

WAITING

Written by

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FADE IN:

INT. HOSPITAL WAITING ROOM - DAY

The large room is dimly lit, intentionally so. The intent is to put the people sitting here, waiting, at ease. At this moment, only one person sits in the room. He is decidedly not at ease.

NATE (30s) sits with his elbows propped on his knees, which in turn holds up his head. One foot bounces repeatedly which causes his whole body to shake in kind.

He sits in silence, bouncing on his leg for a while. A minute or more. Only the ambient sounds of the hospital are heard.

Eventually, GWEN (30s) enters. She carries a small purse on her shoulder. She looks around the room and eventually spots Nate. He doesn't see her, but she makes her way over and takes a seat next to him.

GWEN

You won't believe this, but I was sitting in my morning meeting when I get this text: "I'm in the waiting room. I'm not okay. I need a hit of the good stuff." I was going to completely ignore it. I mean, I don't usually answer text messages like that. You know? But then I saw it was from my dear friend Nate. So, I decide that I have to bail on my meeting and rush to the hospital. And...well, here I am. Have you seen my friend?

Nate finally looks up at Gwen, and holds the moment for a beat.

NATE

Did you bring the Coke?

Gwen scowls at her friend. Without taking her eyes off of him, she reaches into her purse. She feels around inside of it for a while, then retrieves a can of Coke. She hands it to Nate in mock annoyance. He smiles.

GWEN

The classic formula. Not cut with that aspartame or stevia shit. Go easy on that stuff okay?

He puts the can down without opening it. Gwen retrieves a Diet Coke, pops the tab and takes a swig.

NATE

I can quit whenever I want.

GWEN

Sure you can.

They smile at each other, enjoying the joke.

NATE

(deep sigh)

Thanks for coming, Gwen. I didn't know who else to call.

GWEN

It was a boring meeting.

They sit in silence for a moment. Nate looks back toward the ground. Gwen gives him space.

She takes another drink from her soda and puts the can down. Nate picks his up, still doesn't open it, but rolls it around in his hand for a bit.

GWEN (CONT'D)

Have there been any updates-?

NATE

(interrupting)

Remember our first date?

The sudden change in topic throws Gwen off.

GWEN

Umm. I mean, how could I forget? You were literally the worst first date I've ever had.

NATE

God it was awkward.

GWEN

You tried so hard to impress me.

NATE

I got in my head. "What if I say the wrong thing?" Or "What if I say the right thing, but don't have a good follow up?" I don't know what the hell I was trying to do.

GWEN

I felt bad for you. Full confession, I also wanted to run in any random direction screaming.

NATE

Why you didn't I will never know.

GWEN

It was kind of cute. Like how a train wreck filled with animal plushies would be cute...in a horrible way.

NATE

That's an image.

GWEN

(remembering)

Oh god, and then you actually asked me for a performance review!

NATE

That's not fair. I asked if you thought I was "date material."

Gwen looks directly at Nate. She has a suspicious look on her face.

GWEN

What are you getting at?

He pauses as his gaze drifts in the direction of the exit of the waiting room. He fidgets with his can of Coke.

NATE

You told me the truth.

GWEN

You asked.

NATE

And it changed everything.

GWEN

Knowing that you didn't have a chance in hell with me?

NATE

It broke the tension. I didn't have to worry about anything. I could just be myself. The night was pretty great after that.

GWEN

It was. "Yourself" is a way more interesting guy than whoever it was you were trying to be at the beginning of the night.

(beat)

Things might have been different if I had met YOU first.

Nate puts the can down again.

NATE

We would never have been a good couple.

Gwen laughs aloud; genuinely, not mockingly.

GWEN

That's an understatement.

NATE

I'm glad I fucked up so bad. It made us better friends, and I like having you in my life.

GWEN

Same.

NATE

I feel like I can tell you anything. That you'll always tell me the truth.

The weight of the words hangs in the air, and Gwen doesn't respond right away.

GWEN

Thanks, Nate.

The momentum of the story stalls and the two friends' gazes drift forward, neither of them saying anything. The silence lingers.

NATE

I'm sorry for calling. You didn't have to come. I was just panicking. I didn't actually need you to bring me a Coke.

GWEN

It's really okay. And I mean, I owe you one.

