

Metaphor Arthritis and a Mercedes

The thing about arthritis pain and the pain from loving you is how easily I manage both with impermanent remedies rather than admit each is a way of life demanding a change in my own habits. Instead of eating this cake that will surely inflame my joints and cause shooting spikes, I could choose to walk off the pain instead. Wait for the surge of endorphins to release into my bloodstream returning a semblance of balance and clear-headedness to my physical self. I wonder if I can walk you off too.

A thick piece of cake sits in front of me as a silent waitress pours steaming coffee into a cup I'm massaging like it's Aladdin's lamp in disguise. My thumbs have plagued me with arthritic achiness since the year I turned forty. At first, I was convinced the mainly nuisance, here-again-gone-again discomfort was a byproduct of a too tight grip on the elliptical machine at the gym. Pain that comes on quietly like arthritis does—in a gentle, ebb and flow—building slowly, reliably—can sometimes be misidentified. But I was never as good at reading signals as I was at ignoring the obvious. Absently I seek relief from the now faithful pain wherever I find a heated surface.

I'm at the coffee shop on the shaded corner of our street seeking relief from more than just arthritis pain. As I jab my fork into the layered confection I know the calming lethargy from flowing glucose will shortly displace emotional turmoil

with a haze of sweetened wellbeing. Who needs valium or alcohol with such baked goodness? Besides, I can still legally operate a motorized vehicle under the influence of carb-overload, and a recent side-effect of our union sits on the street just outside the coffee shop window: a candy-red, \$60,000 symbol of a decomposing relationship.

I think a Mercedes is like eating rich buttercream frosting by the spoonful right out of the bowl. Delicious sure, but far more fat and sugar than anyone needs. A carotid artery with heated seats, driver assist and satellite radio. After discovering you and my arthritis were on the opposite ends of the faithfulness spectrum, a car-buying binge seemed every bit as reasonable as ingesting a towering piece of layered calories; a bright, sporty placebo against the dark, thick pain weighing me down and signaling the death knell of our future.

I love the Mercedes, and I hate you. But even as I think it I know I'm lying to myself. I hate the Mercedes too. You imagined me as someone who drove a high-end vehicle because you imagined that was the kind of woman who best reflected your own value. I knew that too. It was why I resisted buying the car until today. Buying it now is me rubbing salt into my own open wound. A post-middle-aged version of emotional cutting. Something to make me feel outrage, or indignation, or fury. Anything besides stupidity and confusion. I long to be the woman who burns your clothes, breaks your favorite golf clubs, confronts you screaming in public and then drives that Mercedes straight out of town, or right over you.

I'm pushing the cake around the plate more than eating it, smashing the fork into the frosting watching the brown fluff push up through the prongs. The October sun is fading into pinkish hued clouds deepening the car's candied red to a claret. I think I am somewhere between who I am and who I am no more tethered to the present only by the throbbing pain in my thumbs that lets me know not everything has changed. Even if we have changed. Even if I am now a woman who drives a decadent new Mercedes and philosophizes about chocolate cake alone in a coffee shop. I press the backside of my thumbs against the cup again, but it's tepid now and provides no relief.