

Marco Beltran | Now I Will Finish What I Began With Your Ear

Nothing says "I love you" like Sassafras Big Bopper Charlie Horse

“Wow. That guy is really weird,” Stephanie, my disgusted girlfriend, told me as we pulled out of the Towne Center parking lot in her 1995 Geo Prism, a car that until meeting her I didn’t know existed, after a delightful dinner filled with perverted jokes, homosexual innuendo and nachos.

“What? He was hilarious! I really doubt he was being serious about half of the things that came out of his mouth.”

We were referring to our late-night banter with Joey, whom I had been introduced to a few days before, a 27-year-old, cat-loving ponytail-sporting indeterminately pedophilic vegan with a tattoo on his right bicep of Hello Kitty dressed as Ash from the Evil Dead thrilloogy. Joey had a pointy nose and stubble that made him seem like the type of person who would rummage through your trash just to find a reason to hate you. With every sip from his tall Black and Tan, Joey’s speech became less inhibited; the same applied to his consciousness of the line between talking and howling. He would yell across the table at Juan, a guy I just met who is apparently in

a Smiths cover band, about how gay it is to be in a Smiths cover band. In Joey's eyes, nothing is gayer than liking the Smiths, so I stayed quiet about listening to them in high school.

All ten people in our group, including myself, helped stoke his rants into a horrible riffing bonfire-beast that can only be formed by mixing comic books, pornography and Chemical X. If he said, "There's too much. I'm not going to be able to fit it all," a "That's what your mom said" followed, or "That's what your dog said," and progressively worse, a game of verbal poker ending only when someone pulled a Royal Flush so unpleasant it ruled over all others with an iron fist. When Joey said he wouldn't want to have a daughter because he would hate to think about someone coming along to sully her chastity, someone accused him of wanting to save her for himself. I watched my girlfriend's face contort as if each phrase had stabbed her in the leg with a fork. When the subject of Wobbly Hs, Docking, Screaming Seagulls, and Gorilla Masks, all codes for odd sexual situations, became hallmarks of the conversation, her jaw bounced off the table.

I couldn't decide which was funnier, the faces she was making or the fact that we were louder than the jukebox and everyone in the room combined. All this before the food had arrived. I had thrown this lamb into a swarm of wasps. I relished it: This was going to be a great night.

The rowdy bunch quieted down for a while when the food arrived, everyone too busy stuffing their faces to even look up. Joey looked at me and asked, "Have I ever told you the story about the last girl I dated?" Everyone stopped chewing, ominously.

"I don't think you have," I answered, intrigued by this spotlight that swerved only to Joey.

"I was dating this girl a while back and she mentioned that she would like to do anal, but the only catch was that she would have to do the same to me with a dildo. The next day,

while I was in the shower, I thought I would try it out. So there I was, shoving my fingers in my ass, and to my surprise I started to enjoy it. My legs began to tremble beneath me to the point where it was hard to stay up. I lost my balance and hit the tile hard. My mom rushed in yelling, ‘Oh my God! What happened? Are you all--’ . . . stopping mid-sentence when she saw my fingers up my ass,” he ended, punctuating his story with a satisfied smile.

I looked over and smiled at my girlfriend between intervals of my obnoxious laughter. She had her hand on her face to cover a chuckle. I was surprised that this barrage hadn’t crushed her spirit, since every girl I’d dated and placed in a situation like this had either left early or hated me for bringing them. How hadn’t I screwed this relationship up? Most people I’m only able to stand for a few weeks before I loathe them, and myself for trying to fake emotions toward someone who makes me feel like scratching my eyes out. I hadn’t even realized that we had been together for almost a year. What was I doing right? Maybe it was the alcohol talking, but I felt I’d never met anyone like her.

The bar closed at three. Our group had the only table still in use, and we had no reason to linger, since the bill had been paid two hours earlier. Everyone formed a circle on the sidewalk to continue talking. Joey was surprised to find out I was Salvadorian, and he claimed that it cost him some respect for me, but I was saved in his eyes by owning a copy of Jesus Christ Vampire Slayer, a comedy about Christ-fighting vampires who graft the skin of lesbians onto themselves, giving them the ability to withstand sunlight.

On the drive home, I couldn’t stop staring at her. The street lamps haloed her head. She started to laugh; laughing is something she does when she’s nervous or scared, and she gripped the steering wheel tightly.

“Stop staring. Do you want to make me crash?”

“Sorry. It’s just you look beautiful tonight.”

“Bullshit! My hair is all messy.”

I stayed quiet for the rest of the ride, which only increased her apprehension. When we reached my house, she shut off the engine and I leaned my seat back. She let out another chuckle. I tried to stare at her hard enough to use the force to let her know what I was thinking without having to say it, like in the movies where she would look into my eyes, we would embrace, move our heads forward slowly for a kiss, and a Falcon would fly us off to the moon as credits rolled, but it must have come off as angry, because now she laughed again. I was trying to think of a how to say what I felt about her in such a witty way that she would swoon with the movements of my lips, but the message was scrambled when it reached my mouth, and it sounded like Sassafras Big Bopper Charlie Horse, as things commonly do when I’m trying to say what’s on my mind.

“What the fuck did you just say?”

I tried to play it off as a joke: “It was just too quiet, I had to say something.”

If she didn’t think I was a weirdo before, I’m sure this branded the image in several places in her mind. Ten years from now while knitting in front of a fire place, I thought, she’ll think about what a douche bag I was, and laugh—fuck. I had to do this now, before making a bigger ass out of myself, and I yelled out, “I love you!” as quickly as my mouth would let me. That’s romance: yelling at someone sitting next to you that you love them without any prior warning.

“What?”

“I love you, Stephanie!”

“No, you don’t. You just think you do,” she said before laughing hysterically, which scared me a little at first. “You probably say this to all your girlfriends cause you think you do but aren’t sure about how you feel.”

What the hell? Get out of my brain, I thought to myself as that would have been an accurate interpretation a few years ago, but this time it was different. I imagine this is what getting shot feels like. Rejected.

“You don’t love me,” she said again with a smile, and I couldn’t say anything. I couldn’t think anything. It was like someone was stabbing my chest and squeezing the air out of my lungs while slowly pouring salt in my eye, just before pissing all over their hands and touching my face. I sat hugging my chest and rocking back and forth wishing I were someplace else, someplace good.

“I was being serious,” I said in a low voice because I couldn’t breathe deep enough to say what I wanted, twiddling my thumbs next to the glove compartment of her car. I spent the rest of the silence looking out the window and decided to leave before I made a greater fool of myself.

That night, I couldn’t sleep. I flipped through the pictures I had saved of her in my phone, reliving the night over and over again wishing this could have turned out differently. I felt like staying in my bed for the rest of my life regretting what was said and cursing everyone I had ever met, ostracizing myself from the world and living in my own feces until the police came because the neighbors complained about the smell. Depression seems to make me overdramatic. Just before I was about to bury my face in a gallon of Rocky Road ice cream, my phone rattled in my hand. STEPHANIE shone brightly across the screen with an envelope under it. Fifteen messages to say three little words, but in the end the day is saved.