

You

I've longed for you all my life. I've looked for you in every face that I passed on the street, in every pair of eyes that met mine and I was miraculously able to withhold.

I hoped for you.

But what did I really hope for?

I wanted you to be. You were supposed to stay close and give me strength where I was lacking just as I was always ready to give you some of mine.

First you came to me as a companion in joy. We had fun together. We played as carefree as only children can be. I was taught to give you whatever you wanted. Then you would like me and that was what I sought. So I organized more fun. You brought other people. I was in the middle of this strange dance. I was trying to fly around and catch a bit of everybody. You were doing that too. And others. It was fine for a while, I managed to stay on the track that you set.

Then suddenly, in my place you were still having fun with other people and I was sitting alone in the other room. I noticed that everybody was avoiding me. Including you.

I guess others were your better choice.

Then you drifted away toward them leaving me painfully behind.

When I asked myself why it happened to me, I surely find answers. I just looked in the mirror and I could see a lot of answers. Those answers made me sad. And I remained sad for quite some time.

Then you came in a form that shared my interests. I loved music, it gave me immense pleasure. You came and showed me more of it. You introduced me to a whole range of wonderful artists. You taught me how to read music. Yeah, I'll be eternally grateful for that.

I think you were the first that I really loved. I was scared when a threat came that you could change school to the one in another city. I was terrified of the idea that you could abandon me this way. Of course, you would come here, your parents lived not so far away from my place but I knew it wouldn't be the same. I was saved though. You got ill when the entrance exams were due. You had to stay. I was happy.

We separated for vacations. I missed you so badly. When you came back, we hugged. I liked it. It felt warm for a second but then you slightly pushed me away. Like it was too much. I went too far. I showed too much affection.

Then it went downhill. You had other friends and they told you that it was not cool to hang out with me. I was the weird one.

Day to day you stopped talking to me, you stopped answering my calls. I didn't understand that.

No, I did understand. I wasn't cool. I needed to become cooler.

So for the next few years I was watching the cool kids through the veil of my sadness. I was paying attention and trying hard to recognize all necessary patterns. Did I do it correctly? I thought so. Because when you came into my life again, I was ready to have fun. I was ready to let go. And I did just that. Alcohol helped me. You encouraged me to go this way. For some time we did have fun. And I thought I was cool.

I often made sure if I was cool enough. I asked questions about how much I changed. Because I changed. I felt that. I went about my looks. I looked different. I behaved differently. I felt differently.

Or so I thought.

Then I came across a few of you. There was a male you and a female you. This male you tried to get romantic with me. But... I don't know. I didn't recognize it at first. I just thought that it was just you being you around me. Just like that. Then it appeared that you wanted more and somehow I couldn't give that to you. Although I wanted it. I wanted it to happen more than anything in the world. But I guess not with you.

When you came clear to me about your desires, I was surprised. I can only be sorry that I was surprised but I couldn't have it any other way. You weren't brutally honest with me soon enough and I was too caught up in dividing people into better and worse. I was taught to do that by the small community I grew up in. A community full of toxicity. I couldn't help it.

But I think there was more to it and that was on your part. When I asked you why you liked me, you said that it was because I was handicapped and you liked imperfect women. I felt offended and subconsciously knew that it wasn't a good foundation for a romantic relationship. I wasn't really special to you. I was incomplete, I was missing something important. Apparently you liked that and I wasn't aware of that. When I grew older, I realized that it was your gateway to taking control of the other person. I can only be grateful that I avoided it.

Then I got lost between you and the other female you. Both of you were there. The female you had a friend and the male you got hooked up with that friend. I guess you needed some consolation after me. So you found another me full of imperfections. And then something

happened, something I was really afraid of. The female you told me that the male you acted very judgemental. I didn't like that. It reminded me about how judgemental the cool people were towards me in the past. I condemned you. I wanted you to change your conduct in this matter. So I spoke.

Then the female you said that I betrayed you because I was told about this judgemental thing in confidence. I was caught up in a place where I had to do something. Something right. I just had to try to change this ugly thing about you. But that meant that I betrayed the other you.

I lost. I didn't change anything about you. And I did betray you.

It was so confusing. I guess I didn't have a good way out. And I couldn't remain still. Maybe I should. Maybe I should keep quiet and let people be the way they were and learn at their own pace.

What's my fault? I like the world to be good. And fair. I like to see people being good to each other. Especially you. I've always wanted to believe in your goodness. And I hate being mistaken in this respect.

Then I made the decision and tried to play the saviour. The one who converts. Did I like this role too much? Did I like to see myself as the one who can do it? Perhaps. It is possible. But I've always wanted to act, not to sit still and do nothing. You may not do any harm but if you sit still and observe evil being done, you become the malice.

