the first, "BEEN" on the second, and "FIGHTING" on the third. Each line of text is underlined with two horizontal lines. The board is decorated with various chalk drawings: a large cloud in the top right, a bird in flight in the top left, a flower on the right, a bee on the left, and a zigzag line at the bottom. A black eraser and two pieces of chalk are visible at the bottom edge.

WE HAD
BEEN
FIGHTING

We Had Been Fighting

By The Pretentious Gentleman

The Following Stories Are Based On True Events, But Artistic License Has Been Used To Not Only Protect The Identities Of The Innocent But Also For The Sake Of Narrative Cohesiveness.

Some Of These Stories Stay As True To Their Inspiration As Possible, But Some Do Not.

Book Contains Coarse Language.

Foreword By A Freshly Broken Heart

I haven't been able to move on, even though the time that has passed has outweighed our time together. Knowing you, you would read these words and assert that my heart still yearns to be beside you. It's one of the qualities that reinforces my feelings towards you.

In no uncertain terms, with the most honesty I can muster, I, completely, ***hate you***. I hate your very essence and its continued pervasiveness within my mind. I haven't loved you for a very long time and never will again. I would not be who I am today had I not been by your side for so many years, moulded by each interaction, blessed or hellish; but I wish wholeheartedly that I could purge every memory of every moment we had together from within my aching mind.

It isn't fair that all of my memories of us together, laying in the sunlit grass embraced in each other's arms, nestled in each other's warmth and affection, has been stained by everything you became. I wish I could let you go as easily as you let me go. I wish the sound of your voice, the vivid image of your face, the very knowledge of your person, could be flushed from my

system and I could go about my day without the constant gnawing at my soul that you cause every time you enter my mind.

I wish I could pass by the small reminders that we were together without the crippling pain that comes flooding behind my eyes when I remember you. I have searched through the deepest recesses of my past in vain for any brief moment not poisoned by my hatred for you, all to no avail. There is nowhere that the sweet and comforting person I fell in love with could lift me out of this dark pit your later self cast me into. No matter how far back I go, no matter how wonderful the time was, how strongly my heart felt for you at any point in the past, the memory is spoiled by an acidic and ever insidious, black flame of spite.

I hate thinking about you, and I hate knowing how happy you are in your new life. I hate myself for not being able to purge you from my system and to just move on and accept that you, like everyone else, are flawed and capable of making mistakes; mistakes that anyone our age could have made and ones that shouldn't define you for the rest of your existence,

whether in reality or within my imagination. I wish that I could see past those mistakes and forgive them.

But I can't stop hating you.

I can't stop hating you because I held you so tightly in my heart and held you to such a high standard that when the rose coloured veil fell from the world, all I could see were the worst parts of you.

There is good there, on the periphery, that tries and struggles to force its way through all of the bad that has taken up residence at the forefront of my soul. Good that I recognize as having been all I used to need to be brought out from sadness. Your cute smile and the smell of your shampoo as you lay on my chest. But the cruel memories are too resistant to even the most blissful of those old thoughts.

I loved you with all of my heart, and you broke it. When you did, you killed a part of me that will never live again. You broke me, and it's so fucking hard to forgive someone for breaking you.

I want to wish you well. I want to be healthy enough to wish you all of the happiness in the world, and to let it all go.

But hard as I try, I just can't do it.

And I hate you for it.

STORIES

Story I

We had been fighting. Of course we had been fighting.

It started out like any other day. The school bell rang and we all made our way towards our classes. The first two periods were spent in an attempt to learn something, while our lack of sleep prevented any real progress. When the first two periods were through, the lunch bell rang and it was time to go see the people we cared about, and hopefully, the people who cared about us. I walked up to her as she stood at her locker, putting her things inside it to prepare for lunch. I walked up to her and I hugged her, and she hugged me back. It was going so well. I felt so good to see her.

And then it happened.

You see I had made a huge mistake. In the morning when I was getting ready for school, sleep deprived and just hoping to get through the morning unscathed, I had made a mistake. I had kept the room dark, because in the morning my eyes were sensitive to the light, so I didn't notice the horrible thing I had done.

I had put on my polo shirt, buttons and all, on inside out.

I hadn't noticed it for the entire day so far. I guess nobody had bothered to notice it, or if they had, they hadn't bothered to point it out.

But she noticed. Of course she noticed. She noticed every, little, fucking, thing.

She pointed it out, and at first I just chuckled about it, as you do when something mildly amusing is pointed out.

But it wasn't amusing. Not to her anyway.

Her smile had been replaced with a hateful grimace. She was appalled that I would do such a thing. She called me stupid. She said "How the hell did you fail to put on a fucking shirt? It has fucking buttons on it! Did you put it on in the fucking dark? What the hell is wrong with you?! Go fix it!" She was livid about it. She was so angry at me.

