

BROKEN ATTRACTS
BROKEN

by

Mark Walker

Breathe in, breathe out. Breathe in, breathe out...

So it happened again. I blinked and hours passed.

Was I asleep?

Am I sleeping now?

What is this place?

The world feels so peaceful here, at this time of the night. No drama. No social constructs. Nothing to be worried about. There's just me, my mind, fresh air, trees, and these rails that can—in no time—solve all my problems. All I need to do is wait for the train to no man's world to arrive. But first, I need one answer from you. How could you let this happen? How could you leave me in a place where this seems like the best option? Aren't you supposed to keep me alive? Guess you're not. Guess you're doing what is good for the world, not for me. I'm a villain I know. But all I ever wanted was to make you happy, to make you proud. But no matter how hard I tried, no matter how much I achieved, you always found something bad about it. Something to worry about. How can I make anyone else happy if I can't even make myself happy?

One would think, that if anyone would understand me, it will be me, my own mind. Well, I have quite an opposite experience. I don't understand my mind and she doesn't understand me. She wants to get rid of me, and I want to get rid of her. Unfortunately, we're bound together. For life.

Breathe in. Breathe out...

There's no soul in this world that will understand how much I'm grateful for this fresh air, and stars above me. It is a pleasant change compared to the last few days when my life consisted only of four white walls, the mustiness of an airless room, and the bright screen of a notebook overdriving my dopamine receptors to the point of not feeling anything. It was one of those weeks that comes always after the period when life feels a little too good to be real. After a new high, you always need to find a new low as well. It's a law. It's like a sinus curve, once you reach the top of the period, it's time to enjoy the downfall to rock bottom. I don't know when was the last time I slept or did anything useful. Ev-

ery moment until now just felt the same. I don't even know if my last conversation with Billie was real, or just a daydream.

What were we even talking about? Everything just melts together, at one moment I'm eating dinner in my room, I blink and my dick's in my hand as I'm frying my brain—watching some unholy shit, I blink again and I'm here. I don't know what is real anymore. Am I in a dream?

"Theo!"

What? So am I?

"Theo are you here?"

"Ehm... Yes."

"There you are! Good. I started to think I'll never find you. Sorry that I'm late. I fell asleep."

"Late?"

"Yeah, we were supposed to meet here 30 minutes ago... Everything alright? You look like you got hit by a train."

"I'm fine, I'm just not used to being awake that late in the night."

Of course, I'm not alright. How the fuck could I be alright? I haven't slept in days, I keep myself busy with porn and shitty food and I have no idea how I got here, and why you're here too, Billie. I don't know what is wrong, I don't know if you're real or just a hallucination, and I don't know why the only thing I'm able to say is *I'm fine*.

I'm doing it again, as I always do. Once things in my life start to get bad, I put on a mask. When I'm with someone, on the outside I act just as I always do—and everyone usually falls for that—but on the inside, I'm fighting demons for my own damn life. It's like I put my body and social interactions on autopilot to be able to handle the stuff that is happening inside my head. But by that, I'm slowly dying. It seems like this time, this stuff is starting to leak through the mask into the real world, or that Billie can see through the lies.

"The train should be here in no time."

A train? So am I really here to end it all? But why is Billie here? She is too pure to leave this world like this. She is too useful to the world, she makes it a better place. No, no this is wrong. I can't make this happen.

"Billie, you know you don't have to do this, right?"

"What are you talking about? I've been looking forward to doing this all week."

"Hub?"

"Yeah, since the moment you mentioned the idea of trying train surfing it was all I thought about."

Train surfing? Oh, God. I have some blurry memory of watching this guy riding cargo trains and climbing buildings under construction for hours on end, but I have no clue when I mentioned it to Billie.

It makes sense she wants to do it, she's the true adventurous spirit. I'm a thinker, I prefer to imagine how things would feel. She—on the other hand—tries them first, and then considers if they were a good idea or not. I'm glad she doesn't want to kill herself, she just wants to risk killing herself by an accident...

"You found a great spot, Theo. It's perfect. Right after the sharp turn. The train here will move pretty slow so it will hopefully be easy to hop onto some of its wagons"

"Uh-huh"

Yeah, at least one thing my constantly overthinking brain is good at. Planning things to the smallest details.

"Do you hear it? It's close. I hope it's a cargo one."

"What other train do you think would go this road at this time of the night?"

"You're right... Look. The light."

So it looks like we're really doing that, ok. If I die I die. If I wake up, I wake up. The only thing I care about is to make sure Billie won't get hurt.

"Come, Theo, let's go."

Here we go. One step after another. Now is our time...

jumps on the wagon

"Woooah! We made it!"

"Yeah, let's find ourselves a place where we can sit."

"What? I can barely hear you, Theo."

"I can't speak much louder or I will throw up my vocal cords. JUST GIVE ME THE FLASHLIGHT AND FOLLOW ME."