I've never wanted that. Not for myself, not for you.

The only thing is that I didn't think that you may be too afraid to act. I guess I wanted to see you not only good but also courageous.

Yes. I've been too demanding.

However, haven't I always demanded the same from myself? Or even more? I thought that it gave me the right to demand. Since I could do that, everybody could. And should. That was their moral obligation. For the whole human kind.

In the periods after our paths going in different directions I felt overwhelming sadness. I would beat myself up for all the mistakes I made. Even the smallest ones. I thought I had behaved like a complete fool. And I didn't want to be this fool. I thought things through very carefully. I solemnly swore to myself that I wouldn't make any of the mistakes again.

I hoped to get another chance with you again.

I'm not sure if I ever knew what I really wanted. Or maybe I knew exactly what I wanted. I just didn't care much about the form in which that would come. I wanted connection. I wanted understanding. I guess I wanted somebody to get me the way I was, even when I didn't entirely get myself. At least not yet.

I thought that maybe I needed somebody good. Somebody really good. Somebody emphatic. Somebody like catholicly good. I guess my subconscious mind thought it might be a good idea.

It was weird, really. It was like a Catholic was hanging out with a Goth. Totally out of place. Totally weird.

But somehow it worked. Or at least I thought it worked. For many years. You were patient with me and I liked that. You listened to me. Another good point. And I listened to you. I hated when you diminished yourself in your own words. But this was something we shared deep down in our hearts.

I helped you with technical stuff. You always said that you were terrible with those. But I thought that you were just a bit too lazy to learn them. They were easy for me and I liked being

occupied with such things. I thought it was a fair exchange. I did that for you and I could talk to you and better sort the world out.

Did I like you then? I always ask myself this question. I think I did. But I think I like all people at the first glance. Until they disappoint me in one way or another.

When I analyse these things I sometimes become really astonished by my own attitude. I can be really open towards other people. I greet every person who enters my life with genuine liking and respect. That's who I am. That's how I approach people.

I have to admit that I've learned the hard way that many don't like that. Maybe I just attract people so wounded that they are unable to appreciate it. It's possible that my attitude is the healing attitude and some are just not ready for that. They cannot let go yet of their own inner disliking and disrespect towards themselves.

And I am honest. I show them what they do wrong. I point that out with brutal honesty and I'm usually unpleasantly surprised that no one really wants to face their own wrongdoing. They don't want to make any amends. That's a painful shock to me since my life has always been about reevaluating and correcting my own conduct. I was always the one who did something wrong. No one else was to blame.

Then at some point I grew up to the point where I thought that maybe it's not entirely about me who does things wrong. When this reflection first occurred to me, it was a real revelation. Maybe other people should also take responsibility for their actions. After all this is about the adult life, taking responsibility is one of its pillars.

I thought maybe I could teach somebody that.

There came another you. This time you were quite small and on numerous occasions you emphasized the height difference. It was not a problem for me and I always tried to make you realize that being short has its advantages.

After all the older you was taller than me and I had no problem with this. I took both of you just the way you were. Your height was absolutely no problem for me. It didn't really matter that one of you thought you were too tall and the other thought you were too short. I was in the middle. I could say I was too fat. So everybody is too-something. Or everybody is just right. I always preferred not to think about myself.

Because I focused on you.

Sometimes I think it was too much. I concentrated too much on another person. But I wanted the best for the one who was around me. I had this intrinsic drive to care for anybody within the diameter of my influence. If I could do something for somebody, I did. It was as simple as that.

But it wasn't simple.

I felt excluded. I felt in the void. You both signalled that you had more important people in your life than me. I was just the addition. The tiresome, complicated addition which you couldn't really stand in high doses.

The older you were the stable one, the one who could help me deal with things. But not with all of them since you had your own demons. I knew some of them and I understood that. It was respect. For a long time we were able to devote some time to spend together, to talk, exchange books, try to understand the world and people around us. We went for trips from time to time. During holidays we travelled to a beautiful city just to wander around and inhale

its atmosphere. You told me that it would be our tradition. I felt so happy. I wanted so much to have traditions with people. Regular, stable, repeatable. Something beautiful. Something to organize my life. I didn't really expect much. Such a trip once a year and I would be over the moon.

Next year you forgot. You went on the trip with somebody else.

I did want to meet every now and again. You didn't have time. Maybe the problem was with me. When we did meet, you were looking around nervously. I felt you weren't comfortable in my company. It could've been because of my tattoos. You had a new circle of people who didn't approve of such things.

They were the wonderful new individuals that filled you with joy and hope, as you said. Perhaps. I would rather say that you fell in love with them just as I fall in love with every you I meet. You lost yourself in them and subordinated a large portion of your life to them. You didn't have time for unimportant stuff like me because you had to be free in case one of them called you and offered a new adventure. That was the most important to you.