I hadn't realized what a huge mistake I had made. I hadn't realized that my wearing a shirt on inside out might reflect poorly on the well crafted and well maintained self image that her highness had created for herself.

I felt ashamed of myself. I hung my head down and shuffled over to the bathroom where I could adjust my shirt. I fixed it, rather easily, and went back to join her for lunch.

But the damage was done.

I went through the motions of socializing, but she never let me forget how disappointed she was for the rest of our time together.

Years later I can laugh at this sort of thing - the absurdity of it. A person getting angry over a shirt put on inside out. It's pretty funny when you think about it.

But it wasn't funny then. At the time it hurt. It hurt so badly to be belittled in front of all of her friends for making such a small mistake.

I still think about it, years later. And it still hurts. It still hurts because I loved her, and for the first time I knew...

She didn't love me back.

Story I

We had been fighting. Of course we had been fighting.

It was a normal school day. I had just finished the first two periods of class. I was at my locker and I was putting my books away. I noticed him walking towards me with open arms, ready to give me a hug. I hugged him back. He gave great hugs. I was so happy to see him. He really was a great guy.

And then I saw it.

He had his shirt on backwards, and inside out. His fucking polo shirt.

I mean it has buttons for fuck's sake! I spent every morning freaking out about my outfit so that he wouldn't make any comments about how I looked. He never hesitated to point out what he didn't like about what I wore, or how I talked, and he just shows up wearing his shirt like that?! Does he not realize how shitty it is dealing with all the negative comments that people already say about him? It was bad enough being with a weird guy who was known for dressing in

cosplay for no reason. Now I was dealing with him dressing like an idiot.

I was mad, and I chewed him out for it. Then he got all mokey. It was so stupid. Dress like an adult, you're not a fucking child anymore. It's even worse coming from the guy who is so freaking critical about any outfit I wear that he doesn't like.

Looking back, I know why I was so mad at him. He never seemed to care about how his actions affected my life. Only how mine affected his. And even though it was stupid to get mad about, I hated realizing what a second thought I was to him.

I still think about it years later, and it still hurts. It still hurts because I loved him, and it was the first time I knew...

He didn't really love me.

Story II

We had been fighting. Of course we had been fighting.

We were at my house. There was myself, and another boy and another girl our age. We had been hanging out and I suggested lunch. I asked if people wanted lunch, and after they said yes, I suggested Kraft Dinner to no objections.

I grabbed two boxes; enough to feed the four of us. I boiled the water, poured in the pasta, stirred it around, strained it, poured it back in the pan, poured in the powder and made it all nice and appetizing. I grabbed four bowls and asked how much each of them wanted to eat.

And that's when she decided to tell me what I fucked up.

My lovely girlfriend, who I was just trying to be nice to, to be nice to her friends in kind, waited until everything was done to finally say, with that vicious condescension:

“You know I’m lactose intolerant, why would you make this? What is wrong with you?”

Then her friend, self consciousness getting the better of her, suddenly didn’t want to eat. To be the only girl eating made her feel uncomfortable.

I was so angry. I had wasted all of that time, I had wasted the extra food, all because neither one of them bothered to object for a half hour! If I had known you were lactose intolerant, if I had remembered it, if I hadn’t forgotten, then why the fuck would I make Kraft Dinner, and what the hell did you think the end result was going to be anyway?

How is waiting to chew me out after it’s made in anyway helpful?

It’s been several years, and whenever I think about it, I still get mad. I get mad because it felt like she was actively watching me fail just so she could rub my nose in it. I felt so humiliated and I hated her for making me feel that way.

I still think about it years later and it still hurts. It still hurts because I loved her, and it was the first time I knew...

That she didn't love me.

Story II

We were fighting. Of course we were fighting.

I went over to his house with some friends, two of my best friends. It was the afternoon, we were just acting like idiots and keeping ourselves entertained. Eventually we got hungry so we started to talk about what to have for lunch. Then he decided, without any input, that he would make Kraft Dinner for us.

Kraft Dinner, despite my being lactose intolerant and not able to have it.

I was so mad. How many times do I have to tell him I can't have dairy? It's like he never even listens to me or retains any information about my life! He knew that I was lactose intolerant! As usual it was like I was a second thought to him in everything we did.

I was angry with him. I watched him and waited for him to realize his mistake, hoping at some point without any handholding it would dawn on him.

But nothing happened. He went on like nothing was wrong

He ended up wasting two boxes of KD because he didn't bother asking us what we wanted to eat. He never bothered thinking about anyone but himself.

Did I let it go on longer than I should have? Should I have spoken up earlier?

Sure. But why the hell am I with someone who forgets about me so easily?

I don't think about it much anymore, but when I do I remember how little he seemed to care about me. He didn't even bother learning my dietary restrictions, even though I knew about his. What kind of boyfriend completely ignores his girlfriend's needs like that?

I still think about it years later, and it still hurts. It still hurts because I loved him and it was the first time I knew...

