Self-Prescribed Therapy

JC Alick realizes that sometimes a cookie is just a cookie.

December 1, 2009 By Jesse Cameron Alick

It was all sweat and sorrow—and it all went poorly. I'm glad summer is over. This summer, everything I touched exploded in my face. How sick am I of the word "love"? God, free me from love. At least then I might be able to get some work done.

On the last day of summer I received a box of cookies. And those cookies did more to crush my ego than anything that happened in the months before. More than the angry young man who threw a glass of water in my face in May. More than the dude I took home before discovering he had a girlfriend in June. Cookies. It's the little things in life, isn't it?

The friend who sent me the cookies is a man I've been in love with for three years. Ever since I met him (before that even), ever since I heard him say his name on the telephone, I knew I would love him. I loved him hard—and secretly—for years. It all concluded in some pretty awesome hot-tub sex at the end of July, right on my HIV anniversary. It was perfect for that anniversary to be the day something came together. It felt earned, like reaching the end of a journey. Of course, it was followed by a thorough rejection. What can you do? That's just how my summer was going.

I'm the sort of person who can get over anything if you just leave me alone with it. Let me stew, and eventually I'll come to terms. If, that is, you don't decide to do something stupid and send me a box of fucking cookies. I was full of rage, like a Buddhist gone bad.

My roommate tried to talk me off my ledge by saying, "Sometimes a cookie is just a cookie—can't you take an olive branch?" But I saw the cookies for what they were, a consolation prize: "I don't love you; here, have some cookies!" Not an attempt to make peace, but rather self-cherishing: "Pat thyself on thy back, good sir, 'cause you're still the nice guy!" The box of cookies felt like a meteorite in my hand. Like these cookies had nothing to do with my world. And I resented that. They were about someone else's emotions, and I didn't want anything to do with them.

I couldn't believe a friend would do this to me. A friend would know how I'd react. If you've been my friend for any length of time, you know I tend to read signs into everything. But maybe we never really were friends. I'd been worshipping this guy for three years, and now that he wasn't being worshipped anymore, maybe he wanted to go back to what was: "friendship" (a.k.a., a one-way street of love).

I felt what could only be described as glorious loss for what never existed. Loneliness too, a pitiful sort of slump. I gave the cookies to my roommate. He said they were delicious.

I went back to work. People suggest I’m stretching myself too thin, but since HIV my self-prescribed method of therapy has been work. If you can’t stop crying, at least do something productive.

As I march toward the darkening days of winter, I chant mantras to stay focused: “A day without work is like a day without bread.” Lord, tell me something I don’t know. “Do your work, then step back—it’s the only path to serenity.” But I can’t let go. Why can’t I let go? Then, I remember a non-angry Buddhist thought: “Should you desire great tranquility, prepare to sweat white beads.” Fine, then I’ll sweat.

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