

They sat in uncomfortable silence. The TV glowed its medicinal glow and they didn't look at each other. That's not entirely true. With subtle movements, he stole glances at her face painted pale blue and almost featureless. Her thin lips could still be discerned. The small bump in her nose. The flickering light of the TV was dancing in her eyes. Out of the corner of his eye he watched her. Out of the corner of her eye she noticed him doing this.

Or she thought she did. She really couldn't be to sure. Maybe she was just being paranoid. But paranoid's not the right word. Hopeful might be better, but still wasn't right. Somewhere in between. His leg was up against hers and that wasn't her imagination. He had sat down after he and he sat close enough so that their legs were touching. Of course, he didn't have too much room at his end of the couch. One end was filled by bunched up blankets so they didn't really have any extra space. But he had to notice his leg up against hers. Of course, maybe he didn't think anything of it because he was wearing long pants so it's not like their skin was touching or anything.

What he wouldn't give to be wearing shorts right now. But then, she might move her leg if their skin was touching. She might do that. He hoped she hadn't noticed how close he sat to her. It wasn't too close. It wasn't uncomfortably close. He knew all advances have to go undetected. Or at least appear unintentional. Nothing worse than being detected. He has to appear indifferent. Appear indifferent while still advancing. It was a damned hard juggling act to keep up, but he had had a lot of practice. He prayed he wouldn't let a ball drop now. Slow and gradual. No one notices anything if it moves slowly enough.

Was he getting closer? It was hard to tell. It was impossible to tell. She wasn't sure. She didn't risk shifting although her right leg was kind of falling asleep. Maybe just a little shift won't hurt.

What did he do? He must have done something. She's uncomfortable. Draw back but only a little. Not a noticeable amount. Gradual. And not far because losing ground is deadly. Losing ground? He wasn't conquering enemy territory. What the hell was he thinking? Maybe not enemy territory, but unfamiliar territory certainly. Or at least unexplored. Dammit, don't think that. She's not territory at all. She's... She's...

She's getting bored with the TV. Not that she's really paying attention to start with. Why were they watching this anyway? She hated TV. Better if they just talked. That was always better. Well... that was usually better. Sometime he'd rub her back when they talked. Thinking about that made her back sore. God, she wished he was rubbing it right then. Or better, rubbing her feet. Whenever he rubbed her back it was always a little strange talking to him while he was behind her. Better to be facing him.

Dammit, it feels really unnatural to have to both be facing the TV. Whose idea was it to watch TV anyway? He hated TV. If he could only be rubbing her back or something. He always liked that. Rubbing backs was his way of twiddling his thumbs. His Zen. Plus, whenever he rubbed her back on the couch, they were close enough that she just ended up leaning against him, his arms lightly embracing her. Just lightly though. Any strength would be dangerous to use. Too obvious. Ending up like that had to seem like an accident of position. Same as if they were ever going to kiss. It had to be an accident of being close. How the hell was he going to do that? That was the only acceptable way. He didn't know how else to do it. After the first time, it would be easier. It should anyway. Hopefully there would be a first time.

She briefly entertains the notion of them kissing. But that wasn't going to happen. No, he doesn't want that. Does he? She isn't sure. Maybe. She isn't sure. Better to not think about it. Maybe he just wants her to turn around and just kiss him. He once told her that she could just go up to about 95% of the guys on the campus and kiss them and they'd just happily receive her. Maybe that was supposed to be a hint. Or maybe he was just talking. He just talks a lot. Maybe he has an agenda behind what he says. Maybe. Maybe that's just wishful thinking. Or paranoia. Or something in between.

He turns his head slightly to look at her again. But only slightly. His arm is resting on the couch behind her head, but she's leaning slightly forward. Maybe she's just comfortable like that. Maybe she's purposely avoiding contact with him. If she'd just lean back then he'd take the cue and pull her a little closer to him. But she never initiates contact. Never.

She makes sure to keep her eyes on the TV. Turning to look at him would be too obvious. She can sense his arm behind her on the couch. Maybe it means something. Maybe he's just comfortable like that. Maybe she should lean back. But he doesn't want that, she doesn't think. If he wanted that, he would put his arm around her. If he wanted to kiss her, then he would. He just would.