Nate looks at Gwen, questioningly.

NATE

You don't owe me anything.

GWEN

Sure I do. Remember when Clara left me?

NATE

Yeah. You told me you were afraid to go home.

GWEN

So we went to the Brewhouse.

NATE

It was the Parlor.

GWEN

It doesn't matter. Wherever it was, we stayed until they forced us out.

NATE

(chuckling)

They really didn't want us to be there anymore.

Gwen chuckles as well, remembering.

GWEN

God, were we so drunk.

NATE

Oh, I remember. I think I'm still hungover from that.

GWEN

I still didn't want to go home though.

Nate holds an understanding smile, reliving the memory.

GWEN (CONT'D)

So we walked to the square, sat on a bench and just talked.

NATE

It was a good conversation. I mean, we were there until the sun came up.

GWEN

It was the best sunrise I'd ever seen. You got me through that.

(MORE)

GWEN (CONT'D)

(beat)

I'll always be there for you.

NATE

Gwen...

She stops him from saying anything.

GWEN

It's okay. Honest.

Nate fidgets with the unopen can some more. He takes a deep breath.

GWEN (CONT'D)

Can you tell me what's really going on?

He doesn't respond right away, instead fixing his gaze on a spot on the carpet at his feet, still rolling the can around in his hands.

NATE

After our date. I met Amber a couple of months later, didn't I?

Bringing up Amber's name triggers something in Gwen. Her posture closes, she leans back slightly, the pleasant expression on her face gives way to stern neutrality.

GWEN

Couldn't have been much longer. We were JUST becoming friends, and all of a sudden you start blowing me up, asking for dating advice. I think that's the point when I realized I was your only female friend.

NATE

You still are...

GWEN

I'm aware.

NATE

You're also one of my best friends.

GWEN

One of...?

Nate smiles. Gwen smiles back and punches him in the arm. He lets out a playful exclamation of pain and rubs his shoulder.

GWEN (CONT'D)
Oh, grow up.

Nate looks at Gwen seriously. The brief smile fades from Gwen's face.

NATE
I know you and Amber haven't
always...gotten along.

GWEN
You're the master of
understatements today.

NATE
I mean, I'm aware of her jealousy
stuff, and I know you can't forgive
her after-

GWEN
Nate, please. We don't have to talk
about this.

NATE
-after...that Thanksgiving.

Gwen catches her breath and grits her teeth.

NATE (CONT'D)
But, did you ever like her?

Gwen forces a deep breath through her tightly closed lips.
Her cheeks puff up dramatically.

GWEN
No.

NATE
How long did it take you to know?

GWEN
Basically immediately. She's not
subtle.

Nate considers the statement.

NATE
I never knew.

GWEN
It's not exactly a topic I'm
rushing to talk about.

Nate closes his eyes and considers his next words before speaking.

NATE

I wish you had told me.

GWEN

Would it have changed anything?

NATE

No. I guess not.

GWEN

You mean so much to me, Nate. Seriously. And it kills me to see the way she treats you. But for a while, early on, you seemed happy enough, I guess. It really wasn't my place-

NATE

(interrupting)

We've been having trouble. We fight. Constantly. Until this whole situation with the fibroid...I was sleeping on the couch.

GWEN

You've been surprisingly closed-lipped recently, but yeah, I picked up on it. You haven't seemed happy in a while.

(beat)

I miss the guy I met on the second half of that date.

NATE

We've been trying to work through it, but...I don't know...

GWEN

Nate, it's really none of my business. If you don't want to talk about it...

More silence. The tension of the things unsaid has gotten heavy.

Nate picks up the can of Coke again, and rolls it back and forth in his hands idly before putting it down. He looks off to the side toward the exit of the waiting room.

NATE

Amber's been in surgery for over two hours. Before, her doctor said they were going to try and remove the fibroid laparoscopically. She said that if they could do it that way, the surgery would be over in less than an hour.

GWEN

I guess they had to go in through her...

NATE

It's the only way to get to her uterus otherwise.

GWEN

I'm sorry, Nate. I know how scary this has to be.

NATE

I...

He can't finish his thought. Tears start to roll down his cheeks. Only a couple at first, but within a few seconds, he's sobbing. Gwen leans in, puts her arm around his shoulder and holds him.

