

My Sweater

The mornings are still cold this time of year, and even though Spring's right around the corner, Old Jack Frost hasn't given up on early mornings just yet. Being a guy, and stubborn as you well know, I often don't take a coat in sheer spite of the frigid air. If you think about it, I guess it's kind of stupid, but then again, I never claimed I was perfect. Today, however, I went back over to the closet and scanned through it quickly, almost like someone will do when they go to the refrigerator and they're not really hungry; just browsing in case they get hungry later. There, on the top shelf, right above my blue sweater with the gray snow flake designs, and right below my maroon sweater with the black "V" shape on the front, set my old white sweater, the one with the black and gray designs.

Pulling it carefully from the pile I tucked it under my arm and proceeded quietly down the hall to the stairs. I know however, that my stealthily movement was futile, since my mother will swear I "stomped down the hall when I left this morning." You know what a light sleeper she is. I think she can hear dust settling on the walnut coffee table down stairs, and if you know what's good for you it won't be settling on a glass you left out the night before instead of putting it in the dish washer. Anyway, where was I? Oh yeah, I made my way strait to the garage like a shadow, slapped the garage door opener, jumped in my little red two seater, and raced off to San Jose State.

About fifteen minutes later I pulled into my usual parking spot, hopped out, and tossed my bag on the trunk deck lid. Unfolding my sweater, I situated it so I could put it on. The cool air in the concrete confines of the garage seemed to hasten my quest for finding the tag to indicate "this side back." I stuck my arms in through the bottom of the sleeves, and adjusted the ribbing around my wrists so that the cuffs of my shirt sleeves could be seen. After all, what the hell is the point of wearing a long sleeve shirt if you can't see the sleeves? Pulling the sweater over my head I happened to inhale through my nose, just out of necessity and rhythm really, and that's when things changed.

I hadn't worn this sweater since last winter. It had been folded and neatly and packed away on that shelf in the closet for almost eleven months, and I hadn't even thought about it to be completely honest. After all, why would I? It had been up there with all the others, no better, no worse. The same sweater that's too long and too big in the shoulders. The same sweater I had gotten on October 3, 1989, the night before my eighteenth birthday. The same sweater I wore when John, Sheri, Carrie, and I went to the Hard Rock Cafe in San Francisco the very next night. The same night John let me drive his dad's Nissan 300-ZX home while he and Sheri kissed in the back seats. They were two silhouettes entwined against the tinted back window, and Carrie was a distant statue in the seat beside me. That was the same night I took the picture of the two of them that I keep in my wallet. It's still in there, even after all this time.

This old sweater is the same one I would wear around the house with my gray sweat pants when it rained. The same one I wore when I took Linda to pick out her Christmas tree for her apartment in December of ninety. I remember driving her all over Fremont and Newark in that poor old Chevy pickup my mom bought to tow the boat. It was strange, because I really wanted to tell her how much I loved her that night, but I knew she was going to marry Dave no matter what I said. I pretended we were looking for a Christmas tree for us, and not for them. I know I never told you that I loved her, I was worried you might become jealous and see my on going friendship with her as a threat. You use to get pretty jealous when it came to other girls spending time around me.

However, it was none of these things that I thought of as I pulled the sweater over my head and inhaled. There was a faint scent on its soft surface that tugged gently at my heart. I pulled it off as if it had burst into flames, balling it up in my hands, starring at it. It was as if someone had startled me, caught me off guard. I just stood there trying to figure out what happened. Closing my eyes I slowly raised it up and buried my face deeply into it. Evenly I inhaled, filling my lungs until I thought they would explode, and only then letting my breath escape to inhale again.

The entire world seemed to fade around me; there was no sound, no sight, no feeling, just the imperceptible scent of your perfume. I remembered the last time I had worn this sweater, as if it were only yesterday and not so long ago. Slowly that moment seemed to form around me and the tension in my body seemed to vanish. On the canvas of my heart the picture of you formed again in colors so extensive that even my mind's eye could not distinguish them all; but among them the Caribbean Blue of your eyes stood out saying more than you were ever capable in words, and making me understand so much more.

