

Walking through my apartment door, Mateo placed my bike next to the kitchen table and moved towards the couch, settling down next to the armrest. It was a red L-shaped couch littered with worn-in pillows. I found a spot a few seats away from him. With his hands interlaced and pressed into the front of his stomach, he quipped at me with sarcastic jests. Still, he looked uneasy. I felt the need for a real conversation. I needed condolence for our breakup and I was asking my ‘dumper’ to ease my loneliness. Paradoxically, it did not feel strange to me, and I knew what I wanted to talk about, so I asked him about her. “We met in my Marine Biology 101 course and she was my TA,” he began, not with great eagerness, “one of those ‘Oh, my TA is hot’ kind of moments.

“It truly started on a maymester trip for this marine science class, and because she was the TA, she was responsible for keeping us in order. We had decided to throw a party and wanted her to join us, but she wasn’t allowed to, citing the program rules. When she found out how big the party had become, she got incredibly anxious and frustrated at us. I went over to her room to apologize for the party and we ended up talking until 5 am.” His voice softened, growing glossy and dream-like, “Both of us were destroyed from exhaustion the next day. We continued to talk from there.” His fondness of their story was impossible to conceal.

He told me of their time together and how they grew. He thought she was ‘The One’. He told me how he shared things with her that he had never shared with anyone else, and how he wanted to better himself for her. He acknowledged that it was not easy, but he pushed through the difficult times for her. She made him confront his past, simultaneously gaining his love and trust. Reciprocally, he tried to help her.

“She has really bad anxiety issues,” he revealed. It was the cause of most of their breakups, as she would grow anxious and pull the plug before allowing time for their relationship issues to be worked on. He tried to help her with these anxieties, to help her see her own self-worth and to give her the confidence to love herself. He tried to show her how much he loved her, how she was the only one for him, different from any girl or person in his life.

He spoke of their issues, the turbulent breakups and failed communications. He told me about a particular issue regarding kids. They had previously agreed that neither of them wanted kids, until suddenly, after a trip surrounded by children, she came back with ‘baby fever’. Since she knew his prior opinion on kids, she decided they now had different life-plans and quickly broke up with him. She did not ask for his explanation or possible change-of-opinion, she simply panicked and acted on her own accord. They got back together soon after, but this pattern of erratic breakups persisted.

Then we came to the crucial point, the reason I had ever believed that he and I could be something; that last breakup. It was the breakup when he tried something new: he stopped fighting. She broke up with him over a social media dispute. He did not try to win her back this time, he did not even try to explain himself. “Ok. Fine,” was his response. And then he let her go.

But he had not let her go. Speaking to him on that couch, it was clear she had a part of his heart. A heart he had given willingly and openly, but she did not want it. I couldn’t help feeling angry at how she had turned away from him. I saw her actions as selfish and immature, but I did not voice this. I could not know her motives or the heartbreak she felt. All I saw in front of me was a boy hopelessly holding onto the shreds of his relationship. All I could feel was his overwhelming sorrow.

Reserving out of my thoughts, I listened as he filled in the details of his love-story-turned-toxic. How did he feel throughout this? Frustrated, angry, rejected. Heartbroken,

demolished, empty. Irrational, confused, pissed. His expressions personified the words he spoke. While his stoic demeanor fought to conceal his emotions, his eyes told the undeniable truth of his pain. I felt my voice strain and I fought back a tear as I spoke on all that was said. I did not want to put Shae down, she was the love of his life, and he did not want to hear my thoughts on her. I just wanted him to know that he was heard. I moved towards him and held him, as much for me as for him.

He still wants her; it was obvious in every word he spoke. More than wants her--- he yearns for her. She has taken a part of him and he does not know how to continue without it.

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Where our night went from there is of no real concern. We talked and shared stories, he listened to me ramble about nothing. What he did for me on the surface was offer me friendship in a time of need. What he imprinted upon me was a **beautiful** demonstration of love through the lens of its debris.

I want to be loved the way that he loves Shae and I want to love with that intensity. I cannot imagine cultivating such a love for a person only to have them lock you into a rollercoaster of emotions upon any rough patch. Love requires trust to grow, and he trusted a woman that could not offer to him what he was willing to offer her: unwavering loyalty. She wrung his heart dry throughout their breakups, yet he was still willing to make it work. He embodies a love I did not think existed, made even richer through knowing him personally and having witnessed his undying loyalty and commitment. He would have never left her. He could not leave her even now.

Love is an ideal I have never quite understood, having never been loved by a romantic partner. I have deep friendships and an amazing family, but I have never had the love that Mateo has. I fought back tears listening to him that night, and I am fighting tears now— not because of my feelings towards him, but because of his openness in telling his story. He evoked a deep, empathetic reaction within me through the rawness of his reality. Through making vulnerable this side of himself, I saw a representation of love so pure that I could feel it, I could cry for it. To love like Mateo is what I desire to do. To love with loyalty and respect, perseverance and commitment, romance and passion. Holding nothing back, presenting oneself fully and indivisibly. I deserve this kind of love, and I want to give this kind of love.

But his tale also holds a lesson for me, for him, for anyone in this world. The art of picking a lover is not equal to that of picking a partner to love. To be a lover is to be mysterious and coy, to toy with your prey and toss each other around in fits of passion. A lover is fleeting and exciting, enlivened by the information you do not know. But to truly love another is to open your world to the other, to share your mind and heart and trust them to keep it safe. The love I want, this eternal concept of love, is embodied and grown through the loyalty and commitment you show to your partner each and every day. It binds you to the other. Because of this, the partner who holds your love is the most dangerous person in this world. You must be sure you are bound to someone who will respect the treasure that is your heart, someone that will see your world as equal to theirs and guard it with their life.

Romance is more than candlelit dinners and an empty bottle of wine. I am a victim of this ideal, getting caught in the thrill of the game while forgetting about the substance. Mateo has helped me see how love is no game at all. His emotions were entrusted to someone who could not see past herself to consider the person in front of her. I cannot say what Mateo will do in the future, if he will try again with her or move on and heal. I do not believe one fully moves on from such a deep love, but perhaps that is the point. To share yourself with another means it will

never be forgotten. Maybe they will get back together, maybe they will not. All I can be certain of is that she will regret leaving him behind.

*Sydney Callaway, senior at San Diego Mesa College, graduating Spring of 2019.*