

You would take a puff of your joint and pray to the god of inexperienced smokers that the smoke stumbling down your throat wouldn't render you a coughing mess. You would lay back against the armrest of the sofa in your living room – the only real piece of furniture amidst your piles of semi-unpacked boxes. You would close your eyes, breathe in the weirdly comforting smell of weed, and your mind would race – initially to when you first saw each other and then to when you last saw each other. The former you would recall as vaguely but clearly as the thick cloud of smoke you would blow out; the details frayed but the main idea at the centre intact.

There was no meet cute story which is very disappointing for a *Wattpad* tutored romantic such as yourself. You would remember how you specifically thought, “this guy is definitely Ghanaian”. The interaction of his mannerisms with the environment just gave off an essence that had to have been nurtured under the Ghanaian sun. This was the most memorable detail of your first meeting apart from the fact that it happened in the parking lot of your church in Chicago, and that you had brought up your annoyance about American churches not selling food outside.

With the weed pervading your senses, the irony of the turn of events would make you chuckle, then giggle, then eventually burst out into a fully rounded bubble of laughter. You don't realise how much there is to remember of a person until you fall in love and your goldfish memory shows you she's a romantic too. It's weed-hysteria worthy. Your stomach would turn in malaise as you run through your list of “him-isms”: how he runs his tongue over his chipped tooth when he's tired, his constant rubbing of his nose that's so flat it almost just blends into his face, the way he hunches his shoulders and clasps his hands together when he's nervous, the way he tilts his head when he is trying to disagree with something without sounding patronising. You would move from your position on the couch to stand beside an open window - the elixir to your tumultuous emotions. You would feel the wind serrate through the pores on your face and the bubbles of calm will be a temporary balm to your bruising.

Love is not something that had ever been easy for you. Now it would be so tangibly real it would feel like an annex to your heart; an entity acting as an arbitrary fuel to the organ giving you life. From the beginning, to anyone with an obligation to listen to you, you mentioned how you didn't reciprocate his feelings for you. It was almost a game to you – new person, new version of your spiel of how much you were not looking for a relationship with him; “we're better off as friends”. Bell Hooks explores in *All About Love*, how people in this generation can be so scared to love they end up living in lovelessness. You discussed this on a random winter day in his bed with your legs starting where his ended, sharing warmth in the cocoon of the duvet. You always enjoyed discussions with him that spun the clogs of your mind. It was the most surprising thing about him for you – how he could switch from mindlessly pandering to your interest in Ghanaian celebrity gossip to discussing philosophical life questions. Anyways, you discussed Bell Hooks. He wasn't a believer. You were but accepted his non-belief. You should have taken the signs more seriously because now, you'd sit by your window alone – a manifestation of fear begetting lovelessness. Somebody, ordain that woman as a prophet.

“A can't opener is a can opener that doesn't work” – the lamest joke ever but the way it made you laugh? You cackled and squealed and even wine-night snorted like the love-gluttonous pig you were. It's hard to pinpoint the specific moment the “I'm not looking for a relationship with

him” turned to “hypothetically speaking, would it be so bad if we got together?”. It’s little signs like the bottom of the barrel humour appreciation that should’ve sent you on your merry way.

Almost burning your finger on the end of your joint, you’d wish you’d had a better hold on things. You’d wish you’d kept your boundaries about not being too vulnerable, not getting too comfortable opening up to him, and not succumbing to your every yearn to call, text, consume him. You’d wish you never allowed yourself to blur the lines of friendship under the guise of “body no be firewood”.

You had never been overly physically affectionate. He was the catalyst – always him. He interlocked his fingers with yours once, then twice, then you began having withdrawal symptoms in the absence of his calloused palms. When he held your hand, you would feel warm tingles all over your fingers that manifested as wild, raging butterflies in your lower abdomen, flapping their wings faster than a newly hired gateman running to open the gate. With each of your fingers interwoven with his, in that blanket of security, you always felt invincible. Looking back, it’s crazy to think how much power he held.

You invited him to swim in your apartment building once. You scraped your knee against the granite landing in the pool trying to impress him in a game of water handball. You, who had never been competitive about anything sporty. This was also the day you first felt his hands imprint themselves into the flesh of your waist, and sink into the cellulite on your thighs, and hold on to the crook of your knee. Your boobs pressed into his back as you laid flush against his skin for a piggyback ride. You felt up and down his arms, your palms ebbing with the troughs and vales of his muscles. You felt him; he enjoyed feeling you; you indulged in the momentary acceptability of your skin contact in the water. Even when the sun set and you no longer felt the whisper of heat on your backs and necks, you both stayed in the water, holding on to that ephemeral paradise without restrictions. At a point you sat in his lap with your back leaning against the pool ledge. In complete silence your legs laid strewn all over his and his hands held you in place. Your fingers found their way under his necklace, and you tried to rub off your contentment into the skin on the back of his neck. He told you then, while staring into the turbulent pools of indecision in your eyes, “I really really like you for real”. It was in this moment that you saw how beautifully brown his eyes are. Not the everyday man brown. No. His eyes are a pool of unsweetened hot chocolate that give the promise of richness without too much of that childhood innocence associated with sweetness. You had to catch yourself from staring into them too long and being weird. Your eyes, you’re sure, only reflected irresolution.

