

You had a big pile of work today. So big. So deadlined. Brain. So worked. Pile of work. Forced. So done. So over, now. So now you can think a little bit. But your mind is over. You're done. It's over. You think of going to bed. You don't feel like it. You get up and walk around your apartment, pacing, trying to think of what to do. You decide to make dinner for yourself. But you have too many ingredients. How did this happen? You were enthusiastic yesterday. You were at the grocery store. You had too much. You were alive. You were hungry.

You have a thought that has never occurred to you before. It is unthinkable. You never thought it before, never thought to think it. It wasn't an option, and as long as it wasn't an option, you couldn't act it out. You couldn't even say "no" to it.

You call them on the phone. You don't text them, because you need to hear their voices, arrange things *now*. You need to make dinner because you are hungry and you need to know how many people will eat with you...

YOUR APARTMENT

Your apartment is a simple one. It makes you feel like you are living simply and basically in America. The carpet is dirty, so you get out the vacuum cleaner and clean it. You have a small vacuum cleaner, because your apartment isn't very big. There are posters on the wall of

your apartment: a scene with trees and a photograph of a brick which is exactly what it is. You have a piece of art you purchased from a homeless person on the street, a man who was trying to prove the system wrong, a piece of art that looks like thirty minutes after sunset in a driven mind, a man whom you don't remember very well.

The doorbell rings. You open the door.
Brian enters.

BRIAN: Hello.

YOU: Hello, welcome in.

BRIAN: Did you just say "well, come in"?

YOU: Yes.

BRIAN: I don't think I've been here before. Have I been here?

YOU: I don't think you have, but I could be wrong.

BRIAN: Do you honestly think I've ever been here?

YOU: No. Do you?

BRIAN: To be honest, no.

YOU: Okay, so I've got the brown rice cooking and I just got done vacuuming the carpet.

BRIAN: Here's the meat.

YOU: OK, you can put it over there.

BRIAN: What next?

YOU: Now it's time for me to cut up the vegetables and the meat.

You begin to open up the package of raw meat.

BRIAN: Do you want me to help?

YOU: Maybe you could cut up the vegetables.

BRIAN: Is Julia coming?

YOU: Yes.

You make small talk and cut things.

DOORBELL: <DING-DONG>

YOU: Brian, can you get the door? My hands are contaminated from the meat.

Brian opens the door. Julia stands at the doorway.

BRIAN: Hey, Julia.

JULIA: Hello.

She steps inside and closes the door behind her.

JULIA: Is there anyone else coming?

YOU: I tried calling Robert but his phone was off.

JULIA: So it's just us with all this food.

YOU: Are you hungry?

JULIA: I am.

YOU: Well, there's a few more minutes before the food is ready.

You're busy stirfrying it.

JULIA: What will we do while we wait?

BRIAN: I don't know.

JULIA: Maybe we could dance.

BRIAN: I don't know how to dance.

JULIA: That's right, you don't have a body. You're just stuck in this physical world.

BRIAN: I have a body that isn't very coordinated that's stuck in this physical world.

JULIA: Deep down inside you, do you have a body?

BRIAN: My heart would prefer that I not have a body.

JULIA: So you, the real you, doesn't have a body. You don't have a body in your heart.

BRIAN: Look, I think I can dance if there's something that works for me.

JULIA: Ballroom dancing?

BRIAN: No, no ballroom dancing for me.

JULIA: Okay, what about the ones that make your

head work?

BRIAN: Like line dancing?

JULIA: Yeah.

BRIAN: Way too smart for me. I don't think in time that way.

JULIA: Is there any dance that you've connected with in the past?

BRIAN: The dance of conversation.

YOU: Brian, weren't you telling me about that Cambodian dance you saw once?

BRIAN: Oh yeah, I was at a Cambodian festival and watched these women doing a really slow, spooky dance.

JULIA: Spooky like Halloween?

BRIAN: No, a different kind of spooky. There was some kind of hidden meaning behind their movements, but I know what it was, but I can't put it into words.

JULIA: How did the dance go?

BRIAN: I remember that they moved their hands really slowly and specifically.

JULIA: Like this?

BRIAN: You are definitely moving your hands really slowly and specifically but it wasn't like that.

JULIA: Can you show me?

