

Point of Retreat

Things would never be the same -- that much was clear. How had things changed so quickly? I thought back to the day when we decided to get our own place, almost a year ago. Back when we were the epitome of happiness. Love had flowed through our bodies... we could never get enough of each other, but now the tension in the room was so thick I could barely breathe. My right cheek was throbbing with so much pressure I was almost certain there would be a mark the next day. Brandon sulked in from the kitchen carrying slight regret on his shoulders with an ice pack in his hand.

“Here use this, it should help with any swelling. I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to, you know I would never do anything like that on purpose,” he uttered, gesturing the ice pack to my cheek.

“It’s fine,” I whispered aloud. I could feel the tears welling up in my eyes, but I refused to let them fall. I could hear my father’s voice in the back of my mind telling me that crying was for the weak. I am not weak. Yet here I am becoming submissive to Brandon’s unnecessary outburst of anger. My mind wandered back to when I was a fiery teen, confronting my dad about his domestic violence and calling the cops without even blinking. Where was she now? I was so strong in that situation, but now that I am the one being struck, I am silent. My hands began to tremble as I slowly brought the ice pack to my tender skin. I could feel him trying to pick apart my brain, wondering what thoughts were racing through it. The only thing on my mind was that this was my reality, there is no rewind button in life and I am forever stuck with the actions that just took place. If I was being completely honest with myself, I didn’t want to face reality; this reality that I couldn’t quite wrap my head around. It was almost like being drunk. No, no it was the aftermath of being drunk, long after the hangover is gone, where your brain physically hurts to remember the past.

“Hazel come on, talk to me. Tell me what you’re thinking about right now.” I could tell that his words were more of an order versus a plea or a question. My brain was turning into word vomit, it felt like I was having a constant battle with myself, pondering over which would be the right words to say.

“I have no idea. I’m at a loss for words at the moment. I’m not quite sure how you want me to react,” I spoke so fast that I wasn’t thinking about the words falling from my lips. My eyes went wide at the realization as my hand went up to cover my mouth with a hint of remorse. But maybe the remorse was more for myself than him. As I lifted my eyes to meet his, I could see the anger softly boiling behind his emeralds. He shook his head with a tinge of disgust as he pulled at the roots of the dark brown tendrils.

“I had no other choice, you weren’t listening to me! I was trying to get your attention and I overreacted. I’m sorry, I don’t know what else you want from me. Is that enough for you?” he scoffed. “You never understand me. You’re always stuck in your own world and never give a damn about anything going on in mine. Was I just supposed to sit there while you were being selfish? I was trying to voice my side of the story and you didn’t care.”

At this point all my sorrow was balling up into resentment and I knew that escalation was the only way to handle this intense affair taking place. Before I could think logically, my hand gripped the ice pack so tightly I was afraid it was going to burst just like my heart. In a blink of an eye the cold compress flew from my fingertips as I wailed it at his chest.

“Are you kidding me right now? You can never take responsibility for your own actions can you? This is all my fault, I should’ve been more caring towards you and your emotions, jeez I am so beyond sorry. Is that what you want to hear? I am so sick of seeing you wear your self pity on your sleeves.” I know that my backlash was a mistake, but I was so tired of walking on

eggshells around him, scared that his possible bad day could become my worst nightmare. I felt like I was constantly handling a grenade with a loose pin, waiting for the expected blow to rip through my body.

My eyes quickly diverted, glancing around the room at anything that wasn't him. They stopped roaming when they came across the clock hanging on the wall. What did my dad always say...? If I were to pull the pin on a grenade I would have two to six seconds before the expected aftermath. Well, I pulled the pin and now it was only a matter of time. My brain started slowly counting down the seconds as the hand moved, waiting for the ultimate revenge that would come barreling out of his mouth. No doubt his words would be seething with anger and at the moment I was the only punching bag in sight. My downfall was inevitable.

