

I Am Trying to Break Your Heart
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(an excerpt)

“The best way to get over a woman is to turn her into literature”—Henry Miller

“I hate quotations. Tell me what you know!”—Ralph Waldo Emerson

The lighthouse, really, is best when it is frozen. There are mounds of snow and ice that make Northern Indiana look like tundra. I keep expecting to see caribou lumber between the docks. This was where I spent much of my youth, a youth in existential rebellion. There was Allen, Neal, and myself; we would lay out a blanket just before the tide, smoke cigars, drink coffee (we were too young to buy alcohol and were not the kind of kids with older friends) and read poetry from beatniks. We were idealistic. We were young. The best thing about the lighthouse is the scenery. One can see the lights of Chicago and I would always wonder if Chicago could see the lighthouse. There is a power plant with smoke stacks behind the catwalk that leads to the edge of Indiana. The immutable Lake Michigan in front of us, smoke stacks billowing white puffs behind us, and the county jail (which once held both John Dillinger and, later, Neal’s brother) is a few miles to our left. Neal is now in Texas with his new bride and Allen is working with radio signals and transmissions for the Coast Guard. Yet here I am still, years later, at the place that signified, at least for me, the turmoil of angst and young confusion. I have a small thermos of coffee, mittens full of holes, a thin blue scarf and my red cap. I am smoking unfiltered cigarettes because I always associate them with an older generation, a generation of expatriates and gin. A generation I feel an odd kinship too. It’s all very romantic, and I assure you this is the reason I always start writing with “I was drinking coffee and smoking” scenes. Years later and I have yet to say goodbye to the lighthouse. I need to leave Indiana. Melora.

A few days after she fucking broke my heart I thought of an idea for a story: a man hires someone else to feel for him. I got the idea after seeing someone, on my way to work no less, with a sign saying “have family, need work”. The protagonist would subcontract his feelings, his hurt, and more importantly, his regret. The story, of course, mutated and became about someone who wants to live in the moment, who doesn’t want to feel, and this became analogous to Melora (in the story, it was a male named Ben) and I became the character who wasn’t even in the story, the character who was forgotten (Rosemary, after Olivia Cross’s character in Rushmore). The subcontractor would show up at the worst possible moments, looking for payment from Ben. Moments that interrupted the dénouement (or resolution, closure) of smaller narratives within the larger narrative of Ben’s life such as: before orgasm, his son’s (whom he thinks looks up to him, but really the son wants nothing to do with him) graduation, and the such.

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I needed to write that story. I had so many questions regarding Melora, all unanswered. I needed closure. I needed to write the closure, answer the questions myself. So I decided upon *The Subcontractor* [the italics are used to show title] as way to take the hurt from inside me and put it somewhere else. This is all very structuralist (a literary theory fathered by Saussure. This will soon be discussed). How did the brooding soul-full type get over heartbreak before Saussure? Ferdinand Saussure, a Swiss linguist believed that language embodies the world, it doesn't just record a history or label things. My heartache is not heartache, it is something that is only conveyed through the word heartache (the italics are meant as a way of isolation the word beyond the "association"). Language is not a reflection of the world or of experience, it is a constitution. It stands, not as a reflection of the world or of experience, but as a separate system, meant to construct the world and understand experience. The word is a symbol and whatever the word is meant to represent (the word itself is arbitrary, but the language makes it a reality).

I need to construct what I feel into a language. At least then, my hurt would not be isolated within me and a part of it would be completely separate, in a different construction as opposed to the one I reside in (now, I know this is angsty and it is brooding and it's a little tired and worn, this "I've been hurt and nobody understands me" narrative, but the fact is, despite the number of times it has been told or it has been felt—it is my turn, now). It's hurt every goddamn day, this constant feeling of hollow. This ripping hurt that feels as though my organs were extracted and will continue to be extracted until I run out of organs (you know, that feeling you get when you lose something or forget something but you're not quite sure what it is you forgot).

The difficulty, in writing, was starting the actual process. I had it all plotted out with character profiles and dialogue. But when it came to write, Which tense do I write in?

