

Saturday, March 6, 2004 – 5:27 p.m.

When I woke up Thursday, I was on top of the world. I knew that it would not be long before I talked to Mike, and I was so excited and anxious to finally come clean with my feelings, regardless of the outcome. The negativity of holding those emotions inside had consumed my every thought, so I was sure that once I released those energies I would feel better. This was the same argument I had posed to myself over the last two years time and time again, but this time I was determined I would not succumb to my fears. I have intuitively felt this change coming for some time now. Over the past three to four weeks, there have been several signs the Universe had revealed to me leading me to believe it was imminent. I have no doubt that the rash I broke out with this week was a physical symptom of my intuitive fear of this change that is proving to be difficult.

I was on such a manic high all day Thursday telling everyone I was “walking on sunshine,” and that mood carried into early Friday morning, when Mike came over at 2 a.m. after going out to the bar with friends from work. Like always, the intensity of our energy went from very deep to very light to periods of peaceful silence in between, though my mind was not in our conversation. I was busy talking to myself about when the “right time” would be, and how I would bring up the letter I had written. I kept assuring myself there would be a sign and then I would know it was time.

It wasn’t until around 3 a.m. that we started talking about singing Karaoke on Sunday night. We talked about what songs we might sing, and Mike happened to mention that he wanted to sing “More than Words” by Extreme, because it was his favorite song. I had the MP3 on my computer, so I played it, and we sang it together. As soon as I started listening to the lyrics of the song, I knew that was the sign I had been waiting for. When the song stopped playing, I asked Mike if he knew why he liked that song so much? He said, “yeah.” I told him, “Everything about that song is you. You are ‘more than words,’ whereas I am all about words.” I told him “My words are the only way I know to express myself.” He then said, “I guess that’s why you write poetry and I write music.” I said, “You’re exactly right.”

After a few minutes of conversation, I told him “I have a letter I need to read to you. I can either read it to you now or I can read it to you this evening, but it has to be today. Which do you want?” He said, “Go for it. Let’s hear it.” I began reading the letter to him, glancing up when I’d get the courage to look into his eyes and see what I already knew.

My dearest Mike,

I never imagined the day we first met two years ago that our relationship would develop into what it has become; but I am grateful every day and every moment that you are in my life.

For two years now, I’ve kept a part of myself hidden from you, and it has eaten away at my very core. I have rehearsed what I would say to you and how I would say it, and role-played in my head every thinkable reaction you might have when I say it. And for two years, I have beaten myself up for letting my fear of rejection keep me from expressing what is in my heart.

I have sought the counsel of my wisest friends on how to handle this situation, but I realize now that I must trust my heart, because I can no longer deny what it has begged me to say for so long. It is only because of

my great faith in our friendship that I have the courage to tell you what I've kept hidden behind the mask I now unveil.

You have taught me so many things about myself in the time we have been best friends, and you've helped me to love myself in ways I never thought I could. I never knew I could feel like this with anyone. The intensity and range of emotions that I feel with you are the greatest I've ever known.

When I am with you, I feel completely free of all worries, and a feeling of surreal tranquility. You make me feel like I can change the world and accomplish my wildest dreams. You make me feel special, like I really make a difference. You make me feel smart and funny, and completely unafraid to share my beliefs. But more importantly, when I am with you, I feel a depth of love unlike any other love I've ever known in my life. It's a love that makes me feel as vulnerable as a newborn, yet safe and secure all at the same time.

I have shared with you parts of myself I have not dared share with anyone else, and will always consider our relationship sacred. Whatever may become of our relationship, I know that I will always love you unconditionally and whole-heartedly. I pray every day that you will be in my life forever as my best friend.

While it has taken me two years to fully accept the fact you only want my friendship, I would not change a minute of our past for anything. You have become such an important part of my life that I cannot imagine my life without you in it. The emotional and spiritual bond we have formed is priceless to me.

You are the man in my life that all other men will be compared to, but will never measure up against. Even if I decide to give my heart to someone in the future, he will always share it, because my heart has chosen you, however unrequited that love may be.

Though I have always hoped, and probably always will hope, in some way, that you would feel more than a friendship with me, I want you to know that everything that I have been to you was not simply because of that hope. My love for you is complete freedom. I have always sincerely wanted you to be happy and will always want for you what you want for yourself, even if it means not getting what I want.

