

How It Will End

We're walking on the boardwalk
but stop when we see a lifeguard and his girlfriend
fighting. We can't hear what they're saying,
but it is as good as a movie. We sit on a bench to find out
how it will end. I can tell by her body language
he's done something really bad. She stands at the bottom
of the ramp that leads to his hut. He tries to walk halfway down
to meet her, but she keeps signaling *don't come closer*.
My husband says, "Boy, he's sure in for it,"
and I say, "He deserves whatever's coming to him."
My husband thinks the lifeguard's cheated, but I think
she's sick of him only working part time
or maybe he forgot to put the rent in the mail.
The lifeguard tries to reach out
and she holds her hand like Diana Ross
when she performed "Stop in the Name of Love."
The red flag that slaps against his station means strong currents.
"She has to just get it out of her system,"
my husband laughs, but I'm not laughing.
I start to coach the girl to leave her no-good lifeguard,
but my husband predicts she'll never leave.
I'm angry at him for seeing glee in their situation
and say, "That's your problem—you think every fight
is funny. You never take her seriously," and he says,
"You never even give the guy a chance and you're always nagging,
so how can he tell the real issues from the nitpicking?"
and I say, "She doesn't nitpick!" and he says, "Oh really?
Maybe he should start recording her tirades," and I say,
"Maybe he should help out more," and he says,
"Maybe she should be more supportive," and I say,
"Do you mean supportive or do you mean support him?"
and my husband says that he's doing the best he can,

that's he's a lifeguard for Christ's sake, and I say
that her job is much harder, that she's a waitress
who works nights carrying heavy trays and is hit on all the time
by creepy tourists and he just sits there most days napping
and listening to "Power 96" and then ooh
he gets to be the big hero blowing his whistle
and running into the water to save beach bunnies who flatter him,
and my husband says it's not as though she's Miss Innocence
and what about the way she flirts, giving free refills
when her boss isn't looking or cutting extra large pieces of pie
to get bigger tips, oh no she wouldn't do that because she's a saint
and he's the devil, and I say, "I don't know why you can't just admit
he's a jerk," and my husband says, "I don't know why you can't admit
she's a killjoy," and then out of the blue the couple is making up.
The red flag flutters, then hangs limp.
She has her arms around his neck and is crying into his shoulder.
He whisks her up into his hut. We look around, but no one is watching us.

Duper's Delight

According to a body language expert on *The Big Idea*, a relationship is over when one of the parties shoots a look of contempt at the other. I turn to the TV—I was folding clothes—but it's too late. I miss the visual cue the expert calls "a micro-expression." I'm curious if it's a facial tic, a certain way the eyes flick or squint. But she's already onto the next topic: *always turn your bellybutton toward the interviewer if you want to get a job*. Doesn't that mean you're turning your genitals toward the interviewer, too? The host Donny Deutsch is nodding, his long arms open, his palms toward the camera, which means he's receptive. And I wonder about my husband's contempt, my own flinches, what we say to each other with our faces. I call him to come and hang up his shirts. When I point to the TV, he tells me our twitches are nothing but impatience, recounting examples of the stress we've both been under of late. My husband smiles, a duper's delight, the kind of grin the expert says indicates a liar who takes a secret pleasure in his fabrication. He looks away, another sign of a deception. His bellybutton is at a 45-degree angle from mine. I'm dizzy again, a condition for which I've diagnosed myself on emedicinehealth.com. My husband is sick of my whining, says it's only the heat from the dryer, but I know it could also be my sinuses, anxiety, maybe symptoms of a stroke. This morning an arrow of light fluttered in the corner of my right eye. The image shone like an exit sign. All my blinking and rubbing couldn't send it away. I can't tell you exactly when the glowing projectile disappeared, but I can tell you when my husband did, exactly six days later, on September 10th.

If You Really Want to

The little old ladies at the condo whisper every time I walk past—*her husband left, did you see his face on TV, he's in some kind of trouble, I wonder what their problem was, he always seemed like such a nice guy, maybe he left her for someone else, maybe he's gay, maybe she cheated on him and he found out, the police were at her door asking questions, the mailman heard he was some kind of white-collar criminal, I heard he beat her, the doorman told me she was crying . . .*

The whispers get so bad that I'm afraid to go to the local hair salon to tend to my wiry roots, my stress-straw hair, so I can go back to work. I ask for the earliest appointment, climb into the chair, looking past myself in the mirror to the ladies who file in behind me. I'm ready to be asked, ready to tell my story, the one-sentence version I've practiced—*I'm going through a painful separation*. The sentence is designed to gain pity, to stop the questioner in her tracks.