I had held you in my arms that night as if there was no tomorrow. I can still remember the smile you had on your face. You looked like a child visiting Disney Land for the first time, and at the same time you were on the verge of tears. I understood, I felt the same way too. You stood there with the rose I had given you in one hand, the other caressing up and down my back. Your soft body pressed into me delicately, and slowly your lips drew nearer, yet seeming to take far too long to travel the given distance. The sweetness of your kiss filled my mouth, invaded my soul.

Do you remember the day we met? You in that sapphire blue bride maid's dress, standing at the altar like an angel sent from heaven, but possessing a little of the devil as well. Do you remember that first time we danced together, ever so slowly rocking back and forth and somehow drawing closer and closer to each other? As John Waite sang the last line of the song, you looked into my eyes and I could not abandon your gaze. You wrapped your arms around me and hugged me quickly, as if you might never again get the chance, and I felt as if all of life were a dream.

Do you remember eating dinner at El Nino's, and then driving to Black Hawk Plaza to see "Sleeping With the Enemy." (Ironic now, isn't it?) More importantly I wonder if you remember kissing the first time in front of the fountains? Or how that moment brought us closer than we ever dreamed. It was all so innocent and beautiful then, and in a haunting way I'm not sure I'll ever feel that way again. There was a trust in my heart where you were concerned, and blindly I never questioned it, left no sentinel to guard myself.

I look back now and remember the times we spent renting movies on Friday nights, and somehow never making it through the last one. Instead we would make love on your bedroom floor with the strength of two raging seas, never actually having sex. Our bodies matched in some celestial rhythm of nature as hours passed like minutes, and as our love grew closer to its peak it would jump that last height, explode, and then slowly fall like a feather, transformed. Your sweat dampened body ensuing to rest atop me as the soft feminine curves of your breasts pushed firmly into my slowly heaving chest; we lay spent, holding each other amorously.

In those moments I had no doubts, no worries, no fears. It was like a holy vision; you loved me. *You loved me.* You loved my for what I was, and if given the choice you would chose me again, and again, and again. You would have conquered the world for me, I had only to ask it. You held me tightly in those silent moments, needing me, knowing I needed you; making me need you. It was those moments that were when I loved you most and felt most loved. Neither of us could be more venerable than in those moments we lay naked together; more so in soul than body but both the same.

Pulling the sweater away from my face I felt the darkest sadness I have ever known, and the anger did not come crashing down like a wave to stop it as I wished it would. A part of me wanted to run and find an air tight plastic bag and seal the sweater within it so the scent would never fade. For that moment my heart and mind were in flux between present and past. For all these things I loved you, and for all these things I hated you. Looking back as hard as I could I tried to see what went wrong. What had caused your heart to spoil and the milk of its love turn black as pitch.

You said it was time for us to part ways and only be friends, and I felt this fear rise up and grab my throat as the walls of my Babylon began to fall. I wanted to scream, but when I spoke I only granted your wish, without a fight; you were gone. I became a barren soul, shell shocked, and alone. The next day you destroyed my name and scarred me with lies too horrible for me to even repeat, and my heart became estranged. Over the days that followed

you jabbed at my weakest points, shared my darkest secrets with strangers, and I did not fight back because I had loved you once more than God himself could have known.

So I stood there in the cold, gray, concrete confines of the garage, my little red two seater indifferent to my pain. I might have let a tear escape me if I had been in the safety of my bedroom, or under the cover of sweet night, but my pride would not allow it in that garage. Inhaling once more I wanted to hold you, the real you, the old you. I wanted to kiss you long and soft, and to look into your eyes and see the love that once burned where now there is a frozen heart. Yet, sadly, I know I'll never taste your lips, see your eyes, or know your thoughts again. I smiled half heartedly and gripped the sweater tighter, trying to hold on to what I could not save.

In years from now, when my last window to the vividness of our past had long since gone, I might still remember you, but the memories of the love, the passion, and your bare body on mine will have gone, faded like your perfume. I'll probably only remember the hate filled things, the betrayal, the pain. The fountains, the dreams, the laughter, will all be gone, and I probably won't even have this sweater; this same, simple, old white sweater...The one with the black and gray designs.

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