

# ***The Mourning After***

by David Speranza

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FADE IN:

INT. TED'S BEDROOM - MORNING

CLOSE ON PAULA, mid-twenties, pretty, currently with smeared mascara and a rat's nest for hair. Dead to the world.

Her eyes snap open. Without moving, she blearily scans the room. Something about it confuses her. Then a memory hits. An unpleasant one.

Very carefully, as if dreading what she'll find, she looks back over her shoulder. At that exact moment, a man's arm reaches over to flop across her chest. Paula stares at the appendage in alarm.

INT. HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

The door to Ted's bedroom opens and Paula, in T-shirt and underwear, steps quietly out. Gently closing the door, she glances around the apartment in mild shock. Taking a breath, she moves across the hall to another closed room and opens the door.

INT. PAULA'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Paula's breath comes easier as she takes in this more familiar space. She closes the door and looks gratefully at her bed, still made from the day before.

PAULA

I am so not believing this.

She steps away from the door, revealing a memo pad with a list of items written on it: "1. Tissues, 2. moisturizer, 3. Gummi bears, 4. deodorant."

A tentative knock jostles the pad, causing the pen to drop to the floor.

Paula, now seated on the bed, jumps at the sound.

TED (o.s.)

Paula? Paula, you okay?

Paula opens her mouth to speak, but manages only a dry croak. She clears her throat, makes another attempt.

PAULA  
Uh...yeah. Just fine.  
(beat)  
You?

TED (o.s.)  
Missing you already.

PAULA  
Well, go back to sleep. You can  
dream about me for a while.

She makes a face at her own response.

PAULA (cont.)  
Ted, listen, I'll be out in a minute.  
Okay? Girl stuff.

TED (o.s.)  
Okay. You want some coffee?

PAULA  
Sure.  
(to herself)  
As long as it's enough to drown in...

TED (o.s.)  
What?

PAULA  
(quickly)  
You know how I like it?

TED (o.s.)  
You bet I do.

As we hear Ted move off, Paula flops down onto the bed and  
stares helplessly at the ceiling.

INT. HALLWAY - PAULA'S DOOR - LATER

TED ambles into frame carrying a cup of coffee, his back to  
us. For now, that's all we see, along with the fact that he's  
shirtless. He knocks on the door.

TED  
Coffee.

There is a brief pause, then the door opens--but only enough for Paula's hand to slip through. Ted stares at the hand a moment, not sure what to make of it.

PAULA (o.s.)  
You there?

TED  
Right here. You okay?

PAULA (o.s.)  
You know how I am in the mornings.

TED  
I thought I did. Here--

He puts the cup carefully in her hand, guiding the handle between her fingers.

PAULA (o.s.)  
Thank you, Ted.

The cup disappears behind the door, which again closes.

TED  
Sure thing.

He stares at the door a moment, hoping for something more.

PAULA (o.s.)  
Be with you in a bit.

TED  
Okay.

Ted moves off.

INT. TED'S BEDROOM - LATER

Ted--whom we now see is a cute guy in his mid- to late-twenties--lies reading on the bed among some very ruffled sheets. He looks up with a charming smile as Paula appears in the doorway with her cup of coffee. She is dressed as before, but looks significantly more confident and awake.

PAULA  
--You realize how wrong this is,  
don't you?

TED

Damn you look hot.

PAULA

Ted, shut up--I look like your roommate.

TED

A roommate I've been wanting to gently wrestle since the day I moved in.

PAULA

"Gently wrestle?" Why couldn't you have said something like that six months ago, when you were interviewing for the room?

TED

Would it have made a difference?

PAULA

Totally. I would have called the cops and none of this would've happened.

Ted laughs.

TED

(patting the bed)

Come on over here and let's snuggle.

PAULA

The scene of the crime? I don't think so.

TED

You didn't seem that worried about actually committing the crime.

PAULA

Five margaritas will do that to a girl.

He stares at her from the bed. She looks back at him uncomfortably.

PAULA (cont.)

I wish you'd stop looking at me  
like that.

TED

I can't help it, you look so...

PAULA

What?

Ted rises from the bed and starts walking toward her.

PAULA (cont.)

Ted...?

As he draws closer, Paula moves nervously backward.

PAULA (cont.)

What are you doing?

TED

I just want to...

PAULA

Want to what?

TED

Try something.

Paula's back thumps against the wall. She looks at Ted  
standing directly in front of her.

PAULA

Ted, what are you do--?

TED

Shhh...

She glances at him nervously but doesn't pull away. He kisses  
her--a good, long one. When it's over, both seem a little  
dazed.

TED

(smiling)

Wow...

PAULA

Why did you have to do that?

TED

It's something I've wanted to do so many times but couldn't. It still seems so unbelievable. I'm standing here kissing you and only a few hours ago we were making love.

PAULA

Ted...

He touches her breast, fascinated by this new power. She looks curiously at his hand, then at his face.

TED

This is surreal, isn't it? You and me?