BRIAN: Well, as best as I remember, it went like this.

He tries, and Julia starts to move to mimic him. Then they mirror each other.

JULIA: Huh, this is dancing with a partner but without touching.

BRIAN: Yeah, I guess that works for me.

JULIA: You disembodied troll.

BRIAN: Yeah.

JULIA: You monk.

BRIAN: Yeah.

JULIA: What kind of dancing would monks do?

BRIAN: Maybe like this.

JULIA: I think we should stare into each other's eyes.

BRIAN: To be monk-like?

JULIA: Yes, because monks stare into the abyss.

BRIAN: That's very true.

They try but soon crack up from the seriousness.

JULIA: Okay, we have to try again.

They do better this time.

BRIAN: I think this dance teaches us how to focus and be serious and also to crack up when we're staring at the abyss.

JULIA: So it's good for us whether we succeed or not.

BRIAN: Failure is still failure but it's also success.

They keep trying.

YOU: Hey, would you like to hear some abyss music while you do that?

BRIAN: Yeah.

YOU: Okay.

You have served the food but the dancers haven't been paying attention. The food will be warm when they're ready. You put in a CD you got from the library. It's synthesizer music, open voicing, doesn't change, lots of stark single notes droning. It sounds like a 1980s abyss. You don't like it too much, you like it, it's nice but you don't want to go to that place, it's well-done and artistic but this is the second time you've played it since you checked it out ten days ago.

They dance and then they see the food on the table, and you turn off the music.

You come together at the table and serve your plates.

JULIA: Brian, do you say grace?

BRIAN: Normally I don't.

YOU: Do you want to?

BRIAN: Maybe. Does it have to be ecumenical?

JULIA: What do you mean by that?

BRIAN: Do I have to make it something that includes an atheist and a... whatever you are... ?

JULIA: I don't mind. Just believe what you believe and say what you say, and then I'll say thanks the way I want to. Beth can close, since she's the host.

BRIAN: Okay.

God, thank you for this food, which will taste exactly the way it tastes. Thank you for company. You will guide what we say. Open us to hear you in everything you already say.

JULIA: Okay... hm... okay.

I am thankful for the Universe which causes everything and lets us make all of our decisions. If the Universe can hear or feel, then I send it my gratitude and it can send positive energies back to where we are so that we are healthy and wise.

YOU: I approve of the sentiments of my friends although I don't believe what they believe. Okay, now we eat.

You all are hungry and don't talk much while you eat. Your food is okay. The ingredients are the stars of the show.

JULIA: How was your day, Beth? You look out of it.

YOU: I was working a lot, and my brain wasn't at its peak. Brain fog. Brain-ness. Words. I'm babbling.

JULIA: But you met your deadlines?

YOU: Yes.

BRIAN: You made it.

YOU: Yes.

BRIAN: But you could have quit.

YOU: I could have. Maybe I could have gotten an extension on one of the things I was working on. But that would have been complicated and I don't like doing that to my clients.

BRIAN: This reminds me about what we were talking about the other day, about giving up.

JULIA: I missed this.

BRIAN: The main thing I remember was about the difference between addiction and loyalty. If you "never give something up", it could be because you are addicted, or it could be because you're loyal.

JULIA: Huh.

BRIAN: Maybe you'll have more thoughts as we go along.

JULIA: No, it makes sense. Are we addicted to living, or are we loyal to it?

BRIAN: I think we talked about that.

JULIA: I think there are times where you can't even be addicted or loyal, you can't distinguish between the two.

BRIAN: Is that because you can't see the difference, or because there is no difference?

JULIA: Same thing. You can't see the difference and there is no difference, because you don't have any words. You're just, there, in the moment.

BRIAN: One step at a time.

JULIA: Yeah.

YOU: When I was younger, I used to run regularly. Sometimes, I would lose track of myself as I was running. I would give up, but my body would keep going, would carry me through. Is that addiction, or loyalty, or is it what Julia's talking about?

BRIAN: I think maybe it's what Julia's talking about.

JULIA: It sounds right.

BRIAN: One thing with loyalty is that you can't feel sorry for yourself.

JULIA: If you don't get what you want?

BRIAN: Yeah.

JULIA: So you can't feel sorry for yourself and hope at the same time.

