

A SLIDING STANCE

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I stand in the stone corridor, looking at the uniformed court officer with wide eyes. I am here checking out the space before my court date to get a peace bond against my lover.

“What do you mean we all wait in the same space?” I ask.

“Don’t worry—just ignore him, dear.”

“Ignore him...right.”

Later, the judge will call my lover “mister,” give her masculine pronouns despite her obviously female name.

I will learn a lot through this process about the gendered assumptions surrounding relationship violence.

We didn’t fit their framework of understanding.

The truth was, though, in their own way, my queer feminist activist

communities didn't know any more what to do with me or us than the courts did.

I sometimes felt profoundly alone, like I was drowning in the collective silence and judgments built around me. And in very different ways, I wouldn't doubt this also to be my lover's experience. In either case, nothing on offer seemed very helpful.

I didn't love the option of engaging the court system, it being an institution embedded in racism, classism, patriarchy. At demos, cops were always on the other side, a force we were generally fighting against. It wasn't a decision I made easily or lightly.

Unfortunately there didn't appear to be a lot of other options available. I didn't trust my lover to hold herself accountable, and who else would be there to deal with whatever came next? However conflicted my decision, in the absence of community alternatives it offered me some promise of response, some authority where I felt like I had none. My refusal to see her didn't stop her from showing up at my house. My shouts didn't stop her fist.

It is the morning of filing my statement with the police, who would now hand deliver the court summons to my ex-partner.

My new lover thinks this is an occasion to celebrate: "You must be relieved."

No, my choice paradoxically involves giving over control, an uneasy space I occupy after a relationship where I felt so little of it.

I feel an overwhelming grief I have been staving off by procrastinating until the deadline. That our relationship is over is undeniably real to me in this moment.

How could I say that even after everything, part of me still longed for her? It is a difficult thing to explain to anyone who hasn't been there. From the outside, this possibility seems unimaginable. From the outside, things seem clear and straightforward.

From the inside, life is held in powerful contradictions. I lived our pro-

found intimacy that, when good, was quite magical. The person with whom at times I felt the most safe, the most alive, was the same person at times I both dreaded and feared. The person who could be big and angry could just as easily be intensely vulnerable and incredibly loving. For all her suffering, I thought I could love her pain away—that I just had to love her bigger, better.

Once out of the relationship, I worked hard to see the hooks. How deep our socialization runs—part Catholic upbringing to honor commitment no matter what, part fairy-tale belief that true love only comes once—that somewhere inside of me I clung to my values, and my fear clung to me. To my homophobic family, how much I wanted to show you that queer relationships could be healthy and long-lasting—that I could have what you have, that I could be just like you. And how, because of this, I have kept my silence, and you don't know me as well as you might.

It would be easier to tell you that the story ends there, that I picked up the pieces and moved on, but it doesn't. After I got a peace bond against her, I violated the bond myself, some time later, by seeing her and getting back together with her. Some were brave enough to say I was betting on the wrong horse, but I wasn't ready to hear that.

My house held a meeting with us during which my partner listened to and addressed their concerns about how her behavior had eroded their sense of safety too. She would have to earn back their trust. And I believed she would, because things were different...for a while. But this new narrative, though useful, left no room inside the relationship to name old behaviors, old ways, if they didn't exist anymore.

Soon enough the narrative began unraveling, but in the face of people's judgment and my own hope for change, how could I admit this to anyone, even myself?

Rarely did I get time alone to even think such thoughts. She accused me of using my femme and "passing" privileges against her through the court process; using my class privilege when I didn't pay for this or that; of not knowing what

it was to be a "real" survivor. When she disclosed affairs, my hurt and anger was evidence of my lack of internal security and radical politics.

Everyone has a bottom line. Sometimes you just don't know what it is until you hit it. Mine came in a moment that, in the bigger picture, was a more ordinary betrayal. Another "poly" agreement broken, knowingly, and right in front of me. Humiliation aside, I experienced a moment of pure clarity when I realized this will not stop. This will not stop, no matter what I do or how much I love her. I decided I was finally done.