“So what you’re telling me is this means nothing to you!?” he exclaimed, waving his hands back and forth in the empty space between us. He scoffed as he began pacing in the middle of the living room, massaging his temples with his thumbs. He was mumbling under his breath, words that I could barely make out over his harsh steps against the hardwood floor. Then it was like a switch was turned on, making him stand up as straight as a board. The smirk that traced over his lips filled my entire body with so much fear, I was nervous I would puke, and he began taking slow steps toward the small bookcase across from the couch. His knuckles were white with rage as he reached for a picture frame that was holding one of my fondest memories of us. The silence filling the room was almost deafening, but then a deep chuckle escaped from his lips. He turned his tall, lanky figure toward me before hurling the frame near the side of my head. I flinched as a gasp fell from my lips and then the sound of shattering glass cut through the air.

“I mean nothing to you. All of these memories, all the time we have spent together means nothing to you?” Spit was seeping through the corners of his mouth as his voice got louder. His bright emerald eyes had changed to a dark forest green as he grabbed another picture of the two of us and smashed it at my feet. “Worthless... This is all worthless.”

His eyes became slitted as he studied my face, waiting for some type of reaction and his chest was heaving up and down due to the amount of resentment he had coursing through his veins. I watched intently as his fists clenched and he began taking quick, determined steps towards me. I squeezed my eyes shut in hopes that it would erase all my problems as my feet stayed glued to the floor. Then another crash bounced around the four walls and my eyelids flashed open. I turned my head, seeing his body hovering over all the papers and knick knacks he had pushed off my desk, breathing heavily through his malevolent fury. My eyesight was fading with the tears building up in my orbs, threatening to spill over. I couldn't hold them back anymore and at this point the dam had cracked. The tears streamed from my eyes, leaving a subtle path down my cheeks.

“Do you enjoy doing this? Is this all just a game to you?” I asked, barely audible from the glass echoing in my ear. His head snapped towards me as his ragged breathing slowly calmed, cocking his head in response to my question. I can feel my knees begin to shake and there is nothing more that I want then to simply sit down, just to give up. “I have been there for you through everything. Everything. Yet when something goes wrong, I'm the first person you blame, even if it has nothing to do with me. You confuse me, you know that? Because I love you, but I can't fix you. Have you realized how damaged you are? Our relationship isn't normal, this isn't how people are supposed to act when they love someone. The good memories used to

cloud my mind and give me false hope that it would help you change. But at this point, I'm drained and I don't know what else you want me to do. So yeah you're right this is worthless."

My words were so calm that they sent chills down my spine, but I could tell my confidence threw him off guard. Little did he know it even surprised myself as well. I'm not sure if this was my way of giving in to the possibility of my ending or if this was me just speaking the truth, no longer afraid of the outcome. The fire in his eyes was slowly dying, but I knew that was only temporary. He took a step towards me but I only retreated backwards. Deep down I knew that if I let him get close I would only fall under his spell once again, and I couldn't do that anymore. I was tired of this constant cycle, it felt like I was on a damn hamster wheel.

"Hazel..." he hesitated, his voice dripping with sorrow but my mind was too fuzzy to understand his true intentions. "I'm so sorry. I don't know what just came over me. You know that's not who I really am. It felt like someone else took over, I would never hurt you on purpose."

"But you do Brandon, that's the problem. You are constantly hurting me, whether it be your words or something more physical, you hurt me everyday. And that was you, that's always been you, you were just brilliant at hiding it in the beginning. You were so good you even fooled yourself. I just can't do this anymore." That was the most honest thing I have ever said to him in my life. My body was numb at this point, there was no fear, no pain, and not even a speck of relief or happiness. Maybe this was the calm before the storm, his sadness simply a tool of manipulation, begging me to forgive him.

Brandon's shoulders caved, slumping forward as if he was accepting his defeat. His brows furrowed as he took a step back, signaling that he was deep in thought about his next words. The awkward silence in the room was making my stomach flip, nausea filling me from

my core. I bit back any bile threatening to escape and knelt to the floor, starting to pick up pieces of glass. My hands were trembling each time I reached out to grab random, stray objects decorating the floor.

“What are you doing?” he interrogated.