He didn't love me.

Story III

We had been fighting. Of course we had been fighting.

The day had gone on like any other day. I was sitting in class next to one of my friends. One of my friends who happened to be a girl. My girlfriend hated her, of course. She seemed to hate any girl I was friends with.

But I didn't care at that moment. As far as I knew, my ex was in class, so I didn't have to worry about her getting mad at me for sitting next to a years long friend. We were in class, joking about this and that, while people passed by the window next to us in the hallway. We stopped to listen to our teacher inform us about this or that. Typical school day really.

I remember leaving the classroom with no specific thought in my head. I walked up to my girlfriend and smiled before going in to give her a hug.

She recoiled at the sight of me. She was mad at me. Again.

I was very confused. What could I have done this time?

Well, apparently, I had made the mistake of not noticing that the people passing by the window in the hallway, was her and her friend. I had been too busy chatting with my friend, my female friend, the friend I'd known for years but who my girlfriend hated. I was too busy chatting in class to notice my girlfriend walk by.

For me, I was just not paying attention. For her, I was too busy focused on another girl, to notice her.

She scolded me; said I had been too busy with my "real girlfriend" to notice her. I apologized profusely, but she didn't wanna hear it.

Later on I found out that she broadcast "the incident" to anyone who would listen. She had been so appalled by my behaviour that she wanted the world to know what a piece of garbage I was.

I still think about it all, years later. I should have ended things that year. I honestly should have asked out that friend of mine. She treated me far fairer than the girl I

chained myself to; the girl who always assumed the worst of me. I should have cut out that toxicity from my life and moved on from it.

I still think about it, years later. It still hurts. It still hurts because I loved her and for first time I knew...

She didn't love me.

Story III

We had been fighting. Of course we had been fighting.

I thought we were good. I thought we still had something special together. We had spent such a great time with each other this summer. We went to this animal park and we had such a good time there. We were spending so much time together and I was so happy.

And then he broke my heart.

We had hit a rough patch a few months back and were trying to keep things casual by not bothering with labels. Silly me thought there was an understanding though. I thought he was still mine and that I was still his.

Then he told me - right after he finished fucking me - that he thought he was in love with another girl. That girl he had been friends with for years, that he had had a crush on for years, that he was always screwing around with in class and hanging out with on his spare period with. He told me, as he explained that he had feelings for another girl, that he was just letting me

know because he wanted to be honest with me about it.

How fucking noble.

And you know what? I told him it was okay.

I actually told him it was okay! How stupid is that? That it was okay for him to go be with her. That if he loved her he could cast aside all we had together to be with her.

Then, get this, he decides to stay anyway. Something about me being the right choice because I loved him enough to be willing to let him go. What a fucking prick!

Honestly I wish he had left. Things would have been so much better if he had just fucking left.

How could I trust him with anyone now? How could I trust that he might not just up and leave me for the next pretty girl he sees? How could I trust him to be around **her** anymore?

I try not to think about it anymore. We kept dating, but that was definitely something you don't forget in a relationship. It definitely soiled the foundation. He didn't even end the friendship or stop hanging out with her.

I hope he's happy, I genuinely do. But at the time, he definitely had some growing up to do.

I still think about it, years later, and it still hurts. It still hurts because I loved him and it was the first time I knew...

He loved somebody else.

Story IV

We had been fighting. Of course we had been fighting.

It had been like any other day. We were walking home from school, enjoying each other's company. We were laughing and telling stories. I loved her laugh. I loved the way she smiled, her ridiculous faces and the fact that we could be silly together.

I can't remember what happened; what the lead up was, what small but significant thing occurred that ruined everything. Maybe I said something. Maybe I brushed against her shoulder. Maybe I just had it coming. Again, I don't remember.

I just remember her punching me.

I remember her fist hitting my cheek. I can't remember which cheek, but I remember holding it. I remember where it happened quite vividly: the playground across the street, the bus station to the right of us, the corner of the side walk we were standing on. I remember holding my cheek in bewilderment wondering what the hell had happened. I remember letting

out a groan as the pain shot through my face. I remember asking her what the hell she had done that for.

But most of all, I remember the way she looked at me.

She looked at me like I wasn't there. No expression on her face, no hurried apology or explanation. No justification for what she had done. Just silence. Silence amidst a cold, hard stare.

I remember we continued walking. I remember no attempts at a conversation being had after that point. We just kept walking until we got to the end of my street. I kissed her goodbye and told her I loved her. She blankly replied the same and headed to her friend's house.

Years later I still wonder about what happened. I still wonder what it was that made her do that. But the thing that unsettles me the most is that blank stare she had. No response, no sign of remorse, no reaction at all.

Just... nothing.

I still think about it, years later. It still hurts. It still hurts because I loved her and it was at that time I knew...

She didn't love me.