You would remember that time the dimple on the intersection between his jawline and his chin became ingrained in your brain forever. You would feel a surge of serotonin reliving how you woke up to his morning breath clouding that little groove, and how you planted your lips in it. You’d recall how subsequent urges to feel its depth were curbed by the optics of sending him the wrong signal. It was always about protecting him. You’d wonder why your brain never got to the part about protecting you. Traitorous witch.

You’d had sex on the first date more times than are countable and for some reason that disconnected detached sex gave you the best orgasms... till him, that is. Till you experienced the power of intimacy; that force that kept your eyes latched onto his whilst he stirred the inner

crevices of your soul. The intimacy that made you forget to remember to moan in tandem with him breaking down the glass ceiling of your pleasure. This was just an “as friends”, “one time only” moment. You never expected that months on, it’s the only penis, the only tongue, the only man you’d ever want in you again.

You once asked him one thing he liked about you and he said, “I really like how at home I feel when I’m with you.” You thought it was the sweetest thing ever and had to cover your face to hide the signs of your internal squealing. You too always loved how you felt when you were with him. You felt safe.

Scavenging through your basically empty cupboards for a snack to subdue the munchies, you’d smile at how he hated you calling him cute but was literally adorable with a capital “A”. He’d always give you stick about your favourite colour being lilac, going on and on about how it’s basically purple. Yet it was him who flooded your senses with the smell of lavender, the sight of a sea of beautifully soft pastel “purples”, and the taste of indubitable love. Amidst a room full of wicker baskets with bundles of lilac and lavender flowers in your apartment, there he was; your man; your lighthouse.

It was in the little nothings that you realised how strongly you suffused his thoughts and memory. He’d buy you the cinnamon tossed *Auntie Anne* pretzels even though he only likes the salted ones; he’d “mistakenly” buy extra packs of lip balm which you’d steal because you were always losing yours; he’d keep makeup wipes in his bathroom and a bottle of your favourite cleanser; he’d allow you to put him on fragrances you were obsessed with at whatever given period. He allowed you to be you. Unapologetically. You know that complete embarrassment from being asked “is it time for questions?” when you’re super curious about something? He constantly gave you the totally opposite feeling of that shame. With all this, it shouldn’t have, but the “so what are we?” came as such a shock to you your immediate response was to laugh. Until then you’d been living a dream you didn’t know you had – absorbing his love, nourishing yours, but remaining ambivalent on the topic of commitment. To your laugh he sighed, to his sigh you looked away, and that was it. He didn’t push you, you didn’t push yourself, but you did pull him in, and he you. The jealousy, when you’d finally been able to diagnose it as what it was, was the first real evincing. The second was the heaviness you started feeling each time you repeated your disinterest in anything deeper. It wasn’t until the very end that you realised the toll your non-reciprocity was having on him. It wasn’t until you stopped fixating on your internal struggle between wanting him and not wanting to commit that you realised that he wasn’t as yours as he used to be. It wasn’t until you were self-admittedly hopelessly in love that you realised that he wasn’t anymore.

Now, high as a kite, you’d contemplate the lovelessness of your life. You’d contemplate how you royally fumbled such a good man. You’d look at the reminder of your date in half an hour and unbathed, undressed, unmade up, you’d weigh the benefits of expending energy on all those versus remaining in your romanticised memories of your mess. In the moment, you choose to breathe and live.

The last time you saw each other was like drinking a hot latte. The fragrance of the coffee pulls you in and gets you all excited to take a sip. You take a sip before it’s sufficiently cooled down, feel the flash of pain on your tongue, go through the knee jerk “damn” exclamation, put it away, then after a while, your mouth remembers the hint of flavour tasted beneath the burn and you

forget about the pain and want another sip. In other words, unhealthy. You missed him, and hated him, and wanted him, and loathed him, and wanted forgiveness from him, and an apology from him.

He once joked about an argument you had with your roommate and said, "it starts out like this and soon someone will be stealing someone's man". He bantered with you saying, "I could be the man". You laughed in incredulity because firstly, he definitely wasn't officially your man and secondly, what did he mean he was going to get stolen? You would never have guessed that in the same apartment that he bombarded you with baskets of flowers, in the same apartment that he whispered against your skin how much he liked you, in the same apartment that he massaged oil into your scalp as you watched *Boondocks*, in the same apartment that you cried into his chest when you lost your grandaunt, in the same apartment that you built up experiences of your love, he went and loved another person.

The last time you saw him you were moving out of 24 Gavin Street, and he was moving in. Finally, with someone who could love him unrestrictedly, not held back by fear, lack of trust, or uncertainty. He could fully love and be loved. He regurgitated your repeatedly shared sentiment of not wanting to be in a relationship. "You never had feelings for me anyways", he said, as you remained committed to your vow of silence - your promise to not react and not show any signs of the hurt or pain or remorse or grief.

You'd finish rolling up your second joint of the night to continue disillusioning yourself of the reality of both of your shortcomings. You'd smoke again to re-immense yourself into the bliss of ignorance; to put on the rose-tinted glasses and be in your utopia where once again, filled by each other's essence, you could love and be loved.