Should he just kiss her? No. No, he needs to test first. Test the waters. There's no way she can possibly not see through his 'tests,' is there? That sounds kind of wrong. It's not. He hopes it's not. He's just horribly unsure. That's all. And he can't read her. Dammit, she is so hard to read. He could read most people, but not her. Not her. She wouldn't let herself be read. He could see frustration in her eyes when he made a joke about them kissing, but which kind of frustration was it? Was she sick of the joke? Or was she sick of it being a joke? He had no idea. She won't let on. She refuses to let on. All he is allowed to have are mixed signals.

Does he know? Sometimes he thinks he knows and he's dead wrong. That always really pisses her off. But then other times he could see so much in her mannerisms. Sometimes that kind of pissed her off too. It was like he knew what she was thinking whether she wanted him to or not. She couldn't hide from him then. He wouldn't let her. So perhaps she should draw away from him. Don't make eye contact. If he makes another joke about them being together, no reaction. None. Because she doesn't care. She doesn't. She can't afford to care. Caring hurts way too much. She can't. She won't. She doesn't.

Why doesn't she ever turn to look at him? Why does she barely make eye contact? If can't be insecurity. He doesn't know another girl that's more secure. What the hell is she thinking? It's hard enough to read her as it is. If he can't see her eyes, then he can barely see anything. Does he want to see? What if he doesn't like what he finds? He doesn't need her, anyway. He knows that. But he feels like he does. No. That's just because she's right here. The feeling will pass. It always does. It passes with just a little bit of time.

It passes. It's passing even now. She doesn't care. Maybe if he... if he makes a move or something... maybe she'll be receptive. Maybe. But if he doesn't, that's okay. She doesn't care. She really doesn't. He's just a guy. There are lots of guys. Anyway, he is a little overweight. Yes. He is. She doesn't like that. That's not all, though. That would be shallow by itself. He just like to sit around and do nothing. How boring is

that? She needs someone that goes out. She needs someone to dance with her. Someone who isn't always tired. Someone who isn't so sad. Yes. That's it. He's too sad. He'll make her sad too. He kinda does as it is. He's so... worn down. It's tiring. He drains from her. She can't afford anything to be drained. She needs all she has. There are lots of guys that don't drain. Lots of them. She doesn't need the added stress. Lord knows she has more than enough as it is. She doesn't want this. She doesn't. The last thing she needs is to be left behind again. And that's what he'll do too. He might not think that he will, but he will. Just give him some time. He might think he knows her, but he doesn't. He couldn't. Not if he's still around. He just needs someone to cling to. Someone to unload his sadness on. Someone for him to hold onto. That's what he needs. Well, it's certainly not what she needs.

Of course, he doesn't need her. He's seen what happens with her. One week she likes a guy and the next she doesn't. She can't make up her mind about anything and this wouldn't be any different. Even if she wanted him to kiss her right now, she won't tomorrow night. Or next week. He doesn't need that. He doesn't ask for much, but he wants what he has to be solid. She could be solid, but she doesn't want to. She'd just make him miserable. He's ridden yo-yos before and he's not going to waste his time on one again. If she won't let him in, then he just won't get in. That simple. He wore his heart on his sleeve and she barely noticed it. Or barely cared. Fine. He didn't need that. He doesn't need anyone that was that self-absorbed. He doesn't need the stress. He's tired enough as it is. He doesn't need to add to that. He shouldn't be wasting his time and effort and money and affection and... and... and he just doesn't need this. He doesn't.

She doesn't care. She doesn't. There's no use in caring. No use in it. It's never gotten a damn thing for her. She doesn't care about anyone and they don't care about her. She's better on her own. No one to tie her down. She needs freedom. She thrives on it. He'd just take her freedom away. There's no way in hell she's gonna let that happen. She cares about herself. It's him or her. She can't afford for it to not be her. She's tried caring about other people when no one cared about her. Fuck them. Fuck him. She doesn't care one bit. Not one. Why does he have to come along now to fuck things up? Everything was fine without him. Everything was clear. She doesn't care. He'll go away soon enough and everything'll be clear again.

The TV program's over. He guesses that signals the end of the night too. She'll say something about having to get to bed cause she has to get up early. Sounds like an excuse. Maybe it's not. He doesn't care. He doesn't. He's much too strong to let her affect him. He'll walk her to her dorm. He'll do that cause it's polite. Politeness is all he's going to get from her so it's all he's going to give.