BRIAN: Yeah, that sounds right.

JULIA: Is it ever good to feel sorry for yourself?

How does that help?

YOU: Maybe it helps you feel sorry for other people.

JULIA: I guess some people like that.

YOU: People like feeling like they're loved.

BRIAN: And that they're liked. A lot of trouble comes from that, wanting to be loved and wanting to be liked.

YOU: It's good to be loved.

BRIAN: Yeah. If it's real. But being felt sorry for is just having a signal sent. It doesn't necessarily mean anything.

YOU: But for people who get something out of the signal itself, it does mean something in itself.

BRIAN: Yeah.

YOU: But I understand what you're saying. Is there something other than feelings which people can have, which is love?

BRIAN: Yes. Definitely.

JULIA: Can you explain?

BRIAN: No.

JULIA: Yeah, same here.

YOU: It's a gift to be simple. That's how you avoid sentimentality.

JULIA: Yeah. Wait, how does that relate?

YOU: Sentimentality about your feelings. If you're sentimental about your feelings, it makes you fearful. And you feel sorry for yourself when you don't get things. You can have feelings, but you don't have to be sentimental about your feelings.

BRIAN: If you're sentimental about your feelings, then you don't do your best job in helping other people with their real feelings. There's all the people who don't have anything extra, and you can't help them, because your feelings are too precious to you.

YOU: How can people lose their sentimentality to their feelings?

BRIAN: I don't know.

JULIA: The only way I know is to be broken down.

YOU: So we have to break other people down? Or do we break ourselves down?

BRIAN: Maybe if you're addicted to something, or loyal to something, you get broken down.

YOU: Addiction gives being broken-down a bad name.

BRIAN: Yeah, so it's better to be loyal. Desperately loyal. So if you acquire an addiction or a loyalty, then over time you can be broken down.

YOU: But if you're sentimental about your feelings, you're not even going to start.

BRIAN: Yeah.

JULIA: So how can society change?

BRIAN: Well, maybe there's some step that gets people to be interested in loyalty.

JULIA: What would that be?

BRIAN: I'm not sure.

JULIA: Maybe you'll think of it.

BRIAN: Maybe I'll remember it. It does seem to be the kind of thing I would have been thinking of.

Your meals are weighing on your brains and your apartment is too small. You three go outside for a walk. For some reason, Hoheres Wesen is kind tonight. There's a breeze coming off the Ocean of Soothing, and you walk around in the fading light of the evening. You walk over to the park near your house. You don't see any drug dealers tonight, and you give a dollar to a homeless person who is doing well enough to smile. You see kids playing with glow in the dark Frisbees, and you stop to drink some water from the drinking fountain. You three sit on the grass, the grass that doesn't have any trash on it -- no trash in sight tonight. Julia crosses her legs and Brian stiffly tries. You sit on one foot, with the other leg upright so that your knee is next to your shoulder. A glow in the dark Frisbee lands next to you and a kid comes by and gets it.

YOU: So what should we talk about now?

BRIAN: I don't know.

YOU: Maybe there's nothing to talk about.

JULIA: Look at the sky.

BRIAN: That sky takes me places.

JULIA: Where?

BRIAN: I don't know. Somewhere like in a dream. But not into a dream itself.

YOU: I get that way when I look at certain paintings.

BRIAN: I think there's another world somewhere, which we just get a taste of when we look at the sky.

JULIA: Heaven?

BRIAN: No, I wouldn't call it heaven. I think it's eternal, like heaven, but it's not for the people who like heaven. They can be in that place, but this is a different place.

JULIA: What are the people who like heaven into?

BRIAN: They like stories and wrestling and engagement. Life as a story or a game. But the other eternity is for people who are done with stories and wrestling and engagement.

YOU: People who are furthest from sentimentality.

BRIAN: Yes.

JULIA: Is there love there?

BRIAN: Yes, the love of God.

JULIA: What about the love of people?

BRIAN: In that eternity we love God with all of our hearts and we love our neighbors as ourselves.

JULIA: Unsentimentally?

BRIAN: Yes. If you are full of God, you understand what it's like to be the person next to you who is also full of God. You just wave hello to them.

A pause.

BRIAN: Have either of you thought about having kids?