What an amazing idea my brain produced. Really. What will come next? Jumping off a bridge? Maybe it will be better to slip and fall right between the wheels of a moving train. It would be an accident, there would be no one to blame and nobody would think I did it on purpose. But Billie... No... I can't do this to her...

Looks like we're lucky. This wagon is almost empty. We can sit here and wait until we get near our destination... It's so loud. What a surprise huh? This isn't a place to have a conversation, at least not with another person. All I can do is talk to myself, as I sit in a cargo train, arm over Billie's shoulder. In complete darkness. Hearing only the clangs of a train.

How did I end here? And how, of all the people in this damn world, is Billie the one person here with me? Universe has such a weird sense of humor. If one would try to write a book about our relationship he would probably give up before even finishing it. It wouldn't make sense to him, nor any reader.

We know each other for so long. She's both my best friend and worst enemy. She's the main topic of my prettiest dreams but also the worst nightmares. So many things happened between us and yet there's this one moment that surpasses in its essence all the rest of them. The moment my demons stood still and gave me a little pause. A little moment, a reward for fighting them so strongly, or maybe it was just a trap they prepared for me. They built me a prison cell and I walked straight into it. But I didn't care, because in that cell was her...

We lay together on a couch and watched a movie. I was sitting exactly like I sit now with my hand around her shoulder, her head gently leaning on my body, smelling her snow-white hair.

"I want this moment to never end."

"Me too."

"Theo?"

"Yes?"

"Do you like me?"

I looked her in the eyes. Those two perfect sapphires were at that moment all my world. There was nothing else but those bottomless lakes. I wasn't able to answer that question. It was like I no longer know how to speak. So I did the second-best thing I could think of. I kissed her. At that moment, when my lips touched hers, we became eternal. Her warm red soul hugged my blue one, and at that exact moment, she changed me. From blue, I turned purple like a lilac sky. It was exactly what I needed. A glimpse of hope. A proof that I'm worthy of love. A sign from the Universe that better days are waiting on me. I looked her in the eyes again, and finally, a word came out of my mouth.

"Yes."

That was all I managed to say. She now pressed her body against mine as much as she could, because at that moment even the smallest space between us stretched out for miles ahead.

"Theo, I'm scared."

"Don't be. Everything will be fine."

"After this, things will never be the same."

"You're right, we're as transformative as the Universe itself. The moment we stop changing is the moment we die."

"Theo, please. Don't talk about death. Not now."

"Sorry."

Ah, yes. Every time I speak, things go south. Just shut up and enjoy this moment. She is holding me tight and I'm holding her—and for the next half an hour—we don't speak a word. Those moments were probably the best I had in my life. My head and my body were at peace. There was no conflict, no argument, it was just me, at the moment, lying with a girl I love. But nothing lasts forever, the alarm clock started to ring and I knew I have to leave. I kissed her on her forehead once, and then on the lips. We barely said a word. There was nothing else to say. And in silence, I left.

On the same day, she flew to Sweden. I haven't heard from her for an entire month. When she came back and I saw her for the first time.

I froze. I didn't know what to do, or how to act. All I could think of were other thoughts. No action. At that moment I was once again just a spectator. My body controls were overtaken by an auto-pilot. I hugged her and tried to understand the riddle her facial expression and body language were to me. She felt so distant. I don't know if it was because of her, or because of how my mind works, but at that moment, it just felt like everything needs to stay the same—like that night never happened. I was confused and scared to act, so I proceeded to play this weird game even though I knew that it was not right. After all, I'm not the one who does things. I watch, and I adapt, she was the one doing, initiating. But at this moment, she gave me nothing to adapt to. I always hated this characteristic of mine, but at that moment, I hated it the most. I was too weak to ask how she feels, too weak to do what I want, to kiss her no matter what would happen next. We never mentioned anything, we both played our roles in a game, where we had always been just friends, nothing more. I thought that is what she wants, and I was willing to accept it. That was until one evening, nearly 6 months later, when I could hold no longer, I finally got the courage to ask her about that night.

"What night?"

"In the summer. We were watching a movie, and then, you know..."

"No... I don't."

"What?"

"Theo, I don't know what you're talking about."

"You know what. Forget it. It's probably just the booze combined with sleep deprivation talking..."

It wasn't the booze, nor the sleep deprivation. Until that moment I was so sure this happened. It was so real. So intimate. So beautiful. Is it possible I was hallucinating this all the time? How long have I been struggling with being in this interstate between sleep and wakefulness?

It was this moment that started my last downward spiral. I was finally starting to accept how things are, between me and Bille. I felt there is only one more thing I need to resolve before I will be whole

once again—before I will be able to move and live my life again. But it is those moments—when you're on top, looking for that one last thing, one last fix—you're the most vulnerable. That reaction, that denial of anything happening between us planted a seed of doubt that flourished into the biggest existential crisis I was ever in. Since that moment, my head got a new guest, a new voice, a voice that started to doubt everything that happened in my life.

