

A Perpetual Lover

Category: Chronic Pain

written by Kathleen Bourque | November 24, 2025

My pain is a cruel and jealous lover. It dictates my days and dominates my nights. It sulks and whines when it feels ignored. It consumes me.

I bargain with it. "Just give me one night, one night to sleep without you, and you can have me tomorrow." Pain acquiesces. I nestle myself in a barricade of pillows and heated herbal packs that soothe my twisted limbs and drift gratefully off to sleep, only to have Pain invade my dreams. I cry out, though the torture is phantom. I awake, exhausted, to find Pain perched by my bedside, gleefully prepared to exact my promise.

At times, Pain sets me free. I head to the tidal river's edge and lower myself gingerly into my awaiting kayak. As the reeds gently graze the old wooden hull they whisper "Welcome back," and I am released into my beloved waters of Maine, to where the Mousam River meets the sea. I go in search of the herons, ospreys, eagles, and seals that call this marsh home. Hours later, paddling back, I see Pain lurking on the shore. "Where have you been? How could you leave me?" it demands. I disembark and it punishes me, grasping me in its vicious clasp.

When it's at its cruelest, when it digs its talons deeply into my flesh and soul, Pain seduces me with visions of release. "Come," Pain says, "we can go together." I allow Pain to lead me to the bathroom cabinet and push aside the Band Aids and the sea salt soap and the innocuous bottles of Tylenol and stool softener and reach into the back for the hidden vial that reads "Take 1-3 tablets as needed for pain." I dispense the contents into my open palm, while Pain smirks at my cowardice.

Staring at the pills, I nearly succumb to the sweet, addicting promise of relief. But I know that if I escape Pain I risk surrendering all else, too. In blurring the edges of pain, the pills will also dull the beautiful and colorful margins of life. It is not a tradeoff I am willing to make. I pour the pills back into the vial, screw the cap back on, return it to its hiding place, and retreat to Pain's embrace.

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