

Satellites

by Maura Trail

The end, she thought, when did we end? She knew it had to end. Ten months in and it was no different from the day they met. Then again, the day they met it seemed as if they'd known each other ten years. That was the nature of their relationship she supposed.

Maybe that first day was the end. They met by chance, on a random encounter. About six hours in he first kissed her, in a hidden corner of the CVS. The group wanted to grab beer before stopping for pizza, because pizza and beer after a full day of drinking is always a brilliant idea. He wandered off and she left the group to find him. He was grabbing a five hour energy, several to be exact, apparently he was fading fast. As she crept up to him he looked up, she put her hand on his arm and asked if he was ready to go. He, like it was his mission the whole time, leaned in and kissed her. It was a sweet kiss, a sudden kiss, like a five-year old on a playground stealing a kiss under the monkey bars.

Eight hours in they first really kissed; in the kitchen of his friend's apartment where they all stopped for pizza to soak up some of the alcohol they'd all consumed. It was an unconventional place for a kiss, caught between the counter and the open bathroom door. This was sudden and unexpected, hungry. He kissed with urgency; he tasted like cheep, stale beer. She wondered if the hunger contained in the kiss would be subsided when the pizza finally arrived. Half expecting him to playfully pull her into the bathroom for some privacy, she stopped it before it could get to that point. She didn't want to become spectacle in some stranger's place.

Twelve hours in he asked her home with him as he was leaving the house party they ended up at. She thought about it for a second. It had been a long day. In some strange way it felt like months of dating all wrapped into a few hours. Should she pass this

moment by? Should she just give him her number and call it a day? There was no real question in her mind; she would go home with him. Never before had she felt such a natural connection with someone else, a natural bond, as if the universe was willing this to happen. She wasn't sure if she ever would again. Then again, maybe it was just hormones and the desire to not be alone for one night.

Together they left the party. They got back to his place. It was lived in, that was her polite thought for it being a mess. He apologized for the mess, explaining he had not been expecting guests and being in and out of town so much left him little time to clean. As he pulled a few things off the couch to make room for them to sit down, he offered her water and a beer. She said yes to both. Naturally she was not the type to go home with a guy on the first night, she needed the liquid courage.

She sat awkwardly, perched on the arm of the couch while he got water for the two of them and a beer for her. She, in the end only had a sip or two. He turned on a tv show, futurama, she remembered. It reminded her of an old boyfriend. Immediately she felt comfortable, and slid from the arm onto the couch to join him. She wondered if this was one of his "moves." Somehow she trusted it wasn't. She curled up next to him, he pulled her in close. Together they sat there talking as if the television wasn't even there, as if they were a long established couple. When his still hungry lips could wait no more, he leaned in and kissed her. She returned with equal passion.

Quite as suddenly as he started he pulled back for air. She was left there breathless before him. He huffed out in between heavy breaths, "Sorry, its been a while."

Before he could say anything else, she pulled him back into a deep embrace. They stayed there a while. He finally suggested they

go upstairs. With that he led her to the second floor of his small apartment and into the bedroom. Contrary to popular belief, they did not have sex that night. They wrestled each other out of clothes, leaving them in disheveled piles on the floor, before falling asleep in each other's arms, but they did not have sex.

They woke up the next morning, facing each other. He first. He leaned in and kissed her forehead. Her eyes fluttered open and he kissed her. "Good morning," he said with a boyish grin.

"Hey you," she said and just smiled back at him as she hugged herself into the top sheet. She hadn't felt so comfortable with anyone since her last boyfriend, but that was three years before.

He suggested they do breakfast and was going to make it for her there, to spare the necessity of clothes. Upon further examination of his cupboards, he discovered he would still have to go to the store, so she suggested a diner instead.

They composed themselves and ventured outside. Neither noticed time pass as they strolled down the street, passing several adequate places to eat. He asked for her number, she gave it to him and then playfully asked how he knew she wasn't lying. Instantly he called the number, and her bag rang. "I guess you weren't," he said as he pulled her to him. She just shrugged and smiled; he kissed her and then pointed out a diner across the street.

