

SECOND-HAND HEART

Written by

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EXT. CEMETERY - DAY

A peaceful, sunny afternoon occasionally broken by wistful clouds casting shadows. PAUL stands solemnly before a grave marker, his eyes open, yet focused on something other than the surroundings.

MICHAEL walks softly toward him.

PAUL  
How'd you find me?

MICHAEL  
I followed you.

PAUL  
So, you're a stalker now.

MICHAEL  
First offense.

PAUL  
Second.

MICHAEL  
That doesn't count. That was  
'pursuing'. And anyway, you wanted  
to get caught.  
This is him?

PAUL  
Her.

MICHAEL  
(reading the marker)  
Vanessa Berger. Beloved wife and  
mother. "And Death Shall Have No  
Dominion."  
Who was she?

INT. HOSPITAL ADMINISTRATION STATION - DAY

A distraught ROBERT is signing forms for the release of his wife's body.

HOSPITAL ADMINISTRATOR  
...and here. One more here. And  
this is for your wife's...

ROBERT  
Vanessa. Her name is Vanessa.

HOSPITAL ADMINISTRATOR

I'm sorry, Mr. Berger.  
...for Vanessa's wish that her  
identity be made available to the  
recipients.  
And that's it. Again, I am deeply  
sorry for your loss, but please  
know that her choice to donate has  
saved lives tonight. It is a  
selfless and heroic act.

ROBERT

That's my babe.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

A younger but sicklier Paul stands at the counter and looks  
down at three prescription bottles. His phone chirps.

PAUL

Hello. Yes, this is Paul. Yes. Oh  
my God! Yes. Yes, four hours ago, I  
was just about to take my last for  
the night. Okay. No, I wasn't  
hungry. Yes, of course. No, that's  
fine I can get a ride. Thank you,  
thank you.

The call ends and Paul stares at his phone in wonder. He  
presses a speed dial number. After three interminable rings,  
his Mother answers.

PAUL (CONT'D)

Mom. Yeah, I know it's late. No,  
I'm fine. Yes, I took them. Mom.  
Mom. Mom!  
They found one.

EXT. CEMETERY - DAY (PRESENT)

PAUL

What are you doing here?

MICHAEL

You are such a bastard. I fucking  
love you, and you keep this, this,  
from me.

PAUL

It's not about you.

MICHAEL

The hell it's not. She's why you're here, I mean really here. As in alive. For me, to love, and cuddle, and to make fucking blueberry waffles.

PAUL

I don't like your waffles.

MICHAEL

And so another lie. You keep these visits from me, making up some lame stories about, whatever. And now I find out you don't like my waffles. You could've told me. About her. About this.

PAUL

It's mine. For me.

MICHAEL

And I wouldn't have come. You can have your time with...Vanessa. I get it. But you lied, and I knew you were lying, but I didn't know about what.

PAUL

She was a poet.

MICHAEL

What?

PAUL

A poet. She'd just finished a reading...

EXT. STREET - NIGHT (MONTAGE)

PAUL (V.O.)

...at a bookstore.

VANESSA in crosswalk waving to friends across the street.

PAUL (V.O.)

Some woman out with friends and a few drinks. Just on her way home.

Headlights of swerving car.

PAUL (V.O.)  
Left her lying in the street. Took  
off. Said later that she panicked.

Vanessa crumpled in the street.

PAUL (V.O.)  
They published her last collection  
of poetry after the Memorial. "No  
Dominion".

EXT. CEMETERY - DAY

MICHAEL  
Like what's written there.

PAUL  
Dylan Thomas. And Death Shall Have  
No Dominion. Bob Dylan took his  
name from him.

MICHAEL  
What does that have to do...Paul,  
what do want me to do?

PAUL  
I don't know.

MICHAEL  
Okay then.  
I'm leaving.

Michael waits for some response. Paul kneels, touches the  
grave, and stays in that position.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)  
I said, I'm leaving.

PAUL  
I'm not. Not right away.

MICHAEL  
Okay. I'm staying.

PAUL  
(standing)  
As you wish.

MICHAEL  
You're an ass. You know that right?  
You're breaking my heart, and  
you're quoting the Dread Pirate  
Roberts.

PAUL

He died.

MICHAEL

But then he lived.

PAUL

At the end of the book, it's not nearly as certain.

Michael takes Paul's hand.

MICHAEL

He lived. You lived.  
I get that you need to come here sometimes. But I think it's been more lately, hasn't it.

PAUL

Some days are important.  
January fifteenth.

MICHAEL

The night we met.

PAUL

March twenty-second.

MICHAEL

We said 'I love you'.

PAUL

April third.

MICHAEL

(through a broad smile)  
And fourth.

PAUL

(soft chuckle)  
And fourth.  
October third.

MICHAEL

I don't...

Michael follows Paul's look toward the gravestone.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

Oh, her.

PAUL

Vanessa.

MICHAEL

Vanessa. It's been six years.

PAUL

My other birthday.

MICHAEL

So, we started dating when you were three. There's a word for that. Wait. Today's the third. Six years today. You've never mentioned the date. Never made a deal out of it. Hell, I didn't even know.

PAUL

You weren't a part of that.

MICHAEL

It's always this private thing with you. The sickness, the operation, the meds. That scar down your chest.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

Paul and Michael lie post-coital in bed. Michael traces the scar's outline with his finger. Paul looks to the ceiling.

MICHAEL (V.O.)

Ugly as hell, but beautiful at the same time. It's so much of you, but you never let me in. You never give it up.

EXT. CEMETERY - DAY

PAUL

It's not mine to give.

MICHAEL

That's just bullshit, Paul.

PAUL

She gave me life, Michael. She's kept me alive. She's constant. Sometimes, when I remember to, I just listen to it beating. The rhythm, it changes. It's like a poem where the meter evolves. And sometimes, here, with her, she whispers to me.

Vanessa appears beside Paul.

PAUL AND VANESSA

Time falls between  
Two bodies bearing witness;  
The pull, the fold of aching joy.

All movement derived  
From a singular kiss;  
An act of will, or tumbling die,

Is bent to separation  
And the pale, flat calm.

Time lies within  
The certainty of solid;  
Careless in purpose, or the pain of  
its touch.

MICHAEL

Jesus, Paul. That's depressing.  
Beautiful, but shit, man. Don't  
read anymore of that stuff. It'll  
kill you.

PAUL

No, Michael. You killed me.

MICHAEL

What? Wait. What are you saying?

PAUL

You fucked somebody with Hep C,  
Michael. It's done. The meds aren't  
helping. The infection, it's in  
my...her heart. There won't be  
another.

Vanessa leaves Paul's side and fades away.

MICHAEL

I. I. Paul. Oh, God no. Sweetie.  
What can I do?

PAUL

Nothing. Well, you could help Mom  
and Dad with the funeral.

MICHAEL

No. I mean, we can fix this. I can  
fix this.

PAUL

Go home Michael. I'll be there in a little while. Just go home.

Michael turns to leave.

PAUL (CONT'D)

Michael.

Paul takes Michael's hand and pulls him into an embrace. He holds him as he would a lifeline.

PAUL (CONT'D)

Don't forget her. What she gave us.

INT. LIVING ROOM - TWILIGHT

Michael sits sleeping on the couch. The Collected Works of Dylan Thomas lies in his lap.

EXT. CEMETERY - TWILIGHT

A gravemarker stands a short distance from Vanessa's. It's engraving reads "Paul Bannister - Here Rests a Poet's Heart".

FADE TO BLACK.