JULIA: That's a personal question...

BRIAN: I don't mean "Have you thought about doing it yourself", but more "Have you imagined what it would be like to have kids?"

JULIA: Don't worry, I don't really care about personal questions, I was just messing with you.

BRIAN: Oh okay, well, *you* shouldn't worry about messing with me, because I don't mind.

YOU: I think there would be a lot of times when it would be painful. A lot of times where you had to go against how you felt in the moment to do something for them.

BRIAN: I don't think I have enough in me to do that.

YOU: You may be right. I might not have enough in me to do that. But then something else has to do that at some point.

BRIAN: I guess being a parent would be a case of "desperate loyalty" sometimes.

YOU: Yeah.

BRIAN: Maybe that's the thing other than feelings which is love. Loyalty.

YOU: Yeah, that makes sense.

JULIA: What is loyalty? Is it a way that you act?

BRIAN: It's a stance. When you stand a certain way, that's a way that you act which you feel in your muscles, like proprioception. And that stance naturally connects to action. The muscles and the feeling are one.

JULIA: And you and your environment flow into each other. You and the situation.

BRIAN: Yeah.

YOU: So what about feeling sorry for someone?

BRIAN: Feeling compassion for someone or feeling sorry for someone are stances, too, but they're different from loyalty. There can be despair in them.

YOU: What about compassion and loyalty together?

BRIAN: That could be good.

YOU: Maybe that's what you need, to love people who need to feel like people feel like they love them.

BRIAN: Maybe.

JULIA: Loyalty doesn't betray. Feeling sorry for people can betray.

BRIAN: Can compassion betray?

JULIA: No, I don't think so, but maybe that's by definition.

BRIAN: So when people feel a certain kind of feeling of care and sympathy for someone, it could turn out to be compassion or it could turn out to be feeling sorry for people, depending on whether they betrayed them?

YOU: They are different stances.

JULIA: So you know when you're compassionate, you know the way that it flows.

BRIAN: But you might not be aware of how you're not connecting to reality properly and end up betraying people when you think you're being compassionate.

YOU: It's getting dark, we should head back.

So you all stand up off the ground and go back to your apartment.

YOU: Brian, do you feel like giving up on your book today?

BRIAN: No, I think I can finish it. I think I can

keep going for a long time afterward.

YOU: But you're at a place in life where things can change.

BRIAN: That's true, but I think I can still see myself in the future, working on this stuff.

YOU: You can see the future so you know you will be there someday.

BRIAN: The future already exists and I'm already in it.

YOU: You're not saying that egotistically.

BRIAN: No.

YOU: But people might think you were.

BRIAN: Yeah, I'd better keep that to myself.

YOU: I'm not sure you really will connect with that distant future. But what do I know? You know yourself better than I do, and maybe my worldview is wrong and yours is right. I don't honestly think that, but part of me can see the possibility.

BRIAN: Thank you.

JULIA: When is your book going to be done?

BRIAN: I don't know. Maybe in a month.

JULIA: Are you going to read it to us?

BRIAN: It's a dialogue, so I think we should all read it.

JULIA: Here?

BRIAN: At Mitzi's. Better atmosphere for it, I think.

YOU: Why is that?

BRIAN: I want it to flow out into a space with other people in it, instead of being kept inside a private space where the world is small. Even if nobody else in the cafe pays attention.

YOU: Okay, we'll have to prepare our minds for that.

JULIA: Strengthen our voices.

BRIAN: Yes. Thanks.

YOU: Okay, I'm getting kind of sleepy. I think you two had better go home.

BRIAN: Okay.

JULIA: Okay, good night.

They exit.

You clean up the dishes from dinner and straighten up a little. Then you get ready for bed and lie down, strangely exhausted. What a day.

But you can't sleep until you find yourself in a dream, standing beneath palm trees on the coast during a hurricane, getting behind the trunks so that the water doesn't get in your eyes. You run into the culvert where it's not raining and there's

a little girl whom you pick up and carry over your shoulder to the end of the culvert. There's a grate and you start to worry that the water coming down the culvert will rise and rise and you'll be trapped.

And you wake up in a panic and gradually realize that it was only a dream.

[closing theme]

WAITING FOR MARGOT
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COMMENTS

(no comments)

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