Together they sat, for how long, neither knew. They had all the conversations couples usually had before they took each other home, all the topics you avoid while getting to know someone else. They were a little backwards. They left the diner walked back towards his place and kissed for a long time out front. He welcomed her back upstairs if she had no plans. Much to her chagrin she did, she gave him a look as if to say, "I wish I could, I don't want this day to end." She leaned up, kissed him and said, "I can't today."

She turned to walk away and he pulled her back for a second, the look in his eye was rueful. As he brushed a few strands of hair away from her face, he said "I want to be clear; I don't have time for a girlfriend."

She looked at him, smiled and replied, "I'm not really looking for a boyfriend." She pulled him into one more kiss and walked away, never expecting to hear from him again.

A few days later, he called her from the road. She was sitting in a noisy coffee shop taking care of a few things before a meeting. He was traveling for business and something he came across reminded him of her, he tried to explain it but he couldn't find the words. Hearing his voice brought a smile to her face.

She called him one night when she couldn't sleep, she told him she wished he was there to hold her, that in his arms was the best sleep she had had in months. He talked to her until he was sure she had fallen asleep and she awoke the next morning with her phone resting on her pillow and a soft smile on her face. She wasn't sure if she was falling or not, she only knew that in some way he gave her comfort and right then comfort was what she needed.

The back and forth between them continued over the next weeks before they saw each other again. He came to meet her and some friends one afternoon.

Maybe that was the end. They spent all day outside. It was one of those perfect afternoons to just lie in the sun, or drink at an outdoor bar. There they stayed, half cuddling, their friends knowing what they were and what they weren't.

As they parted ways he invited her to a party that night. She had other plans, of course their plans never seemed to coincide; but she

said she would try to make it. Without having to question, they both knew she would be there. She met up with him as planned. He embraced her when she got there, just a hug though. These friends did not know what they were, or what they weren't.

She felt a little out of place, a little bit of a spectacle, and latched on to the one person she knew there. Jack was in his element, he was fluttering around, and he was flirting with other girls. Her blood started to boil as she watched this. She hated the feeling; she wasn't supposed to feel this way. She removed herself from the situation; she went outside and bummed a cigarette off some smoker while she cleared her mind. The cool night air calmed her. The tantalizing taste of the tobacco relaxed her with every drag. She supposed she would be the same way if it were her friends, but her cheeks still burned with a jealous fire. He invited her and has spent no time with her. Maybe he was no good for her after all.

At that thought she shook her head. She flicked her cigarette into the street, went back inside, and ordered a beer to wash away the taste of tobacco from her mouth. What was she getting all fussy about? They were most certainly not a couple.

She stayed at the bar willing herself not to be jealous, the alcohol was not helping. He came up behind her, wrapped his arms around her waist, softly kissed her neck, and asked where she had been all night. It was the alcohol talking, but he was still looking at her and no one else. Clearly she had nothing to worry about, she smiled to herself as she turned around into him and wrapped her arms around his neck. Before suggesting they get out of there, she pulled him into a kiss. He had no objection.

Shortly after they found themselves enveloped in each other in the back of a cab on their way to his place. Somehow, they managed to keep control of themselves until they reached his place. Between

the two of them his shirt was half way off by the time they made it upstairs.

That night they made love, but it was lustful and full of hunger. Passionate and fiery, she held on to every second as if she never wanted to let go. In that moment she realized she was too attached; she had to detach.

They woke up the next morning and he again suggested breakfast. She lied, said she had plans, that she should be going.

The entire way home she mulled the night over. She never was ever jealous, not like that. She decided it was best if she shut off. No emotion, no connection, no expectations. Surely that would lead to the end, for nothing can last when all doors are closed and locked, and all is left untied.

Over the next few weeks she did not reach out to him, though he did to her. Not that it mattered anyways, they didn't have the time; their schedules conflicted too much. After a month she stopped hearing from him. Maybe it was for the best, she had met someone she actually wanted to give a chance. The last thing she needed was some emotionless temptation to distract her.