I accept that you do not feel for me all that I feel for you. That is what I meant in my first poem to you when I said, "I'd rather live a hundred years as your friend by your side, than have to shed one single tear, or worse tell you goodbye." Your friendship means more to me than you can ever fully comprehend, and I would rather live my lifetime by your side only as your friend than to ever have to give up that friendship for the sake of something else.

One thing I know for sure is I will always want you by my side in whatever role you choose to play. I have finally come to realize that just because you do not love me the way I want does not mean you do not love me with all you have. I hope you will always know you have changed my life in such a profound way that I will treasure every memory we have created until my dying day.

With all my heart,

Terry

Just as I figured, when I had finished reading, he said, "Come over here" and then we embraced in a hug. I said bravely while we were hugging, "That wasn't so hard after all." I did feel a release, and as euphoric of a mood as I had been in before I told him, I was even more confident and happy the first moments after. I knew that Mike wouldn't have much to say because of how he reacted when I told him I was HIV-positive. It was as though I had just laid this ton of bricks I had been carrying in my heart on his lap in a matter of minutes. He needs time to digest things before he can talk about them, if he ever does talk about them.

I knew that he had a thousand thoughts running through his mind, because I could see them in his eyes. Once I began talking about my feelings, it was like I was on autopilot: I

didn't have to think about what I was going to say anymore, the words just flowed from me. I began opening my heart even more, talking about specific events over the past two years, and how I experienced them. I read him the poem "The Mask," and he said, "Whoa. I don't know what to say." I tried offering *him* support, comforting him with the reassurance that "It's ok. You don't have to say anything. I know." I told him how I thought I had let go of my feelings for him after I saw the birthday card he got me, which he signed "Your friend, Mike." I told him, "I know you probably didn't realize it, but your card set my entire spirit for my birthday party. Even though I was physically present, my mind was not there. It was obsessing over the many thoughts racing in my head, because it finally clicked that you only loved me as your friend." Then I read to him the poem I wrote two days after my birthday, "Letting Go," explaining how I thought it was part of the reason we didn't spend time together other than work from my birthday party on September 5, until we started hanging out again in January of this year. I realized I had been pushing him away, because that was the only thing I knew to do to heal myself.

For an hour and a half, we basically sat across from each other in our chairs, more in silence than conversation. I didn't want to pressure him into saying something he'd regret, but kept asking him to be honest with me and tell me how he felt. Instead, I found myself telling *him* how he felt, and him lightheartedly saying he "Couldn't have said it better himself." I told him I knew he knew how I felt because of a mutual friend online that told him last May, so I asked, "Did you not think I would one day have the courage to say something to you?" He said, "No. I guess I didn't think about it." I said, "I know you do not notice subtle nuances like I do, but did you not see this coming?" He said, "No, I did... in the back of my mind." I said, "This has been the hardest thing I've done, even harder than dealing with HIV." I told him how, in the first moments after finding out I was HIV-positive, one of my thoughts was, "I guess I really screwed up my chances of winning Mike's heart now." At a time when I should have been concerned with my own survival, I was more worried about how Mike would feel.

Telling Mike I loved him and being rejected brought back so many memories from my younger years, and the people I've been rejected by. I suddenly realized Friday morning when Mike and I were talking that my first infatuation, Tina Beam, in High School was almost exactly the same relationship dynamic as the one I have with him. Out of nowhere, then I recalled that Tina was also a Taurus. I couldn't believe I was remembering all of this. It's been 9 years since I've even seen Tina but I remembered that her birthday was May 9. It makes sense to me (now) that I would relate to them both in similar ways, and how eerie it is that I have recreated my relationship with her in Mike.

As 5 a.m. approached, and our conversation had all but ceased, he said he needed to go. We hugged each other goodbye--not letting go as soon as we normally do--and I told him, "I love ya, boo." He said, "I love you, too, baby," which not only sounded foreign, but forced, and sent dreadful shivers down my spine.

We were planning to see the *Passion of the Christ* on Friday evening after he got off work, but I knew after he left my house Friday morning that we would not. I guess it was naïve of me to believe I would be able to ignore my feelings once I told him how I felt,

because even though I have tried to detach myself from feeling any further hurt or appearing hurt to him or anyone else, I hurt so incredibly deep inside that I can't begin to describe the pain.

