John Witt II

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Desperado

I pressed “End Call” on my iPhone 7, placing it on the coffee table and emitting a deep sigh. My fiancé—well, former fiancé, John—had called to let me know he was on his way home from work at the penitentiary. I still hadn’t worked up the nerve to tell him that I’d decided to go back to Canada. I was considering keeping it to myself for ease of transition. I knew it would be a hard conversation to have, and I was feeling pretty confident that he wouldn’t be very understanding. It wasn’t that I had stopped caring—I just felt that I couldn’t breathe in that life anymore. The whole endeavor—leaving for Texas and abandoning my financial independence—had felt kind of like a long shot to begin with. His job barely paid enough to support both of us, and lately there had been more friction between us than I could handle. “Well,” I uttered aloud absently, “maybe I can just vanish.” I stacked several more folded shirts into my suitcase and zipped it shut, eyeing its usual home by the living room bookshelf. As I slid it back into its place, I briefly wondered how I’d be able to get everything packed without him noticing before my parents arrived from Alberta. Moving swiftly back to the table, I fired off some texts to my not-quite ex. Their contents, suggestions that he should go visit his parents for a couple of days, would undoubtedly be a little suspicious, but I needed space and time to avoid an uncomfortable confrontation. To my ultimate displeasure, he caught on immediately. Sensing that something was amiss, he began overwhelming me with questions. Sometimes I wondered if he ever stopped asking questions.

One missed call. Two missed calls. “Well, it was worth a try,” I thought to myself.

I powered off my phone and placed it on the charger in the bedroom, deciding that it would be easier to claim that my phone had died than explain why I suddenly wasn’t answering calls.

Shortly afterwards, the door swung open as a tall and well-built blue-eyed man in a heavily starched gray uniform lurched into the apartment. The scent of his cologne stood out from the overwhelming scent of the “Zen” wax on the candle warmer. He looked frantic and upset. “Kind of ironic,” I thought, “that his uniform would be so neatly put together.”

The hour following that might as well have been an eternity. Maybe it was more than an hour. Time was exhibiting that quantum-esque phenomenon wherein every moment existed as both a brief instant and its own paradoxical eternity. I wondered if this was how dying felt.

I came clean, and he pleaded with me, hoping that I would change my mind. He repeated, “I don’t understand,” and he was right—he didn’t understand. Getting me to stay would have required changing more than my mind; it would have required the foundation of who I was as a person to shift, for me to become some other person. That felt really unfair to me. Why should I have to change? Why should I be trapped? Why should I be miserable?

It was unfair for him, too: he would never truly find what he was looking for so long as I remained there.

Soon enough, the tall, well-built man sat silently on the couch looking as small as I had ever seen him. His protests and light sobs had finally faded, and I was grateful for it. The conversation had taken far more out of me than I thought it would. There was no way he would believe it, but I was hurting too. The circumstances that led us to this point in the first place aside, I still cared for him and was not fond of watching him suffer.

The following morning, answering a knock at the door revealed a familiar face: my father stood outside, looking as concerned as I had ever seen him. My mother peered around him and gave me a weak smile. “Hi sweetie,” was met with warm, heavy tears and a hug.

“I’m sorry for making you guys come get me,” I said, wiping my face. “No, of course we’d come for you,” said my father, as he shifted his attention to the miserable-looking guy on the couch. “Hey,” said my father sternly but politely, “we’d like to have a word with our daughter in private. May we do that in here, or would you prefer for us to go elsewhere?” He elected to vacate the living room to give us some space.

The conversation with my parents was rapidly paced. After making sure that I wasn’t being abused or beaten, my father asked if I was sure that I wanted them to take me back. He mentioned that I was at the limit for time that I could reside in the states. Additionally, if I left, I probably wouldn’t be allowed back in the country for some time. These details cemented the somber finality of my decision, but I told them that I was sure.

After my parents helped me move my things outside, John met me at their car to say goodbye. “You forgot something,” he said, holding out his hand and opening it to reveal the ring he had proposed to me with. I fought back tears when I saw it. I told him I didn’t think it would be appropriate for me to take it considering the circumstances and that he should keep it. He insisted, saying, “Please, consider it a symbol of my promise to always love you. You can throw it away, or whatever feels right. Just please take it with you.” His blue eyes glistened in the sun, silently conveying his affection and agony.

I suddenly felt as if I existed outside of my own body, as if I were watching myself in a movie and none of this were real.

“I accept,” I said softly. He began to thank me, but I interrupted by embracing him tightly.

I was certain I’d never see him again. This would definitively be our last parting.

The wind whipped around us; it was surreal.

Pulling away slightly, I then kissed him. As much as I knew I had to leave, I knew a part of me was staying here with him forever.