Peace of My Heart

Janis Joplin sets the soundtrack for suicide

December 1, 1997 By Ray Sorgen

I'm sick. I'm actually quite sick, have been for a while now, and am not really getting any better. My intuition tells me-and I listen to my intuition because it's gotten me though most situations in life-that I'm not going to be around too much longer. I suppose I could be wrong, but you don't need a weatherman to know which way the wind blows. I was explaining to a friend recently that I'm dealing with an infection-a resistant strain of tubercular meningitis-that may or may not be treatable; if it's not, it's always fatal. My friend was focused on the possibility that it might be treatable, but I have to prepare myself for the possibility that it's not.

As someone who's struggled all my life to feel that I have some control over my existence, it's been extremely difficult to lose my immune system and be faced with the possibility that any number of horrendous infections could take over and incapacitate my body at any time. But I've already decided that I'm not going to let PML turn me into a raving lunatic who doesn't know his own name. Thrush of the esophagus-so bad you can't talk, eat and certainly not suck dick-can go fuck itself. CMV retinitis will not steal my vision. Nor will multidrug-resistant tuberculosis take me in its slow, excrutiating clutches. I plan to check out a different way.

I see people in my doctor's office who are so sick they can barely stand up, and my heart bleeds for them. But I find that the only human emotion I can feel for them is pit, no matter how hard I try to muster up some other feeling. I don't get this idea some people have that any life is better than no life, and I'm confused by people who will take any toxic drug their doctor prescribes, just so they can stay alive for a few more days or a few more weeks. I know that I do not want to be the object of anyone's pity, no matter how authentically or sincerely it is felt.

So here's the plan, Stan:

My overdose from heroin will not be tragic, shocking, sad, pathetic or any of the other words *The New York Times* uses when it reports on such unseemly matters. It will be the act of an empowered, purposeful human being committed to gaining ultimate control over his life and death. In my sun-drenched sixth-floor apartment, around the corner from where Billie Holiday got arrested for prostitution in 1929 and first used junk and down the street from the lunch counters on 135th Street where her talent was finally noticed, up the block from where Billy Strayhorn wrote some of his most famous pieces and a few blocks from where Johnny Hartman sand, the

scene will be supremely serene.

I'll put on a Janis Joplin CD and begin to feel incredible relief, because soon I will not have to worry about whether I have enough dope or meth or money. I'll wonder how I'm going to cook up so much dope in my beloved old spoon. (*Will it all fit? What if I fucking tip it over? Will I be able to find a goddamn vein? Will I have time to get the needle out? Girl, you know how tacky it is to go out with a bluetip in your arm, Miss Thing!*) I'll remember to take the chain off the door so they don't have to bust it down. And as I slip into my final narcotic dream, I'll remember the hot, tattooed Puerto Rican boys whom I bought drugs from and fell in love with, and who used to flirt with me like mad. I'll remember my trip to a gay bar in Warsaw this past summer, how incredible it was to see dykes and fags resisting and coming to power in a place that would just as well see them dead. I'll look forward to not having to take 49 pills a day ever again or submit to another spinal tap. And I'll feel the rest coming on that my weary old bones, at the age of 28, yearn for.

I'll think of my friends, and it will be tranquil and sacred as the New York City sun reaches the perfect moment when it slants off the buildings of Harlem and everything is right with the world for a minute or two. I'll be out before the CD player moves to the next song ("Tell Mama"), and I will have left the world in the same way I finally, after a life of struggle, managed to live with it: Pretty much in control, without too much fear, and definitely without a single regret.

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