“I’m doing the one thing I’m good at, I’m cleaning up your mess like I always do Brandon,” my answer was prompt and clipped. I don’t want to hear him repeat the pointless words of “I’m sorry” because at this point it means absolutely nothing to me. I can hear him make hesitant steps towards me and I refuse to flinch or scurry away in fear. He kneels down, mirroring my body image, reaching out to hold onto my wrist.

“Here let me help,” he says with a side of softness I have never heard before.

“I think you have helped enough.” Once again the pressure in the room intensifies and his grip on my skin tightens, his eyes clouding over for the third time that night. I let out a heavy sigh, my body refusing to give in to his true desire. I didn’t want him to feel like he won, but at the same time I didn’t want to get myself more bruised, emotionally and physically, out of spite for myself.

“What do you want me to do?” he asked through gritted teeth as he threw my arm away from him causing the remnants in my hand to clatter back down to the floor. “Tell me the truth because I’m sick of playing your stupid little games.” I knew deep down that I didn’t have the energy for this anymore.

“I want you to get out, that’s what I want. I thought you would have been able to understand that from what I said earlier,” I spoke with honesty while I rubbed the pain out of my wrist, the throbbing now matching my cheek. “I told you that I can’t do this anymore and I meant it Brandon.”

He stood up with a long sigh, putting his hands on his hips while he towered over me. I felt as though I was being scolded by my own parents, his best technique to belittle me and my emotions. The only thing left for me to do was leave the situation, let him calm down and become level headed, even though I knew those moments were rare. His mouth dropped open as he watched me stand and tread out of the room, his eyes burrowing into the back of my brain. His stare made my skin itch as if thousands of ants were crawling across the smooth surface. My steps were quick and short, practically scurrying to the only safe haven I could think of in that moment. I flung the door to our bedroom open with so much angst that it smacked the wall behind it, making my head ache from the noise. I glanced around the room with regret and sorrow tracing my eyes, then burrowed myself under the soothing comforter that was calling my name. My body was tired from trying to be strong and now that I was alone, surrounded by warmth, my mental break had finally hit the forefront of my mind.

My body was shaking as the sobs racked through my lungs, making me feel cold on this warm summer night. I was terrified that my defeat was too loud, possibly giving Brandon an invite of curiosity into the room. My body was crumpled under the duvet as never-ending tears flowed from my closed eyes. I could hear him softly padding down the hall and it was like I had been thrown back into my childhood, studying the sound of his footsteps to understand his emotions. I pulled the blanket tighter up to my neck, squeezing it with all my might as I tried to hold my breath in a meek attempt to gain control of my tears. I could feel him staring at my body, my lifeless, damaged soul. If only he was able to comprehend that this was all his fault.

My mind was reprimanding myself for letting my life get to this point. I know that I have a problem, a problem that hinders my rational thinking. When I feel for someone, fall in love with someone, I become colorblind. All the red flags become green and any faults become

justified in my own mind. My problem is that I let my emotions cloud over the difference between what is right and what is wrong. Suddenly I'm the one consoling him when something goes awry, but I cannot do that anymore. I need him to leave and I need to get a handle on my life, but a life without him.

"Please just leave, I'm begging you Brandon," I croaked out through my raw throat. I could hear him lingering, gathering his belongings while hesitating to speak. I think this is the first time I have ever heard him completely speechless. I peered over the heavy blanket when I felt the end of the bed sink, adjusting to his body. He sat with his head in his hands, leaning over his lap and for a split second I thought he might be praying. But then I saw him wipe his eyes, flicking specks of water from the corner of them. I didn't know it was possible for my heart to feel so hollow. I took this opportunity to turn back into the pillow, bringing my knees up to my chest in order to feel safe. My mind was racing with so many possibilities, I felt rather dizzy, which only made the tears fall harder.

I didn't seem to realize that his hand was brushing my hair away from my face because I was so lost in my own miserable tears. I flinched when I felt his fingertips trace my face, goose flesh breaking out along my body. By now the tears only flowed faster and my heart only ached more.

"I'm sorry baby," he whispered as another loud sob escaped my lips. Those were his last words to me as he grabbed the bag he packed and walked out the door. The door to our new home, the door to our life, and now the door that separated us as strangers.