PAULA

Beyond surreal. It's Dada-esque.

TED

I think we should do it again, just to make sure it really happened.

PAULA

I'm not sure I want to be sure. Some experiences should remain dreamlike, don't you think?

TED

Viewed through a romantic filter?

PAULA

Or an alcoholic haze.

She pulls away from him and sits down on the bed.

TED

What's the matter?

PAULA

I'm trying to imagine where this is going. How deep are the grooves? Can we still step out of them, or is that it--we fucked and now we're fucked?

TED

I'm not sure I--

PAULA

Can we still veer? I need to feel like there's room to veer.

TED

You mean wiggle room?

PAULA

Wiggle, veer, swerve, dodge.

TED

But not reverse?

PAULA

I don't know. If we have to. Is that possible?

TED

Is that what you want?

PAULA

No. I don't know. I mean, do you?

TED

Of course not. Do you have any idea how hard it's been watching you prance around in those T-shirts and undies the last six months?

PAULA

Well, from my one or two glimpses-- very hard.

Ted sees her eyeing his crotch. He laughs.

TED

Sexy and funny. You're amazing.

PAULA

I'm not that amazing. I'm next door. It's like living above a bakery: of course all you're going to think about is eating cake.

TED

Cake, cookies, muffins...

PAULA

Ted, we do still have to live together, you know.



TED

I know, it's perfect--baked goods every night. Only without the calories.

PAULA

Look--just... For now the kitchen is closed, okay?

TED

Closed?

PAULA

The cupboard is bare. The chefs have left the building.

He rubs up against her seductively.

TED

But we've just added a whole new layer to a perfectly good cake...

PAULA

(pushing him away)  
You're on a diet!

Ted backs off, regarding her a moment.

TED

Okay, so tell me: how is this a bad thing?

PAULA

It's not that it's bad, it's just... I liked how things were: your room here, my room there, a big hallway in between. Clear. Simple. Clean.

TED

Simple for you, maybe. Meanwhile, I'm doing everything I can not to peek into the hall every time I hear your door open because I know how ridiculously cute you look when you come out, half asleep, for your nightly pee and glass of water. Ridiculously cute and ridiculously sexy.

PAULA

Ted, you're talking about a semi-conscious woman with a full bladder and a parched throat. How can that possibly be sexy?

TED

Must be the bunny slippers.

PAULA

From now on I sleep in Army fatigues and combat boots.

TED

Don't you see? That's where things get less complicated, not more.

PAULA

How do you figure?

TED

Because. Next time I see you walking around looking too cute for words, I can just jump on you.

Paula looks at him.

PAULA

That is so romantic.

TED

And if you want--if the mood suddenly strikes--you can jump on me.

PAULA

That would be after another five margaritas?

TED

Come on, are you saying you haven't ever thought about--

PAULA

No.

TED

Never?

Paula shakes her head.

TED (cont.)

There was never a time you looked  
at me, I don't know, in a towel or  
something, and--

PAULA

Didn't happen.

Ted is stunned.

TED

Wow...

Paula looks at him, getting an idea.

PAULA

Come here a minute.

A bit unsure, he steps toward her.

TED

What...?

She takes him by the shoulders, positions him against a wall.

TED (cont.)

What are we doing?

She angles a table lamp to cast more light on him.

TED (cont.)

Hey, that's bright--

PAULA

Turn toward the right.

Puzzled, Ted turns.

PAULA (cont.)

Pull in your stomach.

Ted sucks it in.

PAULA (cont.)

Uh-huh...

Paula goes up to him, scrutinizing his features, touching his chest, turning him to the wall and eyeing his ass. He glances back at her nervously. She steps back, shaking her head.

PAULA (cont.)

Objectively, there's really nothing wrong with you.

TED

Well, that's good news.

PAULA

But--I'm sorry--I just don't feel it.

TED

What about last night?

PAULA

Last night, I felt it. Today, I don't. What can I tell you?

TED

Paula, that's crazy. I mean, besides the alcohol, how can you just--?

PAULA

It's not like I have any control over it. I'm just telling you what I feel.

TED

Which clearly isn't very much...

PAULA

I've told you lots of times, you're not my type.

TED

Yeah, but after last night--I thought--

(beat)

What's your type again?

PAULA

Tall, grungy, rich. You know--that whole unwashed, greasy hair, bags-of-cash look.

TED

So clean, good-looking, and not-short won't cut it, huh?

PAULA

(shaking her head)

Good-looking guys expect every girl to blush and swoon the minute they flash a little dental work. I like guys to feel a tiny bit grateful after they've slept with me.

TED

Trust me--I'm grateful.

PAULA

Are you kidding? Look at you!  
You're the cat that ate the canary!

Despite himself, Ted starts to grin.

PAULA (cont.)

You could make a pillow with the feathers floating out of your mouth.

TED

I can't help it, I just...

Paula looks at him carefully.

PAULA

You're not in love with me, are you, Ted?

TED

No, I-- Of course not. I just... I guess I always thought--even before all this--that we were more than just, you know, roommates.