Of course he feels the need to walk to her dorm. He always does. He thinks the campus isn't safe at night for her cause she's just a girl. Just a little defenseless girl. Poor her. Fuck him. Fuck all of them. She doesn't need any guy. They're all like this. They all just want to walk you home, then they leave you if you don't invite them in. There's no reason to care. It doesn't help anything anyway. Most people only care because they're too weak. They're scared to be by themselves. Well, she's not. She's been by herself this long and she's fine. Abso-fucking-lutely fine.

She didn't say much of anything the whole evening and she's not now. Well that's just fine. He's sick of her shit. If she doesn't like him, why doesn't she just say it? Why not? Just make everything easier. Why doesn't she just go away so everything can be clear again?

She doesn't look at him while they walk. She looks off to her left as if something of interest is there to look at. He looks pissed anyway. He's got both his hands in his pockets and he's glaring at the ground while they walk. What the fuck does he have to be pissed about? *He* invited her over. If he's not sad then he's angry. She definitely doesn't need that shit. Here's the door. She should probably say something. See you later should be enough.

Now she's gonna say something quick and run inside. She always does that. Doesn't give a shit when he leaves her, doesn't give a shit when she leaves him. Guess that's just the way she is. He definitely doesn't need that shit. Maybe he can say something to get to her first. Maybe he can leave her feeling shitty for once.

He's just looking at her. Why doesn't he say anything? They barely said anything walking here. She's going to wait for him to say something first. That way she can say the last thing easier.

He's going to wait for her to say something. Just look in her eyes. She wouldn't make eye contact all night, well, now he's not going to let her break it. She's going to have to speak. She's going to have to say the first thing so he can say the last. He can stare into her eyes as long as he wants, he's not going to say the first thing. He's made her uncomfortable all night, so he can break the silence. She's just going to look into his eyes. Is he glaring at her? Not really. She guesses not. He looks sorta tired.

She looks bored. Or is that something else? No. Boredom probably. How else would she feel after being with him all night? There's a strand of her hair in her face again. It's bothering the hell out of him. She never brushed her hair back when it does that.

Is he just going to keep staring at her? She's not giving in. He has to say something. They'll stand here all night if he doesn't say anything. It's probably only been a few seconds, but she can hold out for a week if she needs to. He looks like he can't. He looks so tired. His eyes are kinda droopy. They normally are. He looks... he looks worn down is how he looks. Or something like that.

She doesn't think he can hold out not saying anything. She has no idea how much worse he's endured. He can hold out all night. He guesses that she's not really glaring. Her eyes don't look tired, but they do look... expectant? He wasn't sure. That hair in her face was really annoying him. Why doesn't she just brush it away?

He didn't really look all that sad. Just kind of tired. It was kind of cute sometimes. Most of the time it just made her feel like he thought he knew too much for his own good, even if he was a little dopey. He just thought that, though. Although, he probably did have too much weight on him. He should have collapsed by now. But he wouldn't. She could give him that. He was holding up a lot of weight and surviving. At least the thought that he was. That was probably it. Or something. It didn't matter.

It was too damned annoying. He reached up and brushed the loose hair out of her face. He did it slowly because everything felt like it should be slow right now. He paused with his hand against her cheek. Her eyes changed. They looked...

Warm. His hand was warm against her cheek. His eyes looked a little less tired now. Or was she imagining that? She was, of course. She just noticed that she wasn't breathing. She should be. But him first. That way she can have the last breath easier.

He slowly slid his fingers to her ear, cupping her cheek in his hand. With the most subtle pressure—gradual enough that no one would notice—he brought her face towards his. Her lips parted slightly. He brought his other hand up and lightly rested his fingertips against her other cheek which was very close to his now.

She wouldn't resist. He was doing... doing this. She didn't care. It was okay. His eyes weren't tired anymore. They were looking into her now. And she was looking into him. Just before they met, just before she breathed, they both closed their eyes. But she was still looking into him. And still felt him looking into her. She breathed.

But she didn't.

But he didn't.

They didn't.

He waited for her to say the first word so she could have the last. She was sick of waiting.

"Guess I'll see you later."

"Yeah. Later."

He turned and began to walk away before she even had her hand on the door. He walked quickly but not too quickly. He refused to look defeated. He wasn't defeated. Don't look back. Never look back.

She was inside the door now. He was gone. Like she expected. Don't look back. Never look back.

It wouldn't hurt because she wouldn't notice. It wouldn't matter.

He turned and looked back. She was looking at him through the window of the door as it clicked shut. He paused and smiled. She paused and smiled back.

-Grant Gooding