

Eternal September

KillToParty | 19 September, 2020 | by Billy Pratt

“A week without you, thought I’d forget. Two weeks without you and I still haven’t gotten over you yet.”

She didn’t like it when I teased her about her house. Put politely, it was unfinished. What was meant to be the baby’s room, with its careful design of overlapping squares hand-painted on the walls, had become a storage-space; miscellaneous items suffering a slow transition to the garbage. Her hardwood floors had stains. Light bulbs dangling from fixtures. Things in the yard that hadn’t been moved since they were put down fifteen years prior. A storm destroyed the fence, with only the posts a reminder that her yard had once been enclosed. The front lawn with crab grass and mushrooms.

Not that one needed to be tremendously perceptive to realize that the house, more or less, had ceased any major evolutionary activity- the kind where the first time homeowner is gifted a Time-Life “Home Repair & Improvement” book set, with plans made that foresaw holiday duties on the path to grandchildren.

She wanted me to love the beach like she did. Reminders of this- some purchased at home furnishing stores, some given as gifts- served as the main source of decor; reminding me that the beach is her *happy place* while encouraging me to *keep calm and sit by the ocean*.

If there’s anything certain left to believe, it’s that we’re living in hell. She didn’t understand why I went on about this- falling short of obsessive but with serious overtones of urgency. The greatest misconception about hell is the fire. People think hell is alive, molecules buzzing anxiously. There may be a cinematic quality to this but it isn’t accurate- it isn’t hell. Hell is cold and dead. Hell is subtle enough for you to doubt that it’s surrounding you.

I liked the beach, but I didn’t love it like she did. I’d meet women there for first dates, where we’d find a bench and watch the sunset as the crashing waves create an ambient soundtrack. I can’t spend my days sitting on a beach, it makes me nervous to not use my time productively- a horrible consequence of too much time wasted- but at night I like listening to the stories of women.

Typically divorced, but not always- the ones who were married are usually the more mentally stable- they’ll cite a dead bedroom and an unmotivated husband as their chief concern for initiating the separation. There will usually be a pang of regret over disrupting the lives of their children, and the inconvenience of sharing custody, although this is understood as collateral damage. They had all heard of Tinder and were “excited to try it,” with the initial burst of male interest serving as enthusiastic confirmation that they had made the right decision. You’ll know how long a woman has been on her own by the way she talks about meeting men.

A woman new on the scene will be enamored by the attention- so many *options*, often exceeding her wildest fantasies. A gym-rat in his early-thirties, looking to relieve a bit of stress after leaving the office; the twenty-four year old bartender; the frat guy cheating on his teenage girlfriend- all chasing a woman over forty. She always knew she could do better than her husband- and with the maturity of age, she’s now comfortable enough with her sexuality to indulge without regret.

And even if she had more fun than she ever thought were possible on those lonely nights, sitting under the glow of her television, with an open bottle of wine, playing and replaying the eventual conversation she’d need to have with her husband; even if she had gotten to live out the female version of every man’s fantasy, with the only limit being a time predestined by her own genetic code, a threshold causing the attention to taper- she’ll one day realize the coldness that had always surrounded her.

The beach became her happy place when she found her high school sweetheart overdosed in their bathroom— the beginning of her eternal September. She took their infant daughter and wouldn't return to the house for three years, where she sat in her decaying castle and did the best she could. No one could blame her for any decision she had made there after. This is how she eased into the rest of her days, and there was nothing terribly wrong with it- even if her only wish were to politely color within the lines and walk away with a terrifically neat and tidy picture of a life well lived.

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