"THEO. WAKE UP. WE'RE ALMOST THERE."

What? Did I fall asleep? I guess it makes sense. The constant noise of the train was the only thing that was able to override my always-thinking brain, so it could finally realize how tired I was and how much it needed some sleep. The train is slowing, we're probably close to the station. We need to get out of here or else the station guards will for sure beat the shit out of us, or, at least me. This place looks good to jump. I can either choose a soft wet grass or the cold, metal chassis of the wagon. One quick slip and it will all end...

"NOW THEO. JUMP!."

Ok, option number one...

"How the hell were you able to fall asleep in such noise?"

"I don't know, I was probably just tired."

"Don't play with me, there has to be something else."

"There isn't. Did you enjoy the ride?"

"Don't try to change the topic. I won't give up that easily. Theo, what is going on with you?"

She knows. Deep inside she knows.

"What do you mean?"

"You're so weird these days. Sometimes when I speak to you, it feels like you're not even here, or worse, that I'm talking with someone else."

"Wasn't I always weird? Come on, you're overreacting."

"No I'm not. I'm worried about you."

What can I say to her? That since the moment she denied that night ever happening I doubt every single thing that happens in my life? That since she said nothing will be the same and then tried to keep things

exactly the same I didn't know what to do? That every time I see her I remember that night—which hurts—but I'm unable to stop talking to her because I love her too much? That all I ever wanted to do the moment she came back from Sweden was to kiss her but I couldn't do it because I'm too weak? Because I'm nothing more but a spectator. I don't think there's any option left. I have to stop.

"Billie..."

"Theo?"

"I can't do this anymore."

"What?"

"I can play this game with you no more. You know too damn well I have feelings for you, you know too damn well that every time we speak to each other I remember that summer night you deny ever happening. All I want to know is why? Why do you keep hanging out with me? Why do you still act like we're just friends when we obviously aren't? And why I'm unable to say no to all of this, to cut you out of my life when it hurts so much?"

"Theo, I spend time with you because I love you."

"What?"

"Theo when you left me that night, I felt only one thing. Fear. Fear of losing you. And when I left for Sweden, I there realized one thing. I love you. After I came back, I expected a warm welcome, a kiss. But all you did was an awkward hug. And at that moment, something in me died. You made it seem like that night we had was nothing. Like it never happened."

"I don't think I understand."

"Why do you keep assuming people just know things? That they see what is going on inside your head? All this time you seemed like you want to keep it as it was before. You did not act. You were so distant. Theo if you want to have something, you have to go for it. You can't just stand there—spectating the world—hoping people around you will just understand what you want. But that you will only hurt yourself, and not only yourself but also the people who care about you... me, Theo."

"But why, when I then asked you about it, you denied it ever happening?"

"I don't know Theo... It just hurts too much to even think about that mo-

ment. I thought you were playing with me, that you will once again trap me in your love and kindness and then leave me alone with my thoughts. I couldn't risk that again."

So, you were right again. I'm the villain. I was the one that hurt her. I hurt her with my inaction and I was too selfish to see that. I was too occupied with my pain to see hers. This one cold hug, that came instead of the kind warm kiss was what it all started. So now, as poetic as it sounds, I'll end it with a kiss.

Kisses Bille on her lips

"It's my fault, Billie. I was too weak to act, and once I gathered my strength, it was too late, the battle was lost. We were both too deep in the game we thought the other person wants us to play. We were too blind to see that there is no game. No one said a thing. Ego won again. I'm sorry."

"Theo. I don't know what to do."

"Me neither Billie, me neither. But we can try to figure this out together. All we need to do is finally stop playing. Burn those damn masks, and be ourselves. Willing to lose each other in the process."

"I'm scared Theo."

"I know. Only a fool would not be scared at this moment."

"Are you scared Theo?"

"No..."

And here I stand watching the sunrise, next to the girl that ruined my life and I ruined hers. Now I know, and understand all of this. Broken attracts broken, and we are broken, both in our own beautiful and unique way. I never thought of that like this, I always thought of Billie as this perfect being with no faults, but what I forgot is that she's still a human. No human is perfect. As long as you think a person has no flaws of their own, you can't help her. You need to shine a light on the demons to begin the fight.

I'm still not fully convinced I didn't hallucinate all of this and if any of this is even real, but it feels real. And for this moment, the feeling is more than enough for me.

Breathe in, breathe out...

AFTERWORD

This story is a work of fiction. Even though it was inspired by my life, it does not reflect at all how the events really happened. I changed them a lot to fit the narrative and story I wanted to tell. If you're someone who knows me, then don't worry, I'm not struggling as much as Theo does. Life is—for sure—tough, but I can handle it.

And if you're someone who resonates with the topics of this story a little too much, then let me tell you this. Life is a gift, and even though it might not seem right now, there is a way from the darkness. You will get better. And if your demons are too strong for you, then don't be afraid to ask for help.