Story IV

We had been fighting. Of course we had been fighting.

Our school was doing a production of some play where any student could audition. We both got in and had parts in the play together. I can't even remember who he was or who I was in the play. I just remember being so angry with him.

I sat there among our friends and schoolmates, putting together costumes and rehearsing lines - as he openly flirted with that stupid goth bitch. She was brand new to the school and I had been so nice to her. I befriended her, I invited her to take part in activities with me and my friends. I had been so inclusive.

And now she was the new object of his affection.

He didn't even bother hiding it, blatantly running around and giggling with her and painting each other's faces instead of the sets. Everyone around me knew it. Do you know what it's like to feel that cast aside? I spent so long being there for him and he just flirted with her right in front of me. He rushed at the

opportunity to paint sets with her and spend time with her.

It just reinforced what I already felt like:

A Second Thought.

My friends hated him. Who could blame them? They saw him walking her to her classes, hugging her the whole way. Who the hell even does that?! When I confronted him about he just denied that there was anything going on, and got mad at me for even asking - but I fucking knew. How could he do that to me? After all we had been through?

I stuck by after he suddenly fell in love with another girl, and now it's happening again?

Suddenly I started questioning everything about myself. I started hating her so much. Everything she did I started harping on. I hated her so goddamn much because...

I couldn't hate him. I didn't want to. I wish I could have, but I just couldn't.

I try not to think about it anymore, after all these years. But anytime I see my husband's eye wander, it brings me right back there. Back to that shitty place. Back to ***second*** place.

I still think about it years later, and it still hurts. It still hurts because I loved him. And it was the first time I knew...

He didn't love me.

Story V

We had been fighting. Of course we had been fighting.

I was a teenager, and like most teenagers I was constantly exhausted. I just wanted to sleep through the whole day and stay up all night but I was always just so damn tired.

It was in the mid-evening that she came around. It was a normal occurrence that I would make plans to see her later than first intended because I was too tired to get out of bed. I didn't think it was a big deal. She had made other plans in the meantime and I assumed that that was okay.

But of course... it wasn't.

It never was with her. Nothing I ever did was acceptable. Nothing I ever did was up to her fucking standards.

She was quiet at first when she showed up at my house. She spoke in muted tones; simple questions, simple responses. Then, after several minutes of piss

poor attempts at communication, she finally brought up how angry she was.

Apparently, I was a failure because I sleep too much and I'm tired all the time. She had wanted to spend all day together and how dare I be too tired to spend time with her. I tried apologizing, but she, just, kept, yelling.

I got fed up. I was just too tired and frustrated and I had essentially woken up to getting chewed out for exhaustion. I couldn't take it anymore. So I told her I was done. That's all I said.

“I'm done.”

Then I left. I left my own house just to get away from her. I went down the street and stood next to some bushes and just waited for her to come after me. I waited for awhile knowing she would come after me and bitch some more, but I did so with some hope that maybe we'd patch things up.

But she didn't. She never came.

I eventually gave up and started heading back up the street to talk to her, when I saw a silver car pick her up. I didn't know who it was but honestly, at the time, I didn't care.

I wandered around the neighbourhood, angry and upset. I walked around for hours in the dark wondering what the hell to do. I ran into a friend of mine as I wandered. She decided to wander with me. It was nice. She was one of the few girls my girlfriend had no worries about. Just a friend I could be more of myself around. I didn't tell her what had happened,. I just enjoyed our time together hanging out. I walked her home after and that was that.

Then I tried calling my girlfriend. I wanted to apologize for what I did. No answer. After several missed calls I wandered towards her place.

I wanted to see if she was home. I wanted to see her because I still loved her. I walked over to her street. Across the street from her driveway, I passed a car where two people were in the front, making out. I didn't think anything of it. I didn't recognize the silver car. Until I reached the end of her driveway.

The car door opening startled me a bit. I saw her get out of that silver car back lit by a green lamplight in front of a nearby house. She walked straight at me, head tilted, agitated. She looked annoyed with me. I remember that look of defiance on her face, that look of “In your fucking face! What are you going to do about it? You ruined my night, what do you want?” as she walked towards me.

My stomach emptied. My throat swelled, and my heart...

Shattered.

I didn't yell. That was odd for me. I expected to be mad, but instead I was just devastated. I nodded my head. I bit my lip. I breathed as best as I could as the tears welled up. I knew I had screwed up in a way that could never be fixed.

But for the first time in two years, for the first time in our entire relationship, just for a brief moment, one that I'll never forget, her face showed something that I had never seen before:

Remorse. Sudden, and instantaneous, remorse.

Her face went from angry, hateful, spiteful... to sad. Her eyes widened and her angry face dropped into a frown. For the first time we were together she looked at me and recognized what she had done to me and felt awful for it.