I guess it was quite hard for you to swallow my opinion and the fact that I was right about the late Pope, John Paul II in connection with the paedophile scandals in church. You said that it wasn't really a decent thing to slander his name accusing him of disregarding the wrongdoing of too many priests. I was of the opinion that the biggest problem was that the church didn't respect the victims and that led to disrespecting the late Pope. You had to agree with me. That wasn't easy for you, I know.

Especially that later I found out more about your new circle and where you went with them. You had many friends and maybe it was about this number. You were coming of a certain age and maybe you needed to feel alive again, who knows? Maybe this was your way. I was just

hit by a ricochet. I was the difficult one so I could be disregarded. I became obsolete in your life.

But I fought. I was even trying to bribe you in a way. I started baking home-made bread from scratch and I liked sharing the good things with others. With you too.

It didn't help.

There came a moment when I needed you. My mother died and I needed you. I needed to talk to you for a little while. I called you. You didn't answer. Then you sent me a text saying that you were at your new friend's cottage and you were having a wonderful time. I wrote you back with information about what happened. It took you around four hours to call me.

I didn't answer.

It hurt too much.

I knew how you did it. You did the same thing to other people in my presence when we were at the beginning of our friendship. Of course, you did it on other occasions as well but that was the moment when I couldn't just let it go. Not in that situation. It was too painful. I needed just a few words with you. You needed to finish your fun and make it home to be able to speak to me. Your comfort had to be the priority over my grief.

And yet I didn't give up on you. I still tried to have you around. I organized trips for you to the near-by forest to do some Nordic walking.

I hated it.

You became a strange chatter-box, who was spitting out a continuous pseudo-positive talk that was supposed to make everybody feel so great.

Well, it didn't.

The problem was that your logomania could not be interrupted. It was difficult to say even one short word. I was opening my eyes wider and wider unable to comprehend where this person came from. You became completely unrecognizable to me. And uncomfortable to be around.

I guess I got angry with you. I was throwing accusations at you that you were hanging out with cult-like people who completely washed your brain in a catholic way. You let me down. I let you go.

I still had the younger you. Or so I thought.

I was getting to know you for some time and I was convinced that I figured out all your wounds. I decided to help you heal. I was very patient with you. I gave you space when you were pushing me away. I accepted the fact that I was the secondary character in your life. It was good to use my support but when you achieved something I'd better not be very present. I could be around only when you needed something.

I was the one who encouraged you to get your own place. I was the one who believed that you could do it. And you did. Yey! I was so happy for you.

When it came to a house-warming party, I wasn't there. Strangely enough you invited only people who thought that you were definitely too weak to be capable of that.

All you had for me it was only a short sitting with a coffee and a packet of healthy cookies.

And you said you even bought a mug for me in my favourite colour.

I did come round to your place until I performed a little ritual there. I did some sage smudging to get rid of unwanted energies. Since then I wasn't invited to your home anymore.

Was I used? For a while I didn't want to think so. It's just how things went. It wasn't anything special or unexpected. You were always acting in the way most convenient to you regardless of anybody else. Nothing surprising.

But then there was the last straw.

We were supposed to cooperate at work which we both didn't like much. We were to prepare a mock examination twice a year. The first time you got ill and I did it alone. The second time you left me alone during half of it because you wanted to sleep longer. Well, I wouldn't mind to sleep longer too. You used the fact that in the normal course of work you should start later but it was agreed that you'd cut your working hours shorter on another day to make up for it during this mock exam. And you made the statement that you were coming later. I froze. For a moment I didn't know what to say or do about it. What was more, I didn't think I could say or do anything about it since your decision had been made.

All I could do was to get angry. Angry at how you manipulated me and used me in this situation.

To make matters even worse, you came later than you should.

I confronted you about that.

Your reaction was that I should've said something. I replied that it wasn't really my thing to do since you were responsible for your actions. When the rapist claims that the victim didn't say anything, it doesn't mean that there was no rape. I couldn't let you push the whole responsibility onto me. Not this time. And I didn't.

But since you couldn't do that, you started lying. You twisted the time frame to make you look innocent. I corrected it. When you noticed that it wasn't working, you invented the new version that actually you didn't cut your work short the other day and so you were entitled to take this time off in the morning. Your only fault was that you didn't tell me about that.

I'm sorry but I didn't buy it.

Especially that right after that you started a whole monologue about what big of a problem I was with my communication and behavioural problems.

The point is that I told you about my suspicions. I think my perception of reality is different due to different work my brain does. I am not a neurotypical person. I was sharing this with you.