GWEN

She's going to be okay, Nate. I promise.

NATE

You don't understand.

Nate sits up straight, and Gwen pulls her arms back to listen to her friend.

GWEN

What don't I understand?

NATE

I...I'm not crying because I'm worried about whether she'll come through this or not.

The words get caught in his throat. He locks eyes with Gwen and holds her gaze.

NATE (CONT'D)

I'm crying, because I don't think I care.

Nate crumples over and sobs into his lap. The tears come heavy and fast. His shoulders throb as he cries. Gwen sits back and let's him have his release. Her expression is completely sympathetic. She has no judgement.

His sobbing slows, and after a beat comes to a stop. Nate sits up slowly, wiping tears from his eyes.

NATE (CONT'D)

Do you hate me?

GWEN

Why would I hate you?

NATE

It's such an awful thing to think, and somehow I feel like saying it out loud makes it a thousand times worse.

GWEN

(beat)

You know, the biggest mistake you made on that HORRIBLE date was getting in your head and overthinking everything.

He looks into Gwen's eyes, curious.

GWEN (CONT'D)

You're doing it again.

Nate lets out a long sigh as he continues to look at his friend.

GWEN (CONT'D)

I don't know what's going on between you and Amber, but I do know you. And for you to feel like this means that you're hurting. Deeply. Nate, it's your marriage. I can't tell you what to do with it.

Nate fiddles with the can some more.

GWEN (CONT'D)

When did you know?

NATE

A while, I guess. Since-

He has to take a breath before he makes his admission.

NATE (CONT'D)
Well, since Thanksgiving.

GWEN
What, like last week?

NATE
No. Not last week. Since...that
Thanksgiving.

GWEN
(surprised)
That was over a year ago, Nate.

He nods, but doesn't offer any more words.

GWEN (CONT'D)
That's a long time to hold on to
something like this.

NATE
I feel so desperate. I keep asking
myself these questions about what I
should do, and the answers scare
me.

He puts his head in his hands, and the tears come again. Gwen
rubs his back kindly, but definitely not romantically.

GWEN
I bet they do. But that doesn't
make you a bad person. I know you
don't want Amber to die.

He lifts his head again and sits back.

NATE
I don't.

GWEN
So I think you should let yourself
feel what you're going to feel.

Nate continues to wipe tears from his eyes as he nods in
agreement. He takes another long deep sigh. He closes his
eyes. When he opens them again, he's made a decision.

NATE
Gwen, I want to divorce my wife.

GWEN
(softly)
Okay.

The two friends sit together and let the words hang in the air.

GWEN (CONT'D)
How do you feel?

Nate doesn't answer right away. He takes several slow deep breaths.

NATE
Scared.
(beat)
But relieved. It's the first time I've actually said it. Jesus, I can't believe I'm admitting this while Amber is still in surgery.

GWEN
Things rarely happen when they're supposed to, do they?

More reality settles in as Nate comes to terms with his feelings.

NATE
Shit. Regardless of what happens next, I need to make sure Amber is okay. That's priority number one.

GWEN
But then...

NATE
But then I have to have a really hard conversation.

Gwen nods, but let's Nate sit in the moment.

NATE (CONT'D)
Gwen...thank you.
(beat)
You know, I take it back. You're not one of my best friends.

GWEN
Choose your next words very carefully.

NATE
(chuckle)
You ARE my best friend.

GWEN

Good choice. But fuck, Nate. That was so cheesy.

Gwen and Nate smile at each other and embrace warmly. It's not a romantic hug. It's one of deep compassion and mutual understanding. It's a shared moment that means far more than either of them have words to express. It lasts for as long as it needs to.

When they finally pull away from each other, Gwen reaches over and grabs Nate's unopened Coke. She hands it to him.

GWEN (CONT'D)

Drink your Coke. I drove all the way down here so you could get high.

Nate accepts it and pops the top. The prolonged jostling of the can causes it to explode in brown foam. Coke goes everywhere. Nate is soaked. Gwen laughs hysterically.

GWEN (CONT'D)

Serves you right for that sappy comment.

Nate, shocked by the sudden eruption, takes a moment to recover. As he takes in his soaked clothes he laughs too.

FADE TO BLACK.