I still think about that night, after all these years. I remember watching myself die that night. This once romantic and idealistic boy who was so passionate and affectionate had his heart ripped from his chest. It was some of the worst pain I had ever felt. I remember floating through the air, free from the naivety that kept me chained to her awful person.

And then...

I remember regretting every single fucking decision I made from that point forward, none more so than the first decision:

The decision to stay.

The decision to hear her out.

The decision to try and make things work.

The decision to bring her home that night to stay with me.

The decision to keep dating her for a full, fucking year, after it happened.

The decision to let her convince me that I was at fault and that I was more unfaithful to her because I thought about leaving her for a girl who didn't treat me like garbage at every opportunity.

I regret not ending things sooner.

I regret ever having second doubts about my decision to end things.

I still think about it, years later. And it still hurts. It still hurts because I loved her. I loved her with all of my heart and it was the first time I knew, without a doubt in my mind...

That she would never love me, the way that I loved her.

Story V

We had been fighting. Of course we had been fighting.

I woke up that day hoping to spend the day with him. I just wanted to see him; to be with him. To just enjoy his company. But our plans got delayed because he was too tired. He was always too tired.

One hour turned to two. Then three. Then four. It wasn't until SIX hours after we were supposed to meet up that he finally invited me over. I still went over of course. I wanted to see him. I wanted to spend time with him.

But I couldn't hide how mad I was.

He was always sleeping. He was always too tired to bother hanging out with me. But he had plenty of time to hangout with his friends for hours on end or to play video games all night long until he was too tired to spend time with me.

So I called him out on it. I called him out for making me seem like I wasn't worth his time. For making me feel like I wasn't a priority.

And he got mad at me for it. He stormed out of his own fucking house because I called him out on how lazy he was being and what a shitty boyfriend he was being.

As he was leaving he just kept saying "I'm done, I'm done. I can't do this anymore." He left me alone in his house, with his dad in the next room. He left me standing there by myself in his house.

I waited there dumbfounded. His Dad was just as confused as I was. Eventually, I got tired of waiting so I called a friend. A friend who had been there for me before, who I could rely on to be there for me again. He picked me up. I was done with my boyfriend. I was alone and sad and I needed someone to make me feel better. I told my friend that. I told him everything. And he listened. He was there for me.

And that's why I kissed him.

For all I knew, I was single at that point. My boyfriend had said “I’m done. I can’t do this anymore.” What was I supposed to think?

So when we were back outside my house, sitting in the front of my friend’s car, how could I have known that my boyfriend would be standing at the end of my driveway? I looked over and saw him there, and I told my friend I had to deal with him.

I was so angry at him. He leaves me at his house, I finally get to spend time with someone who cares about me and he ruins it. That’s why I walked toward him with no guilt whatsoever, angry at what he ruined. I was glad about what I had done.

Until I saw his face.

That stupid face. That face that I had fallen in love with, that I once would’ve done anything for, was broken in front of me. Regardless of how we got there, seeing him like that made me feel terrible. He knew that things weren’t going to be the same ever again, and I hated that I made him feel that way.

Things were never the same after that. I hated myself for what I did, but I hated him for making me do it. I don't think he ever forgave me. I don't think he ever forgave himself. He certainly never let me forget about it.

But I stayed. I stayed because I loved him. I loved him so much. I even begged him to talk to me when he finally decided to end the relationship. I was a mess after. I went right back into the arms of that friend, who unfortunately turned out to be a complete piece of shit.

But I still blamed my ex for it. I blamed him for all the damage I went through that led me into the arms of someone so much worse. He convinced me that staying with him was worth the misery.

I still think about it years later, and it still hurts. It still hurts because I loved him, with all my heart, but that night was the first time I knew, without a doubt...

That he would never love me, the way that I loved him.

REFLECTIONS

It's been many years since these events took place. All those involved have moved on and out of each other's lives. The parties involved haven't kept in touch, but seem to be happy in their lives.

But there are lessons to be learned from all of the mistakes they made. As you, dear reader, have probably surmised, neither involved were particularly reliable narrators. Neither was faultless in the deterioration of their relationship. Both poured poison into the well that furthered its toxicity.

Perhaps you have one you side with more over the other, based on your own experiences. Perhaps you think that both were complete twats. I certainly lean towards the latter.

It is in the following section though that I hope to learn from their interactions, to reflect upon all that happened to them and to see if there are some lessons that could be taken from their mistakes.

Perhaps you've made mistakes in your own relationship. Perhaps you constantly get asked for relationship

advice. Perhaps you have an ex you hate and who hates you.

I don't wish to generalize with these reflections. Every relationship is unique in its own right. Plenty are far worse than the one written about here, and plenty of people have much much more one sided relationships in regards to who bears the most responsibility for its toxicity.

Hopefully, regardless of where you fall, some of these reflections provide value to you.

If not, I apologize.

Story I - Reflection

How often have you snapped at something small, or started a fight over nothing?

How often has it been the result of an underlying cause that's been eating at you for a long time?

