

Anatomy of a Break-Up

I've endured my share of splits. Ends seem most difficult when neither party is wrong; neither committed unforgivable sins, ones that might help steel hearts, softening blows. I realized, after my latest split, sometimes neither person holds a monopoly on wrong, each simply *is*—an epiphany that made me long for more dramatic, concrete lines in the sand, tangible things to tidily (or messily—just *definitively*) wrap my head around. But with prediction comes preparation, inhaling, bracing for the aftermath; impromptu meltdowns are infinitely more unsettling. I'm left with way-too-familiar feelings.

A Taurus, I'm a slave to routine, stubbornly addicted, overly reliant on friends. In the wake of this newest end, the dearth of familiarity is jolting. I wake, finding no customary texts or phone calls from my now-former suitor, ones that used to mark the start of my day. Nothing aptly fills the void. I find only relentless, eerie silence—a precursor to a thousand disjointed moments to come, instances retracing old paths, comfortable haunts, altering once-beloved patterns. The Northwest streets I know and love become temporarily foreign, hostile betrayers. No Muu-Muu's, spent too much time there. Avoid Basta's, too many dates there. Relationships: the hardest habits to break. Flailing some, I find my friends.



lady about town

BY DANIEL BORGAN

I glean bits of what they say, their attempts at comforting; I'm in no position to digest long, complicated threads of information. Kevin, ever clever, ever my foil, laments my return to our city's perpetually-shrinking dating pool. He reminds me, "You can't make out with someone in this town without having a friend know what his bodily fluids taste like." With that, I'm back where I started four months ago, saddled with reputation in a sea of friends' exes and former one-night-boy-friends—nights out, while welcome respites, bring to mind old places, spaces I'd rather not reside. It's pretty adorable to be a hip, swinging, bar-hopping single in your twenties—it grows progressively less cute as decades wear on. See: Silverado Sunday afternoons.

Dodging emotional landmines in gay Portland is challenging; it's like maneuvering past the minefield of daytime drinkers littering Northwest. Some I trip, causing me to relive specific, relationship-related failures—then ones before that, and soon the earliest. I wonder how I'll fill my time, though my life *seems* full. Work, gym, activism, socializing, writing—there's no lack of obligation; but commitment rings hollow when I'm trying to fill

sudden, glaring holes in my week. Memories and second-guessing consume my mind no matter what my body is doing. My days are no longer filled with regular dinner dates, no sleepovers, no assured companionship. Of course, the internet reminds us exes still function; I'm shocked to see mine walking around, animated, functioning, since I envision (secretly hope for) some version of the walking dead, something more closely resembling me.

Another night out, with Ryan, once my guide through the rigors of online dating—I failed miserably. "When you rejoin the online ranks..." he begins. I sense a warning. "Try not to sleep with anyone in our neighborhood; I've probably been there already." I remember Kevin's sage advice and think twice about committing to online rummage sales. Like in bars, we get less marketable as time wears on, more prone to people with fetishes about daddies, tube socks and jock straps. Ryan is anonymous sex's champion, and I do marvel at his surprising wherewithal. Men approach him while out, whispering in his ear, covertly, as if passing off some hot new WikiLeaks. Planners emerge, schedules set, and the kind suitor saunters away. I'm not

entirely comfortable engulfed in all that clandestine, empty sex. One day soon, my friend Komo and I plan to set up camp outside Ryan's apartment, noting the tricks parading past—impromptu, early Pride before the dog days of summer. A glimmer, at least, that life will return to normal, a marker indicating the tiniest bit of momentum.

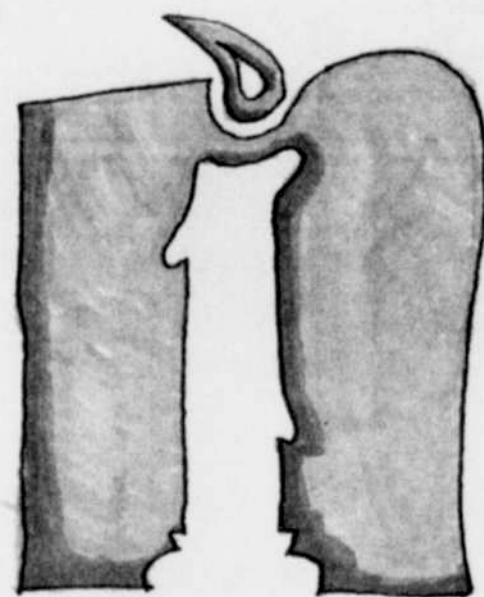
Had I mulled it over, analyzed, could I have predicted—prevented—our last kiss? I've had *The Thermals' Personal Life* on repeat, an album where, start to finish, the band traces the trajectory of a fledgling (and doomed) relationship. In the opener, singer Hutch Harris declares, "I'm gonna change your life, I'm gonna steal your soul." This: "I'm gonna leave my mark." Lyrically excruciating, the album meticulously maps a heart: the questioning, risks taken in opening up, bliss, regret, revelation—then, the end. Maybe *the end* isn't a trip back to the drawing board, but a time to celebrate fleeting moments we allow ourselves to be vulnerable, to try, to invest in relationships that might not work. Experience, a crescendo, builds and soon appeases me, enough to be content spending a Sunday afternoon drinking at Silverado. ☐

Besides, *Poison Waters* holds Church there every Sunday—and she makes me laugh. Email DANIEL@JUSTOUT.COM.

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