When I woke up Friday around noon, I felt as though I had just awakened from a dream but was still having that dream, only in an awakened state. I felt mostly as though I was "going through the motions" with everything I did on Friday. I accomplished a lot of mundane activities like paying bills, cleaning house, and running errands, but I felt a chilling numbness inside my heart all day. Around 4:30 p.m., Mike logged online and said hello, but was despondent other than an occasional one- or two-word answer—exactly the energy I had feared I would feel when I told him. He said he needed to lie down for a nap because he was dead tired. After he logged off, I eventually got myself motivated to take a shower, go to the post office and mail my bills, and get my hair cut.

I pulled into the parking lot of the hair salon and immediately saw Hilda, who up until a few years ago had been the only person that had cut my hair since I've lived in Virginia Beach. The place she worked closed down a few years ago, and I lost track of where she went. When I started working at P.F. Chang's in 2002, there were these coupons posted on our bulletin board for \$5 haircuts at Hair Cuttery a block down. Immediately when I saw it, Hilda popped into my mind. A few days later when I went to get my hair cut, I asked the manager, Nancy, if Hilda worked there. She said, "She did, but she is in one of our other stores now." I never thought much more about it. I accepted that she was gone, but kept going to the same salon to get my haircut. Then, in June of last year, a couple of days after I found out I was HIV-positive, I went to get my hair cut, and Hilda was there. It was the first time I had seen her in over two years and couldn't even begin to catch her up on all that had happened in my life. But then the next month when I went, she was gone again. The lady that cut my hair that month said Hilda had gotten into a disagreement with Nancy and was fired. She said she went to some hair salon in Chesapeake. I always figured I'd find her again one day, and it seems I have. I always feel safe when Hilda is cutting my hair. No matter what chaos is going on in my life, when I'm in Hilda's chair, everything is ok. I found out her birthday is August 28, which is the same as my Grandma Holliday's. I'm sure it has something to do with the energy that Hilda gives me, but I found it all too ironic that she would pop back in my life now.

When I got home from running my errands, I logged online and had the following conversation with Mike:

FSUking99 (9:03:01 PM): hey babe

VBTerry25 (9:03:10 PM): hey, did you have a good nap?

FSUking99 (9:03:30 PM): sorta....i dont know if i felt more tired before or after i took it lol

VBTerry25 (9:03:44 PM): I know how that goes

FSUking99 (9:04:21 PM): think we could see the passion another day? : (

VBTerry25 (9:04:30 PM): sure

FSUking99 (9:07:00 PM): sorry, i suck at plans

VBTerry25 (9:07:15 PM): no worries. Plans change

FSUking99 (9:10:09 PM): what have u been doing

VBTerry25 (9:11:00 PM): well, since I last talked to you, I cleaned up a bit, took a shower, meditated, went and got my hair cut, then stopped and ate at Burger King... and then I

came home

FSUking99 (9:19:33 PM): damn, u got a lot of stuff done

VBTerry25 (9:20:23 PM): well, it was 4 hours

VBTerry25 (9:20:43 PM): oh, and I wrote out all my bills and went to the post office

VBTerry25 (9:20:46 PM): I forgot that part

VBTerry25 (9:27:55 PM): what are you doing?

FSUking99 (9:28:05 PM): watching sports

VBTerry25 (9:28:15 PM): ah ok

FSUking99 (9:28:53 PM): what are you doin?

VBTerry25 (9:33:28 PM): watching Real Time

VBTerry25 (9:55:53 PM): Hey, read your horoscope for March

http://www.astrologyzone.com/forecasts/monthly/taurus_full.php

FSUking99 (10:00:45 PM): well that's encouraging

VBTerry25 (10:02:05 PM): *nods*

FSUking99 (10:02:14 PM): my sis needs the comp, I'll be back

VBTerry25 (10:03:11 PM): ok

FSUking99 (10:20:51 PM): I'm back

VBTerry25 (10:22:13 PM): I'm still here

VBTerry25 (10:24:53 PM): you're awful quiet today :-(\

FSUking99 (10:26:30 PM): im just energiless

FSUking99 (10:26:32 PM): if thats a word

VBTerry25 (10:26:53 PM): depleted is a better word

VBTerry25 (10:26:58 PM): and I understand

VBTerry25 (10:27:01 PM): I feel the same way today

VBTerry25 (10:31:50 PM): are you there?

