

Chaz Edlao

*A slow dance with misery*

Nobody likes to be alone. And when someone tells you that they in fact do and that they do not mind being alone, you must realize that in most cases, unless they are genuinely what one may call a hermit or a recluse, they may not know what they are saying, because they have most likely never truly experienced being alone. Everyone wants to be loved. And if someone tells you they do not need love, you must also realize that they may be speaking words that produce a sound but hold no meaning; or this person may in fact not be a person at all, and may not even be a, well, human. People say love is good. It is a happy thing. A picturesque world that is envisioned to be on the opposite end of a bridge where the grass is greener. Just know, this may also be something said by someone who has never experienced love. This brings us to a young couple. Two people who had never crossed the bridge and curled the green grass under their toes. Two people who never thought their slow dance with love would eventually turn into a slow dance with misery.

Jo is how her name is spelt but pronounced like your average name Joe. She is taller than what is deemed average. She has eyes so dark it is hard to see her pupils and can always be seen with some strange concoction of striped or shiny clothing. She was born into a normal family. She grew up without any lack of love. Her parents showered her with attention and for a small family consisting of only her, her parents, and her younger sister, since they lived away from their extended relatives, they always seemed to be having some large family occasion going on, be it dinners, going out, or a simple movie night with a film projected onto a blank wall with their beamer. Jules, even though it may not be looked at as a traditional name for boys, was given this name anyway by his parents, who at the time just recently watched Tarantino's pulp-

fiction. He also wears a strange mix of clothes, trying his best to stand out from the rest, yet sometimes it just turns out to be plain weird. Jules also grew up with a surplus of love, and there was never an absence of someone who knew him or cared about him. Unlike Jo, his family was abnormally large, and it seemed as if everyone was related to him somehow or were tightly tied into the tree. Jules was a quiet person. He did not mind spending time alone, and enjoyed it. At least he thought he did, since he was never truly alone, as everywhere he went, he knew someone. Growing up in a small coastal town in Portland, walled in by an ocean on one side and wilderness on the other, it was difficult for him to get away from it all. Jo on the other hand, did not like to be alone; she grew up in New York, where if she was anywhere away from her small and confined group of family or friends, she felt alone. Although the streets were filled with people zipping back and forth like ants, she felt that if she were to drop dead right then and there in the middle of the street, no one would change their course. She has never really been anywhere without another human nearby.

Like many young people, Jo and Jules finished school, and went on a gap year. Both were scared to leave their confines of what they thought home to be. However, they were both young and eager to leave regardless of the goblins whispering to them. Jules arrived in Lyon first. He didn't speak a word of French and was not by any means a quick learner, embarrassed to even say "merci" thinking he would pronounce it wrong. He started working at a restaurant that seemed to only hire young foreigners with no fear of the repercussions that may come from paying someone under the table. Even though Jules only knew a handful of words in French, he managed to get by in his position behind the counter of the buffet, filling an endless demand for cappuccinos. He took orders by hand signals, and if you were to be walking past on the street you would look into the window to see a boy with a bowl cut practicing what looks like wing-

chun. Jo arrived a month later and started to search for a job. After many turndowns because of the language barrier, and the fact that she didn't even have a right to work in the country, she stumbled upon the same coffee shop that Jules worked at. This may sound coincidental, but one could say that all love stories are. Jules was notified by his boss that there would be another person coming in to learn about what goes on behind the counter at the cafe. "Hi, I'm Jo" she said to him with her high-pitched voice that somehow still manages to shake one's chest. Jules was surprised, expecting to run headfirst into a language barrier. "Hey, I'm Jules. Are you not from France?" he asks, with a shaky voice as wiggly as an overcooked noodle.

"No, I'm from New York."

"Ahh, big city American?" he replies in a witty tone.

