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Until Death Do Us Parts

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Unrelenting

Jeriann Watkins

I am the biting wind.

I bear not the comfort
or subtleties of a summer breeze.
I will not flirt and flit about,
or be gently pushed away when you tire of me.

You may try to move on
but I am not easily escaped.

I lie and wait those frigid nights
outside your door,
lunging as soon as you emerge.
I spring for your vulnerabilities.

Feel my breath upon your neck,
your exposed ears, cheeks, nose.

I attack without mercy,
begging your acknowledgement
but you continue briskly
until you reach your destination.

Though you ignore me, you feel my presence,
a deep chill aching in your bones.

A single glance through a window,
at the leaf-less trees,
with frozen squirrel corpses beneath them
will make you recall my icy touch.

I will not be forgotten.

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Until Death Do Us Parts

Vanessa Wendland

I didn’t mean to kill him.
I never thought that I’d be the abusive partner in a
relationship. I would normally be classified as the pushover,
the one who would bend over backwards to make sure that
anyone and everyone was pleased with my performance. But
my relationship—the introduction, the beginning, the middle,
and The End—with Alejandro was unlike anything I had ever
experienced. Or ever will.

Looking back at our time together, I can see that I
had been the cold, heartless villain from the very beginning.
He offered everything he had, everything he was, to me. And
my only response was a snide rejection. I said he wasn’t good
enough. I said he was too old and too worn down. Damaged
goods. I was waiting for someone younger, someone better
looking. Someone shinier.

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I had seen him with the last girl he was going out
with. We had actually known each other for a few years before
the idea of Us was ever even mentioned. He always reeked of
cigarette smoke and apple cinnamon. He tried using Febreze to
cover up the overpowering cloud of nicotine that floated around
him. Instead he smelled like a sweet, rotting, red apple that had
a bad habit of smoking two packs a day. Sexy.

The two would always go off together, disappearing for
long hours of the night that would stretch into the orange and
blue light of sunrise. Never really admitting where they went
and where they planned on going. They were experts in evasion
tactics when questioned directly. I wouldn’t have been surprised
if they were doing something illegal: partners in crime. I didn’t
bother to hide my disgust at their relationship. She used and
abused him. Almost every time they came back from their
mysterious escapades he would be broken in some new way. He
was a little bit sadder each time they returned home and she
left him standing there. Scratches here, burns there, gold skin
fading into a haggard grey. He was aging faster than he should have.

Finally, she left him. One day it was business as usual, the next she found someone new. Spenser was his name, I think. Spenser was everything her former partner was not. A newer, improved model. And though it sounds harsh, we all understood what she was thinking when she left. Spenser was someone who had much more appeal and worth than poor Alejandro did.

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Alejandro is what I call him, since he doesn’t like his old name. He can’t ask why I named him that. I would lie if he ever could. I would tell him he was named after a genius poet or a spectacular artist, or someone who was a complete bad ass. I would never tell him that I heard the name in a bad Lady Gaga song.

I was with him when I heard it. We were driving somewhere together, but I don’t remember where. I had been trying to think of a good name for him, something to call him to show that he was officially mine. That song came on the radio and it just clicked. I don’t even know what she was singing about, I just heard his name and it was official. Alejandro: interestingly odd. Alejandro the exotic. Alejandro the magnificent. Alejandro, Alejandro, Alejandro.

My Alejandro.

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When it was first suggested that we be together I almost laughed. I held it in because I still felt sorry for the demolition of his train wreck relationship that I had witnessed. But my sympathy wasn’t strong enough to actually say yes. I had standards that were much higher than the likes of him.

But he was persistent. I’m not sure how the idea of him and I even came about, but suddenly there he was. Relentlessly optimistic. He wove stories of the life we could have together. The places we could go. The experiences that we could share, just the two of us. Eventually, I reluctantly surrendered.

It’s better to have something than nothing, right?

And when he came to me on that first warm night, that night that made him officially belong to me, I suddenly realized that we were made for each other. When I walked down from my apartment to meet him on the sidewalk, I was unexcited and unimpressed. But when I saw him, I forgot about his past. I forgot about my reservations. It was just the two of us, together. Both strangely broken, in our own ways. So unlike, but somehow belonging to each other anyway.

And the rest was history.

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But even the most precious aspects of our life can lose their meaning once the demands of daily life become ensnared by the mundane. Alejandro became less and less important in my life until he wasn’t really a factor at all. Now he was just a convenience. I only saw him on the weekends, if I had time. I only acknowledged his presence if I was lazy and didn’t feel like cooking, so I would go to him and he would take me out to a restaurant. If I wanted a companion to go shopping with, I would make him go to the mall. I ordered him around like he was my servant rather than my partner. And he just took it. He waited patiently for me to notice him—even if it took hours or days. Even if it took weeks.