And you used it against me.

Now you make attempts to act normal, to have things the way they used to be. But I'm afraid for me things will never be the same. I don't trust you anymore. Since I am the problem, I'd prefer to disappear. One of my essential values is removing problems from people's lives. I'm a neuro-atypical fixer. Since I am your problem, I should remove myself from your life. Since you have communication problems with me, I will shut up. It can be stronger than me. I'm afraid I'll cut myself off and there's nothing I can do about it.

You could, though.

You could tell me the truth and sincerely apologize to me.

I'm afraid you won't do it. It wouldn't be too convenient for you.

So what am I going to do with you now? Of course, I couldn't disregard all those good things we've been through. I don't know. Maybe if we pretend that nothing really happened, there will be a point when I'll just forget myself and start behave in my usual, not precisely normal way. I'll be talking too much but you'll be comfortable with this because that'll save you some intellectual effort. You won't have to make all those strange murmuring, mumbling noises that should only mark your presence.

Maybe I'll even start talking about me and try again to solve the great mystery of my mind which makes me search for patterns everywhere and find unusual pleasure and security in obeying rules.

Perhaps even at some point I'll forget that I don't trust you.

Or I'll take a different route. I can always walk alone.

Maybe I keep choosing the wrong you. Somehow I have this imprint in me that I can only be mistreated. So I'll always choose this kind of you that will eventually hurt me, use me, wrong me, betray me because you are selfish and care about your business and your comfort. I seem to choose you because it's terribly hard for you to sacrifice your own comfort for common good. I probably naively think that I can lift you up, teach you other ways, better ones, more humane. I lower my energy and my standards in hope that I can enhance yours. But it doesn't work. I can even end up taking over your health problems. I develop your intestinal discomforts, troubles with breathing or damage the same joint as you. This is wrong.

I should look for different you. Maybe I need you of my kind. This could be a lottery. Either I will love your peculiarities and they will perfectly match mine or I will have your little routines totally collide with mine. The problem is that I am drawn to a neurotypical you. My instinct

makes me mimic you, follow your example no matter how wrong I intellectually and morally perceive you.

Maybe it's time to change my perception. I've been trying so hard to make myself as close as possible to the neurotypical you that maybe I've been losing some things on the way. I've been blunting my intellect to adjust. I've been slowing down so that you could keep up with me. I've been crouching so that you wouldn't feel too dominated by me. I've been cutting off pieces of me to match you. And you couldn't even give up a bit of your comfort for our sake.

I came to the point when I need to reevaluate myself. I've been chipping things off myself for such a long time that I'm not even sure if all that has ever been there. I feel this is all wrong. But I do understand myself. The fact that you should be with people and the number of people surrounding you shows how happy a person is in life.

I've started doubting that. The longer I analyse people and their behaviour the more I realize that it doesn't have to be this way. I don't have to walk with people. They drain me and exhaust me. Maybe my path isn't other people's path. Maybe my path is the lone path. Maybe all those versions of you came to make me realize that. Maybe the point of your existence in my life was to liberate me from fear. It has never been about you. It's been about me and I can only find all the essentials alone. I should be ready to finally face that.

I've always wanted to feel this divine connection with everybody and everything in the world. The truth is that I feel it. I've been feeling it all my life. But it has happened only when I've been alone. The presence of others inevitably brought the sense of separation, introduce the glass sheet between me and them. Their egotistic tendencies, their insensitivities to differences made the separation. What hurts me most is the fact that usually you aren't even

trying to fight your ego. Probably you're not even aware of its existence. And I see it. I see it very clearly. I see how wonderful your life could be if only you could give it up.

You can't.

It makes me sad.

Where will I go from here? What will I do with you? How will I get over this betrayal? I think I need to decide. I am tempted by the lone road. I am tempted by its peace and quiet, by its freedom from the constant feeling that I'm doing something wrong. Strangely enough I'm a bit surprised that I haven't chosen it before. Maybe I should've. Things could've been easier. I could've been calmer for longer. Why have I found giving up on people so hard? It shouldn't be. At this point in my life I'm suspecting that it is a rather natural state for me.

Am I ready to give up hope entirely?

From time to time I get a hint of what it might be. I watch people close and sense the energy flow between them. I get dreamy with watery eyes. This is what I miss, although it's not something that I've ever really experienced. That's the strangest thing in it.

Will I still believe that I'll finally find my tribe? Those who get me and respect my limitations. Those who will accept what I'm willing to give and offer me what I really need. We will be nurturing each other over and over again. We will see each other thrive as much as possible. Those will be the ones who will hold my hand when I am overcoming myself to reach my best potential.

Somehow I don't see that's you.

Joanna Mazur-Okalowe