Sometimes a shirt isn't just a shirt. It's what the shirt represents.

In this case it represented all of the times she had to put up with how his lack of consideration affected her. In a closed environment, like high school, the affects of social judgments are often exacerbated. Couple that with the emotional stability of teenagers being less than stellar, and suddenly a shirt worn inside out becomes an unforgettable fight.

It doesn't help that it seems the boyfriend wasn't shy with his criticisms about her outward appearance.

Now, does that mean that chewing the boyfriend out in a way that left him feeling like shit was justified?

Making him feel inferior, making him feel the way that she felt makes sense: she wanted to bring about empathy in that way. But without the context, without further communication of how she actually felt, all he had to go on was her having an angry outburst over him making a small mistake.

The result, without any communication, without any discussion, is him feeling unfairly chewed out and the underlying source of her anger goes unaddressed.

He could have taken the time to realize that she probably wasn't angry at the shirt, and tried to find out what the real cause was. She could have been more forthcoming with her frustrations. The lack of communication exacerbated everything resulting in an inside out shirt that wasn't just an inside out shirt.

The lesson here is: Take the time to communicate your feelings, and try to be patient enough with your partner to recognize when anger with a shirt isn't actually about the shirt.

Story II - Reflection

Communicate, your point, at the earliest, convenience. Letting your partner fail in such a way is cruel and unnecessary. If they forgot, talk to them about it. Don't try to make them feel ashamed for forgetting because then, as evidenced, all they'll have for you is resentment. They'll probably remember the lesson, the lactose intolerance, but for all the wrong reasons.

They'll definitely remember the punishment a lot more and that will definitely reinforce the resentment.

Remember, people are forgetful. People can feel as though their minds have been erased the second they walk into another room. It is human to forget. Don't forget that. Just because someone forgets something, does not inherently mean that they don't care about you.

However, as evidenced, there were a few unresolved issues behind the anger too. Forgetting a specific issue, one consistently brought up on a regular basis, especially one that important, coupled with a consistent feeling of non-prioritization, could easily make some-

one feel like their partner doesn't care about them as much as they should. Rather than jumping to conclusions though, it is best to take the person aside and discuss the matter and the feelings felt. This also applies to situations where the problem isn't someone forgetting something important, but when the problem is them not recognizing that something is important.

If your needs aren't being recognized, it's entirely reasonable to feel neglected. It's the job of each significant other to try and recognize the needs of their partner, while also trying their best to communicate their own needs to their partner. Sometimes people struggle to communicate their needs, struggle to recognize other people's needs, or struggle to retain ongoing needs. This can be the result of a person's specific memory or it could mean there is a level of apathy that needs to be addressed.

Once again though, in this case, a lot of this probably comes down to teenagers being teenagers. Self-centredness comes with the territory. Emotions run high, slights are taken where none lie, and when they do, pettiness can become unavoidable.

The lesson here is: Better communication, more attention to a partner's needs, and patience with forgetfulness, is all better than pettiness.

Story III - Reflection

This story is a bit complicated. In the first version, it looks like an overreaction. It looks like an unexplained burst of anger. From his perspective it was. He didn't mean anything by his ignorance. He just didn't see his girlfriend walk by. On its own, the advice there is simple: Don't jump to conclusions. Look for an explanation before going in hostile.

But it's with the added context of her perspective, that the outburst becomes much more understandable.

So let's discuss that context.

He felt it necessary to tell her how he felt, even though it was obviously going to hurt her. This isn't necessarily a bad thing. Sometimes in relationships we end up in positions where we have feelings that are negative, but necessary to share. Confining them to yourself can lead to resentment.

An example of this might be that you start to find your partner unattractive. Rather than discuss how you feel, you bury it inside, hoping that the attraction will come

back. Sometimes it does. None of us are at our best 24/7 and the more time you spend with your partner, the more likely it is you'll see them at less than their best, and that will probably mean you'll go through times where you aren't attracted to them.

Keeping it to yourself isn't a bad strategy. You don't need to comment every time you don't find your partner attractive. It's pointless and hurtful. If it goes on for a while though, and you start to build resentment or difficulty staying with them, well, that's a tough conversation but a necessary one to have.

But this wasn't an example of that. He started to have feelings for someone else. He should have come to terms with that on his own time and figured out what he wanted before he involved her, and God knows he should have picked a much better time to bring it up.

It wasn't just lacking any compassion for his partner, it was being selfish. He wanted to tell her so he could feel better about feelings that he had. Regardless of whether he was starting to have second thoughts about the relationship, there are ways of accomplishing a

productive conversation about it that respects the feelings of all those involved.

So when she “jumped to her conclusion,” it wasn’t really a jump. It was based on a pattern of being treated second best. It may not have been the case in that scenario, but the groundwork had been laid.

