

TWO CHOICES

2140 WORDS

Tamara sat on the edge of her bed. Her hair disheveled, as she rubbed her tired eyes while glancing across at her mirror next to the armoire. She'd played this tired scene many times, sleeping lately until noon, idle, jobless, no plans, and regrettably no close friends. Standing, she would stare lengthwise at her figure. The pouch of her stomach frustrated and riled her. As much as she tried, no diet ever really delivered for her. Another day of no plans, she had been up most of the night tossing and turning. Insomnia had its grip on her mostly because

she worried knowing she'd have nothing to do the entire next day. Everyday.

In the kitchen, Tamara fumbled with her coffee pot. Six cups she would brew. She sat by idly as the pot itself percolated. When completed, she would sip and stare at length, mostly into that mug. Random thoughts about her youth, her mother and the career she retired from. All were now long gone. Alone and single, Tamara rued her life in spite of many efforts at finding interests. None ever caught on. The relationships with men she'd met always ended aimless or un-gratifying. Girlfriends, there were a few, mostly married, she remained inclined to deny their invites feeling hesitant in spite of many of their attempts at including her. Strangely, Tamara privately rarely was enthused with the idea of relationships with friends. In some ways she relished reclusiveness. Most of her life was dedicated as a professional to her career. She'd never developed too many friendships. The one that had endured for many years ended badly over a silly dispute the cause of which she could hardly remember. The terminus occurring once they both agreed to a "summit meeting" where all the cards were put on the table. Some of those cards cut very

deeply as they usually do. Even though the two friends vented politely about some of their frustrations, when the meeting was over and they gingerly agreed to erase the board and go forward, Tamara knew the kinship was over. Too much was said, too many accusations. Familiarity it seems does indeed breed contempt.

Nearly 1pm and glancing from her window, Tamara slipped deeply into a solemn moment. Isolated and companionless, she felt detached from the world. On the street below, patrons marched to and fro circumventing the shops beneath her stoop. Before her eyes lie an active world. The infectious singularity of her apartment stood in contrast to what she observed before her.

Tamara had just but two choices.

Retrospect

It was in 1972, Villanova University. Tamara Wilson sat perched near the ledge of her dorm window overlooking The Quad adjacent to John Barry Hall. A mid winters night, light snow glimmered against campus lamps and the tower of Saint Thomas Church beckoned across the way. Tamara sitting alone became absorbed in the moment, as the beauty of that night beguiled her neatly into nearly a transcendental proceeding. Life was good. Her mind seemed clear and balanced. For the first time, Tamara was at peace with herself, happy, unafraid. She especially reflected on a statement her English Professor uttered just hours earlier before her class. "You have but two choices in life", he said. "You can either choose to go out and make an impact on the world or you can sit back and allow the world to make its impact on you". No one before him had ever spoken to her that way. Not her parents, nor her friends. The simplicity of his words struck a chord within her and for the first time ever she saw clearly these two choices in her young impressionable life. It was as though she finally became free from a struggle to understand some

meaning in her life. Before then, everything seemed so confusing, uncertain. That night, Tamara felt free, free as the black bird fluttering just outside her window as it soared off into that mysterious night.

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Tamara was the first person in her family history to attend college. She was bright and everyone knew that, especially her grandmother who she adored. Grandmother Wilson was fond of always saying "keep an eye on Tamara, she's going to surprise you". Tamara's mother was best described as mostly aloof in her relationship with her daughter. It would seem Loretta Wilson was preoccupied with her own personal priorities in her life. Narcissistic was one word that came to mind. For most of her youth, Tamara struggled to achieve some communication with her mother in the face of resistance. The detachment left her isolated and insecure, at best not confident.

Tamara's father, a decent man was a hard working provider. Family time on the other hand was far from a first priority but regardless, financially, Bernard Wilson was a good

provider for his family. He also cared about Tamara privately but was completely unable to show or expose himself as anything other than a tough man.

Bernard did not have an easy life. He did hard work and in most circles would be perceived as successful. Never satisfied, he aspired higher but was often misled by the success of most of his friends whose businesses were more white collar and professional. Bernard was a working class man whose own business entailed hard labor and long tiring days. Tough love would best describe his relationship with Tamara.

Tamara was one of three children, the middle one. Through childhood, she was a shy girl, sensitive but with a bleeding heart. Having endured normal childhood taunts by the other kids mostly due to her shyness and insecurity, Tamara remained isolated and mostly kept to herself.

People, people

Here me go

You know what it means to be left alone

Yeah, people hear me people

Do you know what it means to be left alone?