In the end, Jo never took up that job after the tryout day. She doesn't enjoy environments that prove to be loud and filled with people. During that short half day shift, they took down each other's phone numbers, something they usually would never do. Why would they? They both came from places where they had enough contact to fulfill them, and not to mention that they were both very shy. They spent a lot of time together and fell into what one would describe as a trans-like state. They were locked into a slow dance that never seemed to end nor get boring. The honeymoon phase. Neither of them had a boyfriend or girlfriend before. This was a new love that didn't relate to or feel anything like the love they got from their parents. It was new, exciting, and maybe even better. A few years later, they were a seasoned couple, and knew everything there was to know about each other, just as well as the average person knows about their bedroom. They decided to stay in Lyon, and had remained there since the day they arrived, still locked in their dance.

Some people say if love is meant to be, it is meant to be. And those who dance in it are only there if love is. However, this is not the case. Jo and Jules began to grow bored. They indeed were in love, but their love was like a candle positioned in a way that if left burning it would turn a house into a pile of ash. Jo and Jules never argued, maybe once or twice in their time together over something that didn't mean much. And everyone around them thought they were the perfect couple. They were something people made movies about, but movies are usually shown in just 2D. Day by day the boredom grew, but they still couldn't imagine a life without each other, and just as they had never had a boyfriend or girlfriend before, they had never had a heartbreak. This feeling of heartbreak and the fear of it always surfaced in their heads. Of course, they never talked about this together or with anyone, unaware that they both shared this feeling. It's a scary thing for them, even scarier than initially grabbing the others hand at the start of the dance. It is so scary that they can't let go. "I love you," is something they keep telling each other over and over, slowly turning into a mere set of words that produce a sound but say nothing.

Jules is constantly imagining a life without her. He spends hours chasing the rabbit down the hole. Many of the pathways seem good, and he sees himself happy in the little scenarios he plays out. He dreams of it, but inside he is still trapped in a dance, in a place where the music never stops playing, but only gets thrown more and more out of tune. He wants to be alone. Jo has a mindset that is in the end the same, except there is another aspect to it. Jo feels like she is missing out, not on job opportunities or anything of the sort, but on other people. She sees random people on the street, zipping by, and imagines what they would be like if she grabbed their hands to dance. She wants something new and feels that she would be happy with it. She wants to be once again as she was before, with Jules, infatuated in a honeymoon phase. However, she is held back, scared of a heartbreak.

Oblivious to what the other was thinking, they both continued dancing the way they believed would keep the other happy, but more importantly, to keep their hearts in one piece. Little did they know, that by continuing to do so, their hearts had already slowly begun to break.

Jo proposes that they move back home to her city, but Jules is against the idea. He had had enough of city life. He begins to realize that the love and attention he got from those in his hometown, the same love he tried to get away from, is something that he missed. He was tired of walking around the streets looking at people he knew nothing about, people that had no care for him. He felt that if he were to drop dead right there on the street, no one would turn their head. "Why not?" asks Jo. "I thought you liked the big city life. I mean, you couldn't stop talking about how much it sucks to live in a tiny town," she says in a strong voice. "I thought so, I thought a lot of things," Jules answers back, pushing more air than sound through his vocal cords. He stumbles out of the flat with little to no emotion in his face, leaving Jo confused. She doesn't bother to follow him, as she knows he'll be back. He heads to the kiosk to pick up a few beers and ends up drinking a few too many. His eyes start to feel bulgy, and he stares at the pavement with a blank mind, something he wasn't used to. At the same time, Jo was at home and opened a few bottles of whatever they had lying around in the cabinets hidden behind the stacks of half-used boxes of pasta, while Jules remains there, outside on the bench in front of a kiosk lit by bright LED lights. Jo heads out to one of their favorite basement-style jam rooms, a place that is constantly filled with young people listening to jazzy rock. Her mind continues to think about what could be and is far from empty. She makes her way through the crowd. "Hi, I'm Quentin." She was shocked and didn't expect to hear any English in the room. "Would you like to dance?"