As Mildred foils my hair for highlights, I notice the group of old women decidedly ignoring me, huddled around the coffee pot, crying. Their friend has jumped from the 26th floor. *She was depressed, one says, and I told her, honey, get your medicines checked*. So sad, so sad for her husband who knew something was wrong when he woke up and felt the breeze from the balcony. She'd opened the sliding glass door and pulled out a step stool so she could climb over the railing.

Imagine, just that step stool and her glasses on the balcony tile. When her husband looked down, the maintenance men were covering her body with a tarp. *If you really want to kill yourself*, the most stooped lady says, *no one can stop you*. It had been a long month of threats, my husband's suicide posts on Facebook. Someone (a former student) actually wrote on his wall, *If you really want to kill yourself, take all your pills with milk so you don't throw up and then tie a plastic bag over your head*.

The dye stings my scalp. I guess my student thought my husband was joking around. Maybe he was joking, a sadistic joke to make us all worry. *Don't do it!*

We all took turns writing to him. *Get to a hospital!* The lady who jumped was 80 and jumped naked. Mildred shakes her head and says that suicides tend to take off their glasses before they kill themselves. Maybe that's because it is like they are going to fall asleep for the last time and they're used to leaving their glasses on the nightstand. Maybe it's because they don't really want to see what they're doing to themselves. Maybe they're afraid their glasses will shatter. The old ladies feel guilty. The husband feels guilty. The children and grandchildren are on their way. I feel guilty myself. When I wouldn't take him back, my husband asked me to send him a warm coat. When I wouldn't take him back, he asked me to send him his glasses and Bausch & Lomb contacts.

Madonna and Me

Madonna and I went through
our divorces
around the same time
and I followed her and Guy Ritchie
on perezhilton.com
as a kind of therapy

I mean if Madonna was getting divorced
it couldn't be so bad right
and she'd be OK and I'd be OK

Guy Ritchie was walking away
saying he didn't want her money
because he was a macho British dude
unlike my husband
who was neither macho nor British
and wanted every cent he could get

I kept wanting my guy
to take a cue from Madonna's Guy
I wanted the two to meet in a sweetshop
in London where they could bitch
about how Madonna and I
were so manipulative and controlling

Guy complained Madonna wouldn't allow
pastry in the house and I tried that rule too
since my husband had diabetes
Guy was underrated as was my ex
who thought himself more talented
than I as surely Guy thought
himself more talented than Madonna

or her Guy and my guy
could meet at a pub and pick up
younger women who would say
I don't know how you put up with that
and the new women would puff up the egos
that had been flattened
by Madonna and me with our big voices
hogging the spotlight

the press turned on Madonna
and wrote that she slept in a plastic suit
her body lubed up with wrinkle cream
that she and Guy never had sex anymore
but I think that suit may have been a lie

I didn't have such a suit
just old tee shirts and ratty shorts
I wore as pajamas
that my husband hated
because the shorts had paint stains
and the elastic waistband
was pretty shot and I'd dress up
for poetry readings but not for him
and what kind of wife did that

a wife tired of working two jobs
while her husband worked none
and maybe I was a workaholic
like Madonna who keeps touring
even though she'll never be able
to spend all her money

I had to work to support us
work just to survive
but the truth is
I was also happiest working
away from my husband
whose body left an imprint on the couch
like a chalk outline at a crime scene

and why didn't I dial 911
when it got really bad
Madonna didn't either all those years ago
when Sean tied her to a chair
though maybe that never happened
and it was just a Hollywood rumor

and even Madonna
who talked about everything
never talked about that
because that kind of stuff just doesn't happen
to strong women like Madonna and me

or it happens but we write
"deal with the situation"
on the bottom of our to-do list
and then throw the list away

it's easier to just step on a stage
or have the students
pull their chairs into a circle
for the poetry workshop
in that small room
where they will love you

or at least need you
to speak about their poems
and they will say *thank you for helping me*

and you will feel that even though
you can't help your husband anymore
you can help a few people
and they can help you
as you step into the applause