FSUking99 (10:31:58 PM): yes im here

FSUking99 (10:32:04 PM): do you work tomorrow?

VBTerry25 (10:32:08 PM): tomorrow morning

FSUking99 (10:34:40 PM): blah

VBTerry25 (10:35:02 PM): I'd much rather close lunch on Saturday than work PM

FSUking99 (10:35:34 PM): thanks, now im REALLY looking forward to working tomorrow pm :(

VBTerry25 (10:35:56 PM): well, that's just me. I like to have my Saturday evenings at home

VBTerry25 (10:38:23 PM): are you ok?

FSUking99 (10:38:49 PM): yeah

FSUking99 (10:38:53 PM): am i all actin wierd?

VBTerry25 (10:38:59 PM): yeah

FSUking99 (10:39:09 PM): i dont mean to

VBTerry25 (10:39:09 PM): it's ok. I understand

VBTerry25 (10:40:52 PM): I'm here if you want to talk

FSUking99 (10:41:54 PM): i might come over in a little bit

FSUking99 (10:42:06 PM): i need to get out of this house anyways, too much of it is a bad thing

VBTerry25 (10:42:27 PM): *nods*

VBTerry25 (10:46:30 PM): this is what I was trying to find this morning

VBTerry25 (10:47:15 PM): Neptune trine Moon: A poetic cast 1 March 2004 until 3 May 2004: It is possible that this influence will bring you a very idealized and spiritualized love relationship, even to the point that the two of you will not have a physical relationship. You may prefer to remain platonic because it seems more pure and ideal. And although you are idealizing, in the long run a relationship such as this is likely to be very helpful in your development.

FSUking99 (10:49:22 PM): u didnt need a horoscope to figure that out

VBTerry25 (10:50:00 PM): I know, but it's always reassuring to see that "as above (the stars), so below"

VBTerry25 (10:50:55 PM): If anything, this has all shown me that I should never doubt my intuition

VBTerry25 (11:02:42 PM): what's up?

FSUking99 (11:02:54 PM): nada...wrapping up here, gonna be over soon

VBTerry25 (11:03:14 PM): ok

FSUking99 (11:07:31 PM): im out, be over in a bit

I honestly didn't feel like spending time with him. I needed reassurance of love not a reminder of rejection, but I didn't oppose his desire to spend time together. I can never seem to tell Mike "no." I have already begun feeling myself pushing him away inside and building barriers. When he came over, it was the first time in the entire time of knowing him that I've ever wished he would just leave. I thought I could be so mature and act as though our talk Friday morning had never happened, but we hardly spoke, and when we did, I found it almost impossible to look him in the eyes. Partly because I felt even more vulnerable than I did before I told him, and partly because I felt so incredibly self-conscious around him.

The hardest part of all of this has been fighting to keep from beating up on myself. I have felt so ugly the past two days since I told him. I keep asking the question, "What could be so hideous about myself that he could not find me attractive?" It's certainly not a new question for me. I have been asking myself that question for two years now, only now I have proof: His acknowledgement that he doesn't feel that way. I cannot blame him for not finding me attractive when I don't find myself attractive, either, and maybe that's a bigger problem that I need to deal with. It seems that every time I have taken a chance in love, I have gotten hurt, which then makes me want to retreat behind the thick armor that I have created in my lifetime.

Today the moon is full in the sign of Virgo, which is supposed to be an exceptionally positive time for me, a time of extreme harmony, for healing and cleansing. I suppose these feelings of hurt I feel are a healing of my heart. I think I would be ok if this was the only change I felt was about to happen in my life, but I have a deep feeling there is much more about to come, though I am not clear just yet what it will be. I believe this change with Mike will be the proverbial floodgate that will spark the many other changes I have been expecting. I know once these feelings of hurt and rejection pass, I will again feel proud of myself for being brave enough to take the chance I did, but more importantly, for being true to myself for once. I hope that I don't jeopardize and throw away my friendship with Mike, but right now, having him around is only going to make the feelings of hurt intensify.

My guard is at all-time maximum, and I am now operating in “Warrior” mode. Other than Pat, I have not told any of my close friends that I talked to Mike. I’m sure that Joann and Kelley instinctively knew something was different with me today at work. I don’t know how they couldn’t have seen in my eyes the hurt I feel. Where I had been bubbling with excitement and love of life two days ago, I was noticeably on edge and exuding the energy to “back off!”