He would only go where I told him to go. He would stop exactly where I instructed him to do so. I became tyrannical with how much power I had over him. I demanded everything that I possibly could, without ever considering his feelings. I barely allowed him the most basic of needs. And he let me. Like with all of the other girls that he had taken out before, he was powerless to take control of his situation. Our union was doomed to be a repetition of all of his past relationships. The only difference was that I was addicted to the power that I had come to possess. It was my first serious relationship of this magnitude and I was not willing to give it up or throw it away as easily as the last girl who had had Alejandro. I was completely and fully committed to this uneven partnership. I would never let it go. I would never let him go.

I never expected that he would let me go.

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I remember our last day together because it started off completely irritating. Infuriating weather, annoying people, aggravating music. We were driving to my school, late as usual,
when it happened. A skinny white girl was on the radio singing about how she partied like P. Diddy. The raindrops slapping against my windshield forced me to slow down with the rest of the agonizingly slow traffic. Just Alejandro, himself, every noise he made, every movement that he attempted, pissed me off. I remember vocalizing my anger, just before it happened. I don't recall exactly what came out of my mouth, just that I spewed out a string of insults that consisted of how much better I knew I was, how much he didn't deserve my time, how much I thought he was worthless.

Which is more deplorable about my behavior? The fact that the last thing that he ever heard from me was ugly, hateful words twisted together for the purpose of hurting him? Or the fact that it had become such a habit to belittle him that I am still unaware of exactly what I said?

He had been acting strange all day, but I chose to ignore it. I blamed his own incompetence before I even considered that there might actually be something seriously wrong with him. I was much too consumed with my own problems that seemed so important at the time.

I didn't even realize he was in trouble until he was already gone. One moment he was there, silently trying to push through my verbal assault, trying to survive until we reached our destination, and the next moment he was gone forever. There was no coughing or gasping for air, no visible struggle for consciousness and life. He just stopped. I watched as the life was snuffed out of him as if someone had flipped off a switch. His body was an empty shell of what he used to be.

Everything stopped as I watched him die. I couldn't focus on the traffic outside of the vehicle, only on him. Everything had become silent—I couldn't hear the static of the radio any longer or even the familiar rumble of the car engine.

Alejandro, what have you done?

Three lanes later on the freeway, I managed to pull over without even realizing how I did it.

Alejandro, what have I done?

I struggled to unfasten my seatbelt and stumbled out of the car. I frantically tried to think of something, anything, I could do to save him. But there was nothing.

Alejandro, please don't leave me!

Cars rushed past us, whirling up wind and kicking pieces of biting gravel that bounced off of the cold, dull metal of my vehicle. No one stopped to help us. But maybe it was better that way. There wouldn't be any witnesses to my nightmare. And besides, no one could have saved him. No one could have saved me.

Eventually reason returned to me and I began to realize that I couldn't just sit there on the side of the road, collapsed onto a corpse. I made the call that everyone is always afraid of making. I waited for the men who everyone is always afraid of one day waiting for. I'm not sure if it took them seconds or hours to arrive, but when they appeared they weren't much comfort. I didn't have the answers to the "how" and "why" questions they asked. They didn't have any real answers for me, either.

But how could I explain to them what happened? How could I admit to being a murderer? Because that's what I was. I killed Alejandro. I murdered him slowly, through months of neglect and abuse. I enjoyed ensnaring him in the web of mind games that gave me the power and left him as a broken victim. I loved the power so much that I didn't realize how fast his life was deteriorating until it was much, much too late.

When had I become such a monster? Memories swirled through my mind, suffocating me with guilt and regret. Alejandro taking me to a weekend trip to the coast. Alejandro sitting with me at the drive-in. Alejandro carrying me through snow, rain, or any sort of horrible weather to get me where I needed to go.

Alejandro, I'm so sorry.

But as they prepared to move his body, I knew that my apologies meant nothing now. He was gone. I was finally the powerless one in the relationship. He had left me. He was free and I was forever trapped in his memory.

I watched as the tow truck carried my beloved Toyota Rav 4 away from me forever. And though I might one day...
move on and get a new vehicle to replace him, Alejandro was my first car, my first love, and my heart would belong with him forever.

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**Paper Heart**

Ciara Laing

My heart is made of paper,

Formed into a three dimensional shape.

My blood wells up inside

Oozing through the thin membrane

Feeding the wormy veins that will pump it through.

When I let her in

The paper will become soggy.

Soon it will be nothing more

Than a pile of mush

Like the guts of a Halloween pumpkin

Folded up in last week's newspaper

And left to rot in the garden.

She will destroy

My heart.