



Parkbench Perspectives

By Wayne Visser

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I always imagined that this would be the bench where we would sit and contemplate the world when we were old and grey. There would be no need to say anything. It would be enough that we were together, relaxed in each other's presence, basking in the sun of happy memories, still in love after so many years. I couldn't have been more wrong. I am such a fool. My naïve belief in fairytale endings blinded me. There is no "happily ever after". In real life, this is how it ends: one person is always left alone on the bench, their heart ripped out, their life in shreds.

I wish the initial numbness had lasted. Now all I feel this seething, writhing, bubbling anger. I want to scream, to smash this bench, to set fire to our bed, to hunt him down, to make her sorry for what she did. How could she!? How could sixteen years together mean so little? How could she do it, knowing how much it would hurt me? I wouldn't wish this pain on my worst enemy. So what does that make me? I thought I knew her. I thought we were in love. I thought we would always be together. What planet of self-delusion have I been living on?

I have always said that people fall in love, and they can just as easily fall out of love. And I still believe that. But I never believed it would happen to me, to us. How could I not have seen it coming? How could I have felt that our love was growing deeper, when she was really drifting further and further away? What about my poems? What about all my declarations of love? Did they mean nothing to her? What about the "love forever" that she wrote in all the cards?

I should have listened to my instincts – all those times I felt jealous. It's my own fault, for trusting her. And yet what is a marriage without trust? Ever since she cheated the first time, I have never felt secure. My biggest fear has always been that I would lose her. But I convinced myself that I was just being paranoid. I allowed her reassurances – her lies – to placate me. So many lies! How could she deceive me? Repeatedly! She was living a lie, with me right there. Did I deserve that? It can only mean that she had no respect for me whatsoever. And yet, how is that possible?

And how can I respect her now? She will always be tainted in my eyes. Not only was she prepared to deceive me, to inflict pain knowingly, to plan our demise consciously, but she shows no remorse, no inclination to stop. I feel so sorry for his wife, for his kids, living under the shadow of a lie. When they find out - when, not if, because they *will* find out, sooner or later – the pain will be so much greater. How can she continue this affair? I just don't understand it. How does she sleep at night? Has she no shred of moral fibre in her body? Is this the same person I married?

I know I must let go and move on. But it has all happened so quickly. Two weeks is all it's taken to go from blissfully in love to painfully estranged, from together to apart, from married to separated. How could she throw it all away so easily? What about everything we've shared? Everything we've gone through? Both the good times and the bad. Do those memories mean nothing to her? She has degraded our past by what she's done, and it sickens me. She's made us less. How am I ever going to be able to forgive her?





Of course, she wants to still be friends. She wants to have her cake and eat it. She wants life to go on as normal, just with me out the bedroom, and out the house. She gives up nothing. She continues the affair (after all, she says she loves him and he loves her, despite the fact that he has no plans to leave his wife). She keeps her job. She keeps the house. She keeps her sanity. I, on the other hand, am the loser. I lose the only person I ever loved. And nothing else matters.

What am I meant to do with my life now? I don't care about my career. I don't care about anything. The only thing I care about is love. And I have failed at love. Catastrophically, monumentally, irreversibly failed at love. I thought that love could overcome everything. I thought that love would grow over time. I thought that love was my destiny. Now I don't know what to believe. How can I still believe in love after this? How can I ever trust anyone again after this? How can I dare to hope for anything good again after this?

The fact of the matter is that life is cruel. Suffering is the only thing we can count on, not love. Love is for dreamers, for self-delusional fools. That was me, but no longer. Now I have woken up. Now I know the reality. And the reality is that people don't care. At the end of the day, you are alone. When it comes to choosing between their happiness and yours, there is no contest. People say they care, but their commitment is paper-thin. And their ability to hurt, maim, even destroy those they say they love is all too apparent now.

So much for my wonderful philosophies. As if it really helps to think that this is one of life's lessons, that it will make me a stronger person. As if it is any consolation to tell myself that every tragedy is an opportunity, that there may be a greater love just around the corner. Shallow proverbs like that belong on fridge magnets, not in real life. They have no meaning when your world has fallen apart, when you have been stabbed in the heart, when crying has become as easy as breathing has become difficult.

Of course I will survive. I've never doubted that. I'm not the sort of coward that would kill myself. And of course the pain will subside. And I will get on with my life. We have no choice but to keep breathing, keep putting one foot in front of the other, knowing that the sun will rise, whether we like it or not. But something has died inside of me. There is a dark hole where there used to be love. There is an aching pain where there used to be joy. The passion for life is gone. The faith in dreams is gone. The belief in people is gone.

Yes, I will go on. But I carry the emptiness with me. Poison flows in my veins and lead has settled in my heart. These things will not go away. They may fade. They may become diluted. They may become lighter. But they will always be there. The damage is done. Healing will follow, but scars will remain. I am becoming like this bench. False love has cut me deeply, marked me for life. Others will add their own scratches, and the seasons of time will leave its marks. In the end, I will be alone, just like this weathered bench. And the graffiti gouged onto my heart will tell the same story as so many others before me and so many still to come: loved, betrayed, lost, bled, survived.



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