I’m not embarrassed that he rejected me. He had been rejecting me for two years in his lack of interest, and I instinctively knew that. But there had always been that shred of hope that maybe I was wrong. Maybe he just needed to hear me say it. There had been a million different angles I had analyzed the situation from. I spent so much of my energy wondering “What if?”

I don’t believe that things will ever be the same with Mike. How can they? Our relationship will forever be marked by this change. While I was optimistic in my letter to him, and sincerely do hope our friendship will stand this test, I honestly don’t know what the future holds with us. I am reminded that I once thought that my former best friend, Thomas, would also “always be in my life,” because like my relationship with Mike, there had always been complete harmony between us, aside from the dysfunction of Thomas taking more than he gave in the relationship, or my continuing to give in spite of feeling taken advantage of. But then in July of 2002, just as quickly as Thomas and I had become best friends, he vanished from my life, and I have only seen him once out at a club since. We have not spoken on the phone, and we’ve severed our ties completely. I withdrew from the relationship because of the hurt I felt and cast him out of my life to try to heal the pain. Only when the time came and I had healed, he was gone. I had apparently severed the tie of our friendship with my emotions, even though we never spoke a word of it to each other.

There are distinct differences and similarities between my relationship with Mike and the one I had with Thomas. Thomas and I became instant friends just like I did with Mike, but I never had any physical attraction to Thomas like I do Mike. They are both very attractive men, and even to this day, when people read my website, one of the first things they say is “Your friend Thomas is cute.” I always reply, “Yes, I know. Everyone says that.” No matter where I went with Thomas, everyone was always drawn to his attractiveness, and I was made abundantly clear just how good looking he was. When we would go to the clubs, no matter what guy had been interested in me, or how engrossed in a conversation we might be, the moment that Thomas would come around, I became invisible and disappeared into the shadows. I constantly felt inferior but never said anything to Thomas about it because I wanted to keep the peace, and I saw no point knowing he would not change, because that was just who he was. I eventually stopped going out to clubs with him because I couldn’t feel good about myself when I would always be in the shadows of Thomas’ light.

Just as I was always reminded of Thomas’ good looks, in the two years I have been friends with Mike, I am always reminded that he does not find me attractive or have any romantic feelings towards me, which makes me feel unattractive and undesirable. I try to rationalize that it is no different than my friendships with any of the female friends in my life because I have no feelings of physical intimacy for them, yet it is those feelings for

Mike that make it trenchantly different. In my ego's defense, I rebut that there have been plenty of guys in my past who have been more physically attractive than Mike who found an interest in me, though their interest in me was purely physical. It has not mattered who showed an interest in me the past two years, because they were not the ones I wanted. I could not deny that it was completely possible that this may be the end of my relationship (as I know it) with Mike. I do not believe that relationships end, even if they only remain in your heart and mind. I will always remain attached to the feelings that Mike and every other friend evoked in me, even though they may no longer be in my life physically. I can't exactly shut Mike out of my life, anyway, considering we work together. I know that this time to come will be awkward, to say the least, but as they say, "In the feeling comes the healing."

It's no longer surprising to me to find myself listening to music to help me with this transition in my life. Music always heals my heart. In the last few weeks, there have been many songs dealing with love that have resonated within me, and it was those songs that allowed me to finally cry myself to sleep this evening over the loss of what I hoped would be. It is difficult for me to allow myself to cry and feel sorry for myself. I always remind myself there are people worse off than me and intellectually rationalize that I shouldn't let myself feel bad, but it is equally difficult to deny those feelings their expression.

I am sure one day I will also look back on this period as one of great growth and opportunity. As much as I want to shield myself from any further hurt and pain and shut down emotionally, that would be a disservice to all that I have become over these past few years. Just because I have reacted to situations in the past a certain way does not dictate that I must now create the same results.

The old Terry was a victim of circumstance. The old Terry would shut down emotionally and suppress everything inside as to not let anyone see his weakness. While my actions are sometimes just as surprising to myself as they are to others, I know that I can only hope to do my best and promise to be true to myself above all else, even in the stake of a perceived loss. Just as I was confident that I would know when it was time to finally confess my love to Mike, I am confident that I will also know what decisions to make when it is time to make them. I fully believe I have the power to create from this change whatever I want, and I know that I will choose best. It is in the dark of night that we find our greatest hope in the light of tomorrow.