PAULA

Sure we are: we're buds, we like to hang out, we like to have fun together. Only last night we had a little too much fun. It happens. We're adults, we'll get over it.

TED

And if I don't want to get over it?

PAULA

Then we'll just have to cut your balls off.

Ted looks at her sharply. She flashes a sweet smile.

TED

Refresh my memory: Have I seen  
this side of you before?

PAULA

Of course you have. Try squinting  
through that post-coital haze. I'm  
still the bitch who leaves crumbs  
on the counter and forgets to  
change the toilet paper.

TED

Right. I hate that bitch.

PAULA

See? And I can be even bitchier.

TED

Good to know...

Smiling, Paula gives him a playful shove. But Ted's brow  
remains furrowed.

PAULA

What's the matter? Why is this so  
hard?

TED

I don't--I'm trying to...

PAULA

Ted, what?

TED

(coming out  
with it)

How am I supposed to look at you  
the same way now? I mean, you're  
not just my cool and sexy roommate  
anymore, you're-- I've been inside  
you.

PAULA

God, Ted, do you have to make me  
sound like a shipping container?

TED

Paula, I'm serious--our bodies have connected at every possible point.

PAULA

You are in love with me, aren't you?

TED

I don't have to be in love to appreciate the feeling of breathing into another person's lungs, of being so close our eyes can't focus. Drunk, sober, it doesn't matter--there was a connection there. An intimacy I'll still be remembering when I'm ninety.

PAULA

I wasn't that good, was I?

TED

That's not what I mean. To look someone in the eye--someone you know --as they give themselves to you, to be momentarily part of them as they offer up their most primal selves--that's not something we can just forget.

(beat)

Can we?

PAULA

We have to. All of us. Except with the person we spend the rest of our lives with. Otherwise we'd become basket cases. Some of us more than others.

Ted thinks about this a moment.

TED

So that's it? We just pretend this didn't happen?

PAULA

Realistically? No. But I don't exactly want to shout it from the rooftops, either.

(MORE)

PAULA (CONT'D)

(pause)

Ted, I had a great time. I really did. And I'm not saying it won't happen again. But we can't expect it to. We've got to treat this like some rare and valuable drug-- but one that might cause cancer. It's too easy, otherwise. Too potentially habit-forming. And habits can be taken for granted. Which can lead to all sorts of resentment and disappointment. And I'll be honest, I'm not looking for a live-in boyfriend right now. Not this soon, anyway.

Ted contemplates this, a thought coming to him.

TED

Egg nog.

PAULA

What?

She looks at him, not sure if he's lost it.

TED

Remember how, when you were a kid, it was only in the house during the last week of the year?

PAULA

Okay...

TED

And it was so precious, so rare, each of us was only allowed a small glass. But that little taste was so smooth and sweet and perfect-- with that rich, musky aroma--it was so unbelievably satisfying, it never even crossed our minds to crave it the rest of the year. Once the holidays were over, that was it: it no longer existed. Not until it showed up again a year later, like magic, in its old familiar spot on the refrigerator door.



PAULA

So, you're saying last night was  
egg nog?

TED

(nods)

Maybe.

PAULA

(considering)

Huh. I've always wondered what's  
in that stuff.

TED

(with a shrug)

Magic?

Paula shakes her head with a laugh.

PAULA

You're too much, you know that?

He smiles. Paula turns to leave, then pauses at the door.

PAULA (cont.)

I'm curious: who made the first  
move?

TED

Last night? You don't remember?

PAULA

I remember ordering the last round  
of drinks, then I remember kissing.  
But I don't know how we got from A  
to K.

TED

You really want to know?

PAULA

Why? Did I say something stupid?

TED

Well, you were pretty drunk, so I  
don't--

PAULA

What did I say?

TED  
(after a pause)  
You said...you'd been wanting to do  
that for a long time.

PAULA  
I said that.

Ted nods.

PAULA (cont.)  
And did you believe me?

TED  
At the time.

PAULA  
But now?

TED  
Now I don't know.

Paula nods thoughtfully. They regard each other a moment.

PAULA  
You know what I need? A really hot  
shower. Then I need to go sleep  
off this hangover.

TED  
Amen to that. Save me some hot  
water?

PAULA  
(smiling)  
Sure.

Neither seems sure how to end the moment. Then Paula,  
blinking first, turns away.

INT. PAULA'S BEDROOM - LATER

Paula leans back against the door and lets out a huge sigh  
--not at all sure what to make of all this. Her movement  
dislodges the pen from the memo pad, which drops to the floor.  
As she retrieves the pen, she pauses to look at the items on  
her "To Get" list.

She opens the pen and scribbles something on the pad. She steps back to regard her handiwork, trying it on for size.

ON THE PAD, at the bottom of the list, we see a new item has been added: "Egg nog."

PAULA stares at this addition a moment longer, a strange smile coming to her lips. She taps the pen against her lips thoughtfully.

The screen goes BLACK.