The new guy didn't last long though. That ended abruptly when she heard from Jack again. He called one night, she answered without looking, figuring it was the guy she was actually seeing. It wasn't, it was Jack wanting her to come over, have dinner, watch baseball. She said she already had plans. He was not dejected, just said maybe next time. She neglected to tell him she had a date, she should have because he took full advantage of his empty evening to tell her how much he wanted her. All through dinner she tried to ignore him. In that moment her will was not strong enough, she couldn't or maybe she didn't want to.

Dinner ended early and her date went home under the pretense of having to be at work early. She didn't think, she didn't ask, she just texted Jack "I'll be there in fifteen minutes." She hopped in a cab and headed to him.

The doorman greeted her when she arrived, let her straight up. She hardly had to knock on the door before Jack answered. "I'm glad that was so quick," he said, "It's been too long." He pulled her inside and into his arms. She had hoped there was nothing left for her in his kiss. There was. Had she planned that night she would have planned to stay. He tried every way imaginable to get her to. She had no idea what this was but she knew it was not the end.

She called her date the next day, apologized for how distant she had been, and ended it with him. She had no reason or explanation, he didn't ask for one. Maybe he wanted more than it was, maybe she wanted less, and maybe she just wanted Jack.

The next few months involved many late nights with Jack. She was a fan of their Tuesday night trysts after work: dinner, wine, and exploring each other, in no particular order. He loved their Sunday fundays, she would come over midafternoon or still be over from the night before; they would sit around all afternoon watching movies or sports.

It was easy for her, no emotion, no worry. There was never a question in her mind as to whether he was going to call. He always did, when he wanted to see her, when he was out of town, he reached out to her.

At some point, she couldn't exactly remember when, he showed her a picture of him and his nephew. She felt her defenses weakening and wondered whether that would ever be them. These thoughts were not welcome; she was not supposed to be attaching herself.

This was the beginning of the end, she supposed.

A couple weeks passed before she saw him again. She had tried to distance herself. He called her late one night as she happened to be leaving a party, invited her out with his friends. She stood on the street corner for a long time contemplating. Another girl walked up and asked if she had a light, she did. The girl offered her a smoke, she accepted, they talked. The both had worries. At midnight on a street corner on a Saturday in New York City, everyone has a story about a lover. The girl told her she had a good feeling about Jack. She suggested they flip a coin. Heads they go and tails they go home. The girl would go home, she would go to Jack.

She went up, unknowingly to the bar. Unknowing what she wanted, unknowing what he wanted, and unknowing what would come. When she got to the place she walked inside and found him easily. He was excited to see her. He wasn't sure she would come. He showed her off to his friends, he spun her around on the dance floor, pulled her close, and then took her home.

They made love that night and twice again the next morning before they made it out into the daylight for food. They wandered around for a while, talking. They looked like a couple. They acted like a couple. They went back to his place and watched television all afternoon while cuddling.

Together they made dinner. Their trip to the grocery store was brief. They stood inline behind an old man. When the cashier asked if Jack had a club card, he said "I do." The old man chimed in "be careful saying I do around a pretty young girl. The last time I did that she never left. Best fifty five years of my life." Jack just laughed politely.

She smiled endearingly at the old man, he reminded her of her grandfather. She offered to help him with his groceries, but he denied it and told them to get out of there. She just looked at Jack, for the first time really looked at him. It hit her like a ton of bricks, though she did not understand it at the time. They went home, made dinner, and made love one more time before she had to go home.

That was the beginning of December, was that the end? In the weeks to follow they were both busy. To busy to see each other. She liked it that way. She was still contemplating things.

He contacted her the day she was leaving for the holidays wanting to see her before she left. The most she could do was stop by his office on the way to her train; maybe they could do a drink. He said no, that it might be cutting it too close. That was a test. Had he just wanted to see her, he would have made it happen. He wanted usual, he just wanted sex.