There is a comfort in the past tense as opposed to the present tense. For example: "I felt Confused" implies that there is no longer confusion or that what happened in the past now has the appropriate retrospect; as opposed to "I feel confused" which implies that whatever is happening in the moment is on shaky ground, it is not quite understood. The same can go for "I loved her" versus "I love her". The comfort comes from nostalgia or an understanding of loss. There is no sadder phrase than "I loved..." The present tense would imply that the feeling is of an indeterminable amount of time, this is an ephemeral phrase, till it becomes past tense. The future tense, however, "I will feel confused" or "I will love her", I believe conveys a sense of loss what the hell it is that we have in the present tense. There is fear of loss turning the present tense into the past tense.

To get back to the narrative of writing a narrative of closure, I couldn't write in past tense because the words, which were symbols for how I felt, were inauthentic. There was no clarity or resolution because there was as of yet, no past tense in this narrative. When I wrote it in the present tense, the story was nothing but chaos, which, however, was exactly how I felt. I wrote up to the first time the Subcontractor showed up in Ben's life, and at that point, I realized, I couldn't write it (my closure) until I could put retrospect on the narrative of our relationship.

(HER)

"Leo, I have never felt this way before. I never thought I would ever want to get married again, but, I mean, I can see

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myself with you.”

“I wish you were the father of my children.”

“I wish you could see just how amazing you are. You are so important to me.”

In the summer there are seagulls. When I was a child I thought seagulls were exotic birds, meant for the sea and the coastal regions of the United States. Not Indiana. Not with the only major body of water touching Indiana like a poke. If there were seagulls here now I'm sure they would be frozen like statuettes, standing on one leg. I can imagine them stalking the frozen beach tundra, scavenging for the dead fish and leftover potato chips that they are so used to finding during the warmer months. As they scour the land, it happens, this freezing, and they never move again. They aren't even given the grace of Sisyphus, who at least was able to put one foot in front of another as he rolled the rock uphill. At least Sisyphus was allowed to move, even if he made the movements for eternity. At the end of his infinite struggle, he had at least been allowed to move the rock forward. Now, I haven't yet finished Camus's (does the apostrophe come before a second 's' or should it show up after the first 's's?') *The Myth of Sisyphus*, so forgive me if I'm reiterating what a better thinker has already written.

There is an unflinching beauty in impending doom and, in particular, to the resistance of it. I think it is one of the reasons I love superheroes and science fiction films. I love giant robots and diabolical schemes—"out to destroy the world". To know that the world is coming to an end, all that we know. All the narratives in the world would reach a conclusion, and people would take a chance with one another. Because, with the doom impending, why the hell not. Yet, (I feel like I should say it with an exclamation mark, Yet!) There is that resistance to doom that is absolutely gorgeous. This is the superhero: those that refuse all but a better future or at least, life.

Even with the world coming to an end due to a giant laser on Mars or special nanotechnology that turns all humans into simply working bodies (as opposed to having any essence) those that oppose the oncoming doom or the end, those that refuse to accept it, those are the ones that we need to aspire to be like. Death (am I really being this morbid, this early in the narrative?), the only state of being that is impending, is a lack of any forward movement. It is doom that is inescapable. Yet, every day we live we reject that notion. This goes not only for end-of-the-world scenarios but in smaller narratives as well.

Our refusal of death (a refusal through life itself) is existential in nature. Jean Wahl, in discussing the roots of existentialism writes that "Although our existence is characterized by the fact that there are things possible to us, the moment will come when there will be no more possibilities, when there will be no more 'ahead of us.' This is, of course, the moment of death..." How does one continue to be part of something (a relationship, a job, a club, etc...) if they don't believe there will be "aheads". How does one live, in which the next five years will be exactly the same as the past five years. It's seems horrifically cyclical in which, their real life character development, has no forward movement. How can one go to the same bars and meet the same people and talk about the same things every week? How can anybody not fight for the future? How can one accept a "no ahead"? It seems as though this

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is simply a “waiting” for that impending doom, which, I would assume, would create a mass amount of anxiety as we watch our narratives stall, like frozen seagulls, waiting for doom.

If language (forms of communication) establishes order in the chaos of the absurd (world and life) then language must be a form of extracting meaning from existence. Ergo, those unable to communicate (unable to be conscious, authentic, or have nothing to say; not to mean: don't talk) are existents (noun: human by physiology). There is a suffocating freedom in the choice to exist consciously or simply “live life” in a transient consciousness. I suppose what I'm trying to establish here is an argument for conscious living, to be aware of the world outside one's peripheral vision”. To live in a way that makes it so you don't have to consistently revolt against oneself in order to achieve an ideal but rather to grow organically and move towards something. There must be an “ahead of us”, otherwise, we are just objects, moving statues.

