

From A Man of Ideas and Other Stories

With

At age thirty, Daryl knew that his marriage was the best thing that ever happened to him. At age forty, he felt the same about his divorce. Then he started feeling low, a narcissist who grew to loathe looking in the mirror. He met Lydia in a coed bathing facility with two stalls and one bar of soap. Lydia fell asleep in the shower and woke up to find herself clean. "God," she said after realizing how carefully he had looked after her, "you take really safe showers."

But other than that, Daryl was full of whimsy or something like it. He delivered odd bits of information: "You know, the Chinese Han dynasty had cell phone technology, but the emperor suppressed it." He also asked questions: "Who was hotter, Don Juan or Casanova?"

"You and you and you," she told him, hushing his lips with one strong forefinger. "Sin at leisure," she said afterwards; "repent in haste." She concocted other sayings, many about him, such as "It's hard to put your best foot forward when you can't even get it in the door" and "He who does not work can have no vacation." Daryl had been on disability since the Reagan administration. When asked about employment, he claimed he didn't want to increase the amount of pain in this world.

But she was preternaturally alert, sensing when the moment had passed even before it arrived. She never thought what she had with Daryl would last. One day when the sky was the color of paranoia, she was going to break up with him, but she could hear the unrequited slap of the rope against a flagpole. She could suddenly see life from perambulator to wheelchair. And she couldn't do without.

That old what-iffier, sniffing around the dank clouds of our possibilities. That inveterate duo, love and lack.