

ONE DAY

He looks directly into my eyes, his smile wide and generous as he confesses to telling his boys and his family how dope it is that his girl is an artist. A beam of bright light radiates from his pores, a light only God could see, and I know he really loves me.

He sits with me as I paint. We talk, we laugh. Sometimes I can't because I have to focus. He, in turn, becomes quiet, watching. Some days, I ask him to leave because I am not ready to let him observe my process, my techniques - it is too early to reveal all of my secrets.

He returns, attempting to decipher the lines, marks and splatters in my paintings, questioning what they might or must mean. I smile and say, "Something like that." He is patient, then asks why we haven't gotten busy on my studio sofa. I playfully yet sternly remind him, "This isn't where I fuck, it's where I create."

In the evenings, we dance naked with the lights off, then lay together taking turns reading Khalil Gibran, the bible and self-help books aloud. While philosophizing and signifying, we wax poetic and I express a deep need to use our poetic musings as titles for my next paintings. He laughs, giving me permission.

Sometimes while driving around the city, I ask him to pull over so I can gather the tumble weaves (abandoned tendrils, tufts and wefts of hair) I find on the sidewalk. He waits patiently saying, "Do you," then wonders aloud what I will do with the hair now stuffed in a plastic baggie clutched triumphantly in my hand. "Where do you get these ideas?" he asks, later he points to random inanimate objects in the street, suggesting I may need or want them for my work. I don't.

Many moons pass, he attends all of my openings and now peppers his conversations about art with words like juxtaposition, value and investigate. He frequently tells me I inspire him as he digs deeper into discovering his authentic creative expression.

We become preoccupied in our lives, only a week has passed, and yet I miss him. I surprise him with a knock at his door. It is the first time he doesn't invite me in, he is showering. As he shuts the door and I turn to leave, I spy upon his desk a teddy bear snuggling a heart - I did not give him this gift.

He looks directly into my eyes, his smile weak and disingenuous as he confesses to being with another woman. He rambles off odd facts as evidence the stars have aligned to bless their union: they have the same middle initial and her mother has the same birthday as me. I remind him that *our* middle and last initials are the same, and *we* have the same number of letters in our full names. He acknowledges these truths while believing that one day I'd realize he was not creative enough for me.