Her train ride home afforded her time to think. Everything that had been building up for her about them hit her at once. He was never available for her. He never remembered anything she said, save for her having a nephew, he always said yuck to kids. He never wanted to take it outside of the bedroom, except for food. That last time with him, the entire time with him felt like they were a couple. The only thing was she was shut off. She wanted that, but not with him. She wasn't sure they could ever be anything more than they were.

The holidays passed and they had one more rendezvous. She had to be sure there was nothing there. As she laid there in his arms after, she felt conflicted. She felt at home and yet numb. She knew she had to end it. Not then though, sometime when they could talk about it.

Two weeks later he contacted her in the dead of night, asking her if she was still awake and if she wanted to come over. Instead of saying no she told him that if he wanted her, he had to come to her. He did. She never thought for a moment he would, clearly she couldn't end it then. Then again guys will jump through hoops if they know they are getting sex out of the deal.

He got there and noted how much he liked her apartment. He explored it a little like a puppy in a new place before retreating with her to her bedroom. To her it seemed as if they both somehow knew it was the end. They fell asleep as the sun came up.

They both awoke, not wanting to leave warmth of her bed on the frigid January morning, but they both had plans. They cleaned up, got dressed, and walked in opposite directions. She pointed him towards his subway and she walked towards hers, neither looking back.

He contacted her the following week. She couldn't do it anymore. She had wanted to tell him in person but every time she saw him, she couldn't bring herself to. So she just blurted out to him over the phone that she couldn't do the non emotion thing anymore, that it wasn't enough, and she wanted them to end before either started to resent the other. He understood, better than she thought he would.

So, this was the end.

He reached out to her a few times, on those cold winter nights where you just want someone enveloped around you. As hard as it was to stay strong, as hard as it was to say no, she stood her ground.

She ran into him near his office one day. All was cordial, neither had anywhere to go, so she suggested a drink. He agreed and they sat there for hours like they always did. Someone they inadvertently

started talking to made a comment on how cute the two of them were. They both ignored the insinuation.

What happened next she was not prepared for. He hugged her good bye and walked away. She was prepared to have to tell him no, to explain everything to him, to fight her own emotions. None of that happened. They just hugged and walked separate ways. They were done. After ten months of whatever they were, they were done.

She dated on and off but no one seemed to stick around. No one seemed to fit. No one felt like home.

The next time she ran in to him, it was easier. They hugged; they caught up on each others lives and parted. Maybe it was self defense on both parties. She had started seeing someone else, John. He was there, so she was with him. And Jack, he was his usual self. It was easier to pretend they had been nothing when she had something else in front of her.

By chance she met John. He was perfect on paper and even more so with her. She and John connected. He took an interest in her, was there for her when she wanted him to be, paid attention to her interests. She was still candid with her emotions; and, though she feared she always would be, she felt something was there. This was different than Jack, something deeper.

A year to the day from when they first met she saw Jack again. The weather was gorgeous. He hugged her that day and she didn't want to let go. They talked a long time about life, his job, her work. It was reminiscent of their beginning. When John arrived she kept stealing glances Jack's way. She shook it off. Composed herself and resumed her usual senses, though she wondered all the time if Jack had already moved on.

The next few days went by in a blurry mess. She had almost no time to think when she stopped thought she wasn't thinking about life or John or work or friends, she was thinking about Jack. Maybe she hadn't been as numb as she thought, or maybe she's that fucked up to want him back now that she couldn't have him.

John was great, but there weren't the same tender affectionate moments she had with Jack. She and John were like two stoic creatures slowly falling for one another. The only two who really knew anything was there were she and him. One of John's friends did tell her that he had never seen John so openly happy and affectionate towards anyone. She supposed there was more to it than that.

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She kept thinking her and John, her and John, her and John. Jack kept popping back into her head. She thought they were over, that it was the end.

She called Jack, no answer. She left a message, "Hey Jack, It's Sarah. I just wanted to see if you wanted to grab a drink when we're both free." She hesitated, not wanting to reveal herself. "I miss you."

Maybe it was the end; maybe they are still at the beginning. Maybe they were stuck in some strange orbit around each other.