While she maybe could have been more tactful in the way that she reacted, he should have recognized that it wasn’t her fault that her emotions were high, given the history of all that had happened.

The lesson here is: To consider the context of a situation, to communicate your feelings when necessary, even if they are negative, but to do so with consideration for your partner’s feelings. Even if the feelings you have involve wanting to end things.

Story IV - Reflection

Let me blunt: No person, at all, should physically abuse their partner. It isn't acceptable behaviour. That behaviour was a huge red flag, not just because it happened, but because there was a complete lack of remorse about it.

It's one thing when horsing around goes too far and someone gets hurt. That happens. Emotions may run high if an accident isn't perceived as such, but as long as trust and understanding has been established that sort of thing can be forgiven.

But to hit someone, and then stare blankly at them, with no offer of remorse or concern, is a sign that the other person doesn't recognize the impact that their actions had, and will likely have no problem committing this same act again. Do not submit yourself to that kind of heartbreak. It is the most painful kind you can experience.

All that said, why would he stay despite that? Well, he stayed because he was convinced by a narrative to do so. He was convinced that if “love conquers all” given that he loved her, he should be able to get past her hitting him.

Let me say this: No one is phenomenal enough to deserve your love if they abuse you. You deserve better than them. You do not owe it to an abuser to stay and mend them of their ways. That’s what he thought was expected of him; that forgiveness and acceptance was his job.

He was wrong.

Do not let love or infatuation blind you to abuse. You will find love again, and you will find it reciprocated by someone who deserves your love. Not by someone who takes it for granted.

The lesson here is to recognize your self worth, leave your abusers as early as you can, and that hitting your partner is unacceptable.

Now, as for the other side of things.

It's possible that the unaddressed anger felt towards him led to the sudden act of violence coupled with the lack of remorse. Is that an excuse? No. But we're trying to analyze these stories best we can.

In high school, flirtation is difficult to avoid as hormones are all over the place. It's also difficult to know the line when it comes to flirtation when it's such a new experience. Flirting is fine sometimes, but there is a line, and here that line was crossed. Given the established issues with wandering eyes, it seems pretty evident that he not only had a problem with that line, but other things as well.

She had every right to be upset that he was neglecting her feelings and making her feel second best to another girl. Regardless of any reason behind it, he should not have been flirting with another girl like that, and especially so shamelessly. It projects an air of dismissal towards his partner.

If you find yourself in a situation where your partner is doing this, confront them and assess the relationship. If you find yourself flirting to such an extent, you may realize that it is the result of not getting what you need

out of your current relationship. It's fine to come to this conclusion, but it's unfair to start overtly seeking outside parties before addressing the concerns within an already existing relationship.

It's unfair to your partner and their feelings. Be upfront about how you feel. It's possible that the relationship just needs adjusting, or it could be time to end things. It's uncomfortable to talk about or address, but it's worse to ignore it and let jealousy or even the possibility of infidelity, poison what you already have. If things need to end, end them. It won't be fun and it won't be pretty, but it's better than staying in a broken relationship.

If the resentment festers, it may end up coming out in harmful ways.

Also try to remember that you should try not to blame the object of your partner's desire for the situation. Don't hate them just for existing. It's not fair to them and it doesn't help anyone.

The lesson here is to keep an eye on your own flirtation, discuss issues you may have with a partner's flirt-

ing, and discuss why it's happening in the first place. If relationships are in need of a change, or an end, letting them fester doesn't help anyone besides Divorce Lawyers.

Also, while it is natural to hate the other person, it's not them that is really the problem.

Story V - Reflection

You know what some of the most common symptoms of depression are? Lethargy, fatigue, lack of energy and irregular sleep patterns. He was depressed. Given the context of the rest of the relationship, it certainly makes a lot of sense.

He woke up to the girl he loved, complaining about an exhaustion he had no control over.

Meanwhile she just wanted to spend time with him, and felt cast aside because he was sleeping all day, and while being asleep all day wasn't necessarily his fault, prioritizing his time in such a way implied that she wasn't worth as much to him as other things.

Given his history, not that far fetched.

And because they were both so quick to assume that the other was attacking them, it was their default to attack back.

He got mad at her and then he did something dumb and impulsive. He ran away from his own home.

Even dumber was that he expected her to follow him. He knew she loved him, and expected her to put up with that behaviour because love supposedly trumps everything.

But not only does it not, it shouldn't.

Meanwhile, she sought comfort in someone who showed signs of genuine compassion and interest in her. She did so after her boyfriend made it sound like they were over.

Whether he meant it or not, that's how she took it. After putting up with being placed second to so many things, someone who clearly wanted to put her first would be a comfort.

He was heart broken. So was she. She just found someone to heal her faster than he did.

And yet they still ended up staying together out of habit anyway. Which didn't help things. It just let their already well established toxicity continue to fester.

