

Myra's Lighthouse

by Doug Woodhouse

We've been riding in silence for an hour and a half now, and I've been mentally cataloging all the various ways Myra has fucked me up. I know this is a dangerous game, strapped to our seats inches apart and hurling down the road at 70 mph, but I can't help fiddling with the fuse.

When we broke up, Myra told me that she didn't like feeling guilty if she was out having fun without me. The discussion stemmed from an incident that happened about a week before, when she called me from a bar because she was drunk and needed a ride home. Some of our friends from out of town had dropped in unexpectedly on their way to a conference in New York, and they had all gone out to one of our favorite spots to hang out and catch up. I couldn't believe Myra hadn't called me, and I told her so on the way home. It probably wasn't the best time to get mad at her since she was tired and drunk, and I ended up locking myself in the bathroom and running the shower so she wouldn't hear me cry. They picked her up at her office, she said, she thought I was busy with my work, she said, she didn't want to disturb me, she said, but I still felt like she was having more fun without me and didn't want me to be there. I was hurt, but Myra was so insistent that I was being irrational that I couldn't help think that maybe she was right.

Myra cracks her window and I crack mine. She lights her cigarette and passes me the lighter. Although I'm close enough to touch her, it feels like we're on two separate islands, miles and miles apart. I can't see her, I can only see her smoke signals. She blows the smoke out her nose and stares straight ahead. I wonder what she's thinking, but I know better than to ask.

A year after we broke up I was invited to a birthday party for a girl I had a crush on, and the entire night I found myself constantly leaving the room when she entered it. I was making myself miserable, and I wasn't entirely sure why I was doing it. I thought it might be because I didn't like competing for her attention (which it

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partly was), but when I got home I realized I was displaying a trait that I had now subconsciously labeled as "positive". I was told that wanting to be with Myra when she was out doing fun things had had a repellant effect upon her, that I had suffocated her and it had made her want to get out of the relationship, so there I was, like a peacock strutting my plumage, leaving the room to show her "Look! I can let you have fun with other people! Aren't I desirable?" Stupid, stupid, stupid, stupid, stupid, stupid.

Myra flicks her cigarette out the window and puts her seat back to take another nap. What poor, disheveled beasts we are! Every human out there is a fucked up and complicated creature, living out dramas that we're barely even aware of, bumping up against others in the night, running mental mazes and trying to find the other soul that will fit like a puzzle piece against our own ragged coast line, not knowing what their coast line looks like, and sometimes not even knowing our own, just crashing the two together and rubbing them back and forth, hoping to find a point where they snap together in place, but often times only succeeding in eroding the coast even more, giving it a new broken shape. Is Myra a different person now because of me, or is she just making the same mistakes over and over and over again? Am I? Why did I agree to this trip? Maybe I died years ago and this is what hell looks like: a white Nissan Sentra with Myra sleeping in the passenger seat. My own Sisyphean hell. I pull off at the next rest area and get out of the car, just to prove to myself that I can.

