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English 101

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Can’t Help How You Feel

When a couple is stressed it’s usually very easy to read. There’s such thing as hiding emotion. Sometimes in the effort of hiding such emotion the tension becomes so visible that it’s hard to imagine seeing the pair happy even if they have been many times. Me and my ex were often content on the outside because we buried each other’s feelings for worse. We didn’t know how to handle them and that only led to more awfulness as our time together went on.

One date I had decided to take her to our favorite pizza place, one where the pizza was very customizable and made with fresh ingredients. As soon as a customer walked in they could smell the fresh baked dough, and the transformed unleashed smells of toppings as they came out a surprisingly speedy oven. When I walked in the white building decorated with farm tools and modern lights hung from piping I already knew the type of pizza I wanted and how weirded out she would be when I ordered it. It was a normal crust pizza with a basil pesto and tomato sauce base, provolone and goat cheese, sausage and peperoni, saluted onions and spinach and finally a drizzle of chili oil to top it off. We sat down. I guided her to a window pane with bar stools in the back of the restaurant with plenty of the silly antisocial privacy we had both desired. I brought her over the pizza while she focused on her phone looking scrunched and cold atop the stool. I honestly don’t remember what she ordered other than it had cherry tomatoes and for some reason that was somewhat nasty to me even though I enjoy them now.

We’d grown comfortable to have a lack of meaningful conversation aside from me asking “are you alright?” since she always was troubled to some degree. Maybe that was the biggest issue to the whole thing. The foundation was our problems and that never really led to any long-term solutions. Whether it be the bulimia, depression, suicidal tendencies, poor home life, the list goes on and on and even if they got better, with our care we only grew to despise each other more. As we tried to change each other to people we would love only hate grew.

Toward the end of our pizzas she said she had to go to the bathroom. I of course sat there staring at her pizza, I normally like eating other people’s leftovers but there were plump tomatoes on the pie. I don’t like juicy tomatoes on my pie. You can only imagine how I feel about pineapple on pizza. She had barely eaten it. Six out of the starting eight slices remained. This was normal, but it still bothered me in a way. Out the window I could see the occasional pedestrian. It was a slightly misty and stickily warm day and none of these people looked particularly happy. A woman in a long brown jacket struck me as odd. She seemed to be happy in her gait. Confident and looking strong headed with sunglasses. I could only imagine how ugly things must look in her sun glasses. Probably made the mist look like a sickly fog.

Lexi returned from the bathroom. Staring out the window still, I checked my watch, It had been a full twenty seven minutes since she had first entered. She looked a tad more shaky and frail than usual. She carried off the vibe of not wanting to be held or comforted but left to whatever madness was in her head. I cared about her problems, so I bothered to ask.

“Are you feeling alright?”

“No but can you give me a second, I have to think how I should word this”

“Okay that’s fine take your time, we have all day really.”

She paused thinking. This took about two minutes. I honestly was emotionally sweating. A feeling akin to anxiety with a still tremble and a constant uneasiness. I was somewhat used to her needing to think and respected it since so many people talk without thinking and it just gets them nowhere essentially. After this short time, she held my hand. Looking back, I don’t think I’ve felt fingers like that before. Thin, long but interlocking in a very welcoming sense. I think I told her they were like spider legs. I later learned she took offense to this, but I guess that’s just some meaning lost in translation.

“I’m sorry I’m worrying about it again” she said under her breath, shoulders hung low, tapping her knee from the stool she had sat on beside me.

“I thought so” I honestly didn’t know what to say. My gut tightened like a snake had wrapped around my entrails.

The fog outside was not as thick as it was when she was in the bathroom. It had become a mere mist with the sun peaking out over the street full of buildings.

“what made you think about it again?” I asked patiently frustrated.

“I keep looking at my stomach and it feels a lil bigger and you know my mood has been off.”

“Yes but that could be your meds and shots and we like just ate minutes ago.”

“I just have a feeling, you know? Like I know it’s there.” She said with her arms slightly waved upward like a plea or beg. There was nothing there.

“I understand, well maybe not, and I can’t relate but I can try to understand, you know if you keep stressing about this it will only lead to more stress and keep going and troubling us just like it has been the last 4 months. Honestly Lexi I care, and I want to help and I’m glad you’re talking cuz I know that’s hard for you with this but I don’t know what you want me to do or how you want me to approach this. We were as safe as we could be and you’ve been tested twice already, we don’t need to keep stressing about it and I can only be so considerate when this keeps coming up. You stressing so much about it is only making me stress more. It’s getting so hard to not boil over and react harshly when you keep bringing this up week after week for no real reason.”

I paused to breathe, stressed from the ramble of thoughts pleading her mind to stop stressing over this topic. I knew there was nothing there and that her concern was as irrational as a woman wearing sunglasses amidst a foggy street. She kept looking away from me, down to her feet down to the side walk.

I think In this moment I truly took a few long seconds to consider leaving her. I felt like I knew I was always beating myself up and now I was feeling the epiphany of the beating. My mind even once admitted how unhealthy this was. There were even times of stress where we were literally at peace, nothing to bother either of us but I knew there was a storm coming and it sent my body and mind quivering inside. Even if it was better for me, leaving was never felt like a real option. My guilt from such an abandonment would hurt more and the possibility of her failing in life and feeling pain only drew me closer to keep trying, to hope for a real calm after the storm.

“I don’t think you’re looking at this in a way that’s right or helpful for me.”

“What do you mean?” I said feeling equal worry for her and frustration with myself.

“I don’t think you’re being really supportive to what could happen, it’s like we’re apart on our thinking and not together, and I need you to care more than ever right now.”

“I do care Lexi, it’s just right now it’s starting to seem like you’re looking for reasons for this obsessiveness to be true, like you want it to happen”

She paused for a few moments her hand shaking beneath mine as I tried to calm her second by second, heart beat by heartbeat. I saw a few tears leave her eye as she turned her head back towards me.

“Maybe part of me does want it. I’ve never really had someone who cared for me so much or depended on me, so I want something to care for who needs me, I want that feeling so bad”

I paused trying to think of how to respond.

“And what happens after you get that? You know there’s so much that comes with it especially at this point in your life.”

She started crying more. The pit in my stomach tightened in pain of guilt. I didn’t know what to do. At this point it wasn’t a “walking on egg shells feeling” but like you were in a dark warehouse suspended on a window ledge with rows of rope you could walk on but each one was just as awfully thin and unstable as the other. Even worse, each one led across infinitely, not down to any form of calm, an endless tension.

“Maybe you’re right but I cant help how I feel, im sorry.”

“It’s okay you don’t need to say you’re sorry in that way you’re right, let’s take a walk I’ll get you another test, this isn’t over and nobody is going anywhere.”

We walked toward the fog in silence, there was a Walmart a good ten-minute walk away. I think I looked scary at that point. I can’t really imagine my face well. Faces always confused me. But I know neither of us looked happy, It felt like a stressful storm was always around the corner of each week, each day, sometimes each hour. I still cared very much but all I could think of walking through the mist was what she said last.

“I can’t help how I feel.”