Expectations of unending bliss led to inevitable disappointment. His eye began to wander once the fantasy disappeared, and she could never trust it to be where it needed to be. Then they started to resent each other.

One of the most painful things about this entire story is that both of these people still loved each other throughout. They just sucked at showing it. Certainly at showing it consistently.

He didn't want to leave her because he was convinced it would hurt her. In reality he was afraid it would hurt himself. She was afraid that leaving him would hurt him, but really she was also worried that it would hurt herself.

The fear led to him being honest with her, thinking it was the right thing to do, that it would hurt if he didn't tell her. It hurt her anyway. He didn't want to hurt her again, so he kept his feeling bottled up inside. Then, instead of addressing the fact that he's lost interest and moving on, he stayed. Because he loved her and knew she loved him, he thought that leaving it unaddressed either wouldn't hurt her or would hurt her less than leaving. But he couldn't hide the fact that he

wasn't interested anymore, so he ended up hurting her anyway.

Meanwhile, she knew he was trying, she loved him and she knew he loved her. So she put up with it, left it unaddressed, let the anger fester and eventually it came out in unhealthy ways building resentment between the two of them. She didn't want to hurt him, but ended up hurting him anyway.

They loved each other, as much as they could, but they weren't open with each other, they weren't considerate of each other's feelings, and they let things fester instead of talking openly and taking the steps to either better their relationship through better lines of communication, or recognizing when it was time to move on and that it would be the best for both of them.

In the end, it just kept becoming more and more toxic, with both contributing to the deterioration of the other.

The lesson here is: Relationships are hard.

“Yeah, no shit.” You might think to yourself.

But they are.

Relationships require upkeep, communication, reassessment. All of which is certainly hard to accomplish for a pair of high schoolers, but it can be equally hard for any of us. Patience, forgiveness, talking to each other even when it's hard, it's all important, and they're the lessons that can be learned from this relationship, even though it failed to do a lot of it.

Hopefully some of these reflections might resonate with you dear reader. Maybe they'll give you some insight into your own relationship, into relationships you had in the past, or maybe you'll go into a new one in the future with these reflections in mind.

These tips don't just apply to romantic relationships either. All relationships benefit from the lessons learned here.

At the very least, I hope you don't feel like these reflections wasted your time.

Either way, I thank you for reading.

Afterword: My Shitty Ex

My ex was shitty. They were shitty to me and their shittiness to me still affects me to this day.

But I was shitty too. We were shitty to each other and brought out the shittiest parts of each other. When people are in love with someone they can very quickly become aggressive if they believe that love isn't reciprocated, or even if it is reciprocated, if it isn't reciprocated to the degree that they believe they deserve.

We could have saved each other so much time and pain had we just voiced how we felt in a calm, well thought out manner, and been able to take the criticism as constructive instead of as attacks on our character. If we had taken the time to talk out our issues, recognize what they were, address them and try to fix them maybe the relationship would've gone better or at the very least ended on better terms.

But once the foundations were cracked, neither one of us was rational enough to do either. When we criticized, we aimed for destruction. When we were criticized, we crumbled. That's how the anger started, and

how the resentment started and how all of the shitty things we did and felt and said all came from two people who at one point, maybe even until the end, loved each other.

Throughout our relationship, my ex was super shitty to me.

But I was super shitty too. While the other person's actions are not an excuse for either of our actions, behaviours, or reactions, it is important to realize that another person, even someone you're close to, has an entirely different perspective that you need to work on getting accustomed to - flaws and all.

If you don't know why they're reacting a certain way, take the time to ask. Even if they don't say it right away, you at least have to make an effort to try and find out. Because ignoring it, or taking it as a direct assault on your character, or thinking it's about a shirt, or about Kraft Dinner, when it's really about inconsistent consideration, is antithetical to a prospering relationship.

Remember too, that you have to make an effort to catch yourself when you displace your anger on your loved ones.

It's an unfortunate inevitability that an external source that angers you will cause frustration towards your significant other in ways that don't make sense in the moment. The key is to recognize when you are displacing that anger.

It's also important to communicate when another person's actions are what is angering you. Don't expect them to instinctively conclude what you are thinking and to change as a result of you simply being mad at them as a punishment. A punishment only works if the reason for why it is being implemented is explained. Without the explanation, it's just unexplained cruelty, the cornerstone of any resentment.

Explain your side of things and be open to their explanations. Be open to criticism, but recognize that you don't have to be ***critical*** in your criticism. Also don't forget that your feelings matter too, and while they know that, in the moment they might forget.

Sometimes they might need to be reminded.

Only excuse what you ***can*** excuse. The alternative is living in misery.

We were young, and stupid, and shitty, as most teenagers are. We were self absorbed, inconsiderate and uncaring about how our actions affected the other. We only cared for each other when it was easy, but stopped when it was hard.

I have a shitty ex, but...

So do they.

But I hope that we're both better people than before we both shitty exes together.

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Fin