

Don't Fear the Reaper

KillToParty | 13 March, 2020 | by Billy Pratt

â□□Baby, I'm your man.â□□

Nothing ends well. I hate to be the one to tell you, but if you didn't already know, romantic endings are for Hollywood. Real life is dull with a shit ending. I've never watched someone die, and my hands carry the softness of a man with intellectual savvy- I've never known hard labor, and this is something I appreciate. After I scrub diligently for twenty-seconds and dry thoroughly, I enjoy the soft touch of my fingertips on my reasonably ageless face. People are shocked that I'm forty- and with a baseball cap turned just slightly askew, I can still fuck reasonably young women.

But this isn't going anywhere. The joke is that once you hammer out the formula, in your Henry Frankenstein fuck laboratory, you're already halfway bored by the results. They say the journey is more satisfying than the destination, but once you slipped into the realm of hindsight, you wonder if that's just another bit of Hollywood bullshit.

You have so many of the same interactions that it all blurs together and becomes part of your muscle memory- like realizing Punch-Out is a rhythm game- you could do it blindfolded. You thought you were Tony Soprano, a playboy with a dark side, but you're really Livia- "it's all a big nothing," something you understand now more than you ever thought you would.

So you resign yourself to wanting something real. You think you've finally come up with the right equation for it, and even if you understand the immutable fact that *genuine relationships don't exist in hell*, you're still going out to slay demons with your spear and armor until you get the girl- even if you have to play through the game twice.

But nothing ends well. Hollywood endings are called that for a reason. I never took my dog for the walk I was too busy for before his liver failed. You won't say the right things to resolve the years of tension you've had with your parents before they die, even if you come close. You won't find the right girl to ride off into the sunset with- "all a big nothing."

When she told me that she wasn't sure how she felt, I knew it was time to go. You never want to get jobbed out of a territory- the idea is to leave on your own accord. It was time to go, and I told her I wasn't going to stay the night- something that struck a nerve with her. She felt comfortable sussing out her feelings in language that could hang in the air and be arranged and rearranged like refrigerator magnets- this was the kind of control she expected; her decision and her terms. But the ultimate sin in a relationship is forgetting that it's a perpetual game of chess- even when it feels like it isn't, there's no rest for the wicked.

I was sincere in leaving- it wasn't a game to sway her feelings. I collected my things and she walked me to the door, where I took one last look at her. I thought she was beautiful, another sin when you're living in hell- and took a second to linger. I wanted to feel something. You want to *feel* a goodbye. It may be the last time you ever feel anything remotely close to love for a woman, even if this were only in bit-sized pieces with artificial flavoring- *love adjacent*, maybe.

You wait to feel something, but what you want is acknowledgment that she's there with you in the moment. You want a look of presence in her eyes. Only men are fools enough to get caught up in nostalgia- romanticizing the past- women are too pragmatic for that. Like hungry wolves, they understand picking bones and moving on. Cut out at the right time, and she'll still care- you'll get that look in her eyes, and you'll feel your goodbye.

I told her I'd see her around- saying goodbye felt too real. She had a moment of fluster, a minor stutter when she'd get too nervous, then smiled and said 'maybe at Target,' a joke we shared, that I was always running into ex-girlfriends at Target. I took another pause, touched her face, returned her smile, and left. So perfect an ending to tidy-up a good-enough six-months that I would have been able to reflect fondly on it for years; so perfect that it couldn't have really been the end. If endings seem too emotionally charged, you end up going back to them. Things only truly die in cancer ravaged hospital beds- black and stinking, shit and piss.

That is reality, not storybooks; not Hollywood. The zombie invasion end-of-the-world meme, where we go out defending civilization with homemade weapons and combat cars, was never going to happen. Coronavirus is the reality we deserve- death by the neo-liberal, consumer hellscape we created- death by Amazon Prime, death by Travelocity- death by *wanderlust*, death by modern sin-Â holed up in our homes, being lied to by our governments, while our lungs collapse. There is no perfect goodbye.

We saw each other until that look in her eyes was gone. This is reality- you drive a relationship into the ground trying to make it work, trying to play catch-up, and you go out counting the lights. You realize it's over two weeks too late, and your last memory of her is only coldness- all a big nothing, and you'd better get used to it.

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