Not even a love to call your own

A little understandin'

Lord that's all in the world I need

Understandin' and a little bit of lovin' baby

That's all in the world I need

A misunderstanding of a no good woman

Yeah, lord they've both caused my heart to bleed

1 J.Hendrix/ "Bleeding Heart"

Over the course of several weeks, Tamara steadied herself through her studies. A good student, she worked hard choosing most evenings to regress to her dorm room where she read both literature and philosophy. Her interest in her course on logic beguiled her. The great philosophers hypnotized her interests. Descartes, Aristotle, Bacon, Plato were among her favorites. Most of the other kids balanced studies with intense social lives. Tamara absorbed her studies with vehemence. Often times, she was invited to join the festivities but chose otherwise, remaining in her room, attached to her favorite books. Eventually, on one occasion, she agreed to join a small group of coed's and ventured down to a local hangout where beer and a jukebox were the staples of the evening. That's where she met John.

No newcomer to shyness, John's was often mistaken for disinterest. Not unlike Tamara, the two mostly sat quietly interacting only gingerly while the rest of the crowd reveled in the night's proceedings. The distinction in both their behaviors as opposed to the others that evening was mostly discernable only to them. The evening became raucous as most college town bars do.

In the corner stood a lone pinball machine. John sauntered in that direction driven by his childhood endearments, a result of misspent youth at Barnacle Bills amusement parlor at the Jersey Shore. John Givens played those machines for hours in his youth, a specialist he surely was. It was fair to say he too sequestered himself from the crowd while he was young and the pleasures of pinball satisfied his yearning for separation.

Halfway into his first game, an unexpected event occurred. Tamara crossed the room and approached him showing interest in John's play. Polite, he introduced himself and Tamara too as she stood eagerly watching as John mastered the game in a way she had never seen before. For some time, Tamara just watched, seemingly enthralled with his adeptness. Shortly thereafter, somewhat against her will, John convinced Tamara to take control of the game. At first without competence, John eventually stood behind Tamara and guided her efforts at playing pinball. Giggling with pleasure and really having fun, no boy ever stood in that proximity to her before. With an extreme cautiousness, their familiarity grew over the next hour. For the first

time that evening their two personas blended in balance with the crowd at Jack's Corner Bar.

Tamara was an attractive girl by most modest measures. Her junior year at the college was the most liberating year in her life. John and her became an item seeing each other most weekends and usually one evening during the week. Both of them had found something new. Neither had an extensive back round in relationships hence theirs developed rather slowly. The freshness of the times together was engaging and full of mostly frolic. Over the period of many weeks, they came to know more intricacies as their fondness for each other blossomed. Tamara and John engaged themselves with the other kids more often on Friday and Saturday nights and the perception was by the others that the two were indeed a good match and likeable and welcome among the group. All was well that late spring at Villanova. The talk among the crowd was the Junior Prom. Three weeks away, guys and girls alike made preparations. More than a few relationships among the group that had been long term would become more serious. An engagement or two, pins, many relationships in Junior Year became cemented. John and Tamara had no such thoughts except one week before

the big night John was invited home to Tamara's for the weekend. That weekend started off on a Friday afternoon.

Heading home with John, Tamara was driving the car. At the intersection that was more of a yield onto the highway, anticipating the vehicle in front to pull out, Tamara hit the gas. In a moment, she moderately smashed into the rear of another vehicle. A sizable dent in her front end, everyone was fine. All passengers were nothing more than startled. Tamara was mostly very embarrassed. Both drivers exchanged information and John offered to drive the rest of the way. At home and relieved, the family engaged in small talk as Tamara carried on more than necessary about her indiscretion that day.

The accident was most likely the effect of her nervousness bringing John home. That weekend Besides dinner and a day trip to the shore, the weekend none the less flew by. Back at school, everything moved forward in normal course. The next week was the Prom and John made plans to do the right thing.

On Tuesday, John went for a haircut. His long locks were

trimmed short telling the barber, a business cut, "tapered and neat". Next was the men's shop. A Blue Blazer and gray slacks, he spent the money he requested from home for the event. The red tie with stripes was traditional, conservative and John was happy with its appearance. Friday night would roll around in no time and girls dressed in their best attire ever seen while boyfriends arrived from different campuses and from out of state.

That Saturday, getting dressed, Doug England approached John. "Somebody is going to get dumped tonight John", he said. Focused on his attire and fixing his hair John gave those words no further thought. In an hour he would be picking up Tamara.

Little did he know that they would spend their last night together.

Tamara broke off the relationship. Afraid and influenced at home, she suspected that John had bigger plans than in fact he did not. Bernard, her father saw John as less of a provider than Tamara deserved. Putting more emphasis on the doings of other couples than she should have, Tamara suddenly became afraid that her relationship with John was moving too quickly. In defense, all was terminated. John, caught off guard retreated to the bars. Stunned, he carried on for months occasionally reaching out to Tamara to no avail. Time would heal some wounds.

Many years went by and Tamara remained single. She had been successful in her business life, construed professionally capable, a leader. Her career became her life. She relished it, satisfied by its offerings. Today, she had awoken to that window overlooking the ledge below. Too many nights had been lonely and too many days. Across the room sat her notebook computer. Tamara sat before it and typed John Osborn in its search engine. In short order, a profile and email appeared before her screen. Tamara hesitated. The link before her was highlighted. In

a moment, she selected and her mailbox opened.

Dear John,...