Character Profiles in 500 Words or Less

Melora Susan East was born on November 14, 1980. She had been married for eight years to Walt. Together, they had three children: Calvin 8, Anne 6, and Ramona 5. They married when they were 18. They divorced after a series of money problems and fights.

Melora was the second of three children for Don and Susan East. She spent her high school years getting drunk, high (When she was on 'shrooms she would go by the persona Sharona Frapple) and going on missionary trips with her church. She married Walt because she had no idea how to start her life, what else to do except get married and have babies. In the early years of their short marriage they both managed a low-end chain restaurant and bought a house. Walt was drunk and passed out on a friend's lawn when Anne was born. In the seventh year of their marriage, Melora had an affair (it isn't really romantic enough to use the word 'affair'—It was a one-night stand with a man named Mike. She was on a business trip in Missouri. And she admitted it to Walt as soon as she got home, I think, in excitement). She did it in an attempt at creating a “no ahead” for her marriage; however, Walt wanted to work through it. She ended it. She has lived with this guilt and regret yet she has never apologized to him for this. When we were together, she started to think about apologizing. Just saying...

She was pulled: she had two jobs a day job selling insurance and a night job as a waitress in a chain restaurant (where I met her). She was in the process of moving out as we went on our first date, a breakfast before work. In the past she had attempted going to beauty school, dropping out. She applied and enrolled in a composition class at the local college while we were together, dropping the class a week before it started. She told me several times that she always wanted to volunteer at a homeless shelter, but the people in charge never let her (she thinks, because of her lack of an education). She would ask me when I fell in love with her and I would give her a different answer every time. In truth, I fell in love with her when she told me, “I've been in this scene [the bar scene] but I always felt like I was more than this. I always felt like I was more than going to the same bars and the same parties. I think I am more than the weekends, when Walt has the kids.” I fell in love with her future tense.

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Leo Leeland McDougal, that's me. I was born November 22, 1986. I was the youngest of three children born to Ian and Caroline McDougal. As a child my interests varied from magic tricks, frogs, Bob Dole, and ventriloquism. In high school, I became involved with ZEAL MINISTRIES and became an itinerant preacher. As a teenager, I would fill in for area pastors when they went on vacation and preach at youth events. Neal and Allen were part of the worship team. When I was 18, I uncovered an affair between my father and *some woman* [italics here denote judgment]. At this point, my father (who could have been the inspiration for the Willy Loman character from *Death of a Salesman*) gave up the past and present tense and gave himself over to the future tense. He is a different man now. He is character change.

At 18, Neal, Allen, and I found Jack Kerouac and poetry. It's all very stock and clichéd. We would go to the light house and recite poetry. I always liked the idea that as the lighthouse was frozen, so would be our words. Spewing out our mouths, freezing the moment they touched air, and fall in the lake, sinking. Once, we stole Neal's father's Jager and recited *A Night Before Christmas* with expletives, "It was the night before Christmas and all through the goddamn house not a creature stirring except a motherfucking mouse" At this point, I was forced into college (by my father, no less), although what I really wanted to do was live a life on the rails, hopping freight trains, reading books, and *examining life* [this italics are there to show that this will come up later. A recurring theme within the story]. I dropped out of college after a year (failing six classes in all). After a serious depression and two failed relationships in which I used a lovely girl for money and sex and fell in love with a trombone prodigy for reasons of not being alone in this world, I decided to go back to school. Since then, I have realized that as narrative beings, we can't control the grand narrative of life, but we can control our character movement. My father is proof of this.

The problem, with writing this state of being (narrative stagnation) out, is that there is no ending or advancement of plot. In terms of narrative, I'm at a point that one could skip over and not miss anything. I could even go so far to say that this is the point in a story that isn't even written. Nothing happens, the plot isn't moving forward. This is part of the film in which Jean-Pierre Léaud would drink coffee in a café for eight hours. Nobody would film that. One never sees, in the movies at least, the part of the narrative in which the protagonist isn't moving, and rightfully so, for who would want to see a film about stasis? Unless, you're an Antonioni fan, which, if you are, I will never understand you. I wonder, if I'm able to write this, what you are reading, simply because there is not a plot to advance, because it is not quite essay or a story. It just is. This is being written, these words code for a period of narrative, in which nothing happens, in which the protagonist is just a frozen and imaginary seagull, mired in heartbreak and refusing the "no ahead".