

Leaky Pipes

by Deborah Oster Pannell

I was thinking everything was OK, until one day I woke up and realized that I was living on an entirely different planet, and you seemed like a complete stranger to me. I was feeling so ashamed of these feelings, that I couldn't even tell you about them. I couldn't help that it was almost a week before I was able to put any of these murky thoughts into words. At this stage of my life, uncertainty congeals at will into recognizable form. I have little or no control over the time frame. Sometimes I'm just watching and waiting for things to make sense.

So then I was thinking I needed some time to myself. I was thinking that this process of coming into myself, rediscovering who I am, fastening together the pieces of my identity from the fragmented timeline of my development — it would all take a lot of concentration and focus.

There are many tasks involved in gaining clarification. Cleaning out my house is just part of it. Getting my thoughts in order, putting the ideas into spreadsheets, making sure the to-do lists are complete and have encompassed everything I don't want to forget is all taking a tremendous amount of energy. So is writing down all my story ideas, all the loose plot lines and stray images, random scenarios and character sketches. I was thinking there was no way I could do all this and still give you the kind of attention you crave from me.

One thing I have realized is that the more I create the environment I need around me, the easier it is for me to think clearly. Feng shui is real. My spiritual clarity depends on me folding up the piles of laundry. Having the leaky refrigerator fixed was a step forward in establishing the strong foundation of my courage and independence. Subsequently changing the water filter myself was the “I Am Woman Hear Me Roar” icing on the cake.

But I fucked something up when I was tightening the bolts. By mistake, I loosened the connection to the brass tubing that led to the water pipe, and now it leaks. Now I don't know what to do. My

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kitchen is a mess, the refrigerator is in the middle of the room, I can't turn on the ice maker because I can't turn the water back on, and I can't afford to pay my plumber to come over and embarrass me by fixing it with his big boy tools in about five minutes.

But mostly, I'm really pissed off, because I could call you, and you would probably come over and fix it for me, because you have those same tools. And I'm pissed because I don't want that kind of relationship where I get scared and call you when I can't get something to work. Even though I really feel like crying and I miss you. Because I know that after we kiss and make up (and the sex will be so good), I will wake up tomorrow and wonder why I am spending time with you when I'm not sure. I'm just not sure.

Maybe I'm just supposed to not mind the leaky pipes. Or the fact that it takes three times as long as I thought it would to fix them. Or the fact that one day I think you're amazing and I want to spend the rest of my life with you, and the next day I hate everything about you. How is that not supposed to freak me out? How am I not supposed to hate that I can't fix a fucking pipe in my house without calling someone to help me?

But then you called me. And you asked me how my day was. And when I told you about the pipe thing, you actually gave me a couple of good ideas, and I'll probably head back to Home Depot tomorrow to get what I need to really fix it this time. And then I was thinking, man, I wish you were coming over tonight instead of going to play cards with your friends. Because you wouldn't care that my kitchen is a mess, and you'd kiss me and hold me and love me, and I would be so sleepy and a little sore walking through the aisles of Home Depot tomorrow.

But instead, I'm sitting here writing this story, because I'm fucking finding myself, here in these words, on the page, articulating my feelings and sharing my experience and making some kind of narrative out of this ridiculous series of events that is actually my life. I don't know if this is supposed to be a short story, or a blog post, or a chapter in a book I keep telling myself I want to write, or just an entry in my journal that really ought not to have been shared,

and therefore I should be sort of embarrassed by this massive overshare.

And I don't know why I think I should be any more adept at relationships than I should be at changing refrigerator water filters. I have not been well trained for either. And yet, here I am, muddling my way through as if I actually know what I'm doing.

