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Losing Home

by [JackiejLH](#)

Summary

Why applying Spinoza's philosophies to relationships is never a good idea.

Notes

This story is written with the permission of the wonderful Mina de Malfois. All characters are her creation; I'm just messing with their heads a little.

Nancy's been getting too comfortable lately, and it worries her, nagging at her subconscious near-constantly. So when someone she hasn't talked to in almost three years emails her out of the blue with information about a new business venture, she only hesitates for a moment.

When she leaves, Judy is mad (which Nancy doesn't feel too badly about, really), and hurt (which she kind of regrets). But as usual, Judy's initial response to pain is a mix of bitter sarcasm and quiet anger, both of which are somewhat less than endearing, and so Nancy *almost* manages to ignore the guilt as she packs her things and disappears without much of an explanation beyond, "I'm going away for a while," and, "I'll email you," and a very quiet, "I'm sorry," spoken after Judy's already left the room. A pang of conscience causes her to tell Mina where she's headed so that Judy doesn't worry, but she's reluctant to do even that. The next day she boards a plane to New York, and then another one that has too many layovers along the

way, but it gets her to Australia as quickly as possible, and so that's just fine.

She tells herself it will be better for both of them if she's somewhere else for a bit; it'll give time enough for everything to go back to being as normal as Nancy's life ever gets. She's fairly certain Judy understands all of this, too, somewhere behind the anger. She always has in the past. They've been here before, after all, and they'll probably be here again someday, and Nancy acknowledges that for the most part, that's her fault. But every time she goes back, Judy lets her into her home, and into her bed. Nancy's key always fits the lock, the things she's left behind over the years are waiting right where she last left them, the third shelf in the cupboard to the left of the sink is still stocked full of her favorite cookies, and within days Judy has rearranged her schedule and her life to include space for another person, so Nancy can't bring herself to feel solely to blame.

But still, she's always the one to go away and to come back, and Judy never chases after her; it's like an unspoken rule. Returning to Judy is like going home; home to a quiet life and a daily routine and to someone who still loves her even though she can't figure out why. And maybe that—along with the key and the cookies and the millions of other little things that tell her that she could belong there if only she'd stop running away—is why Nancy never stays.

Everything she needs to attend to in Australia is wrapped up in a day or so, and she knows she should be heading back to the States, but all she has to look forward to when she does return is a big empty house that's never really been much of a home because she's hardly ever there, and a car that will just end up driving her back to Judy's doorstep sooner or later. So she extends her stay at the hotel and spends the next few days pointedly avoiding making plane reservations, and all is well until she comes in late—or rather, very early—and notices that the light nearest the door is turned off.

She knows that she left that light on when she went out the night before, fully intending to be back well before daylight. That plan had fallen apart when faced with copious amounts of alcohol and a pretty young girl with red hair and freckles across her nose and a cute but slightly irritating giggle, the exact opposite of the person she'd been trying to forget about if only for just a little while, and when she wanders back into her hotel room it's nearly six in the morning. And the light is off... which isn't right because housekeeping wouldn't have been in so early, and no one else has a key to the room.

She frowns and enters the room cautiously, but doesn't see anything else out of the ordinary until she walks around the corner to find Judy sitting on the couch, her head propped up on an uncomfortable-looking throw pillow, fast asleep. Nancy's frown melts into a sheepish grin—her best and most effective defense against Judy's anger—as she turns on the light and Judy opens her eyes.

Judy doesn't look mad, though, just tired, and like there's something weighing heavily on her mind. Her hair is tangled on just one side of her head, her cheek is red from the imprint of the pillow on her skin, and her

glasses are a little crooked, and Nancy thinks she looks impossibly beautiful in that way that Judy always does.

For a moment, neither of them looks away or even so much as moves, and then Nancy finally breaks the silence by saying, "You could have slept in the bed." She notices that Judy hasn't even removed her shoes, and there's a small suitcase leaning against the wall, still packed.

"I was waiting up for you," Judy explains, and then glances at the clock across the room and frowns. "Well, trying to, anyway." Standing up stiffly, she glares at the couch and sighs. Without another word, she disappears into the bathroom.

Not even remotely sure what's going on, and hovering somewhere between still-a-little-drunk and mildly-hung-over, Nancy finally decides on just leaning back against the wall and waiting, her gaze settling on the suitcase. For some reason its very presence is unsettling, and Nancy's not sure why.

When Judy emerges from the bathroom a few moments later, her clothes look slightly less rumpled and her hair has been coaxed back into perfection, and she looks more like she's coming home from work than like she's just spent the night on a couch. And suddenly it occurs to Nancy just why the suitcase is bothering her: the first thing Judy always does upon arriving at a hotel is unpack, even if she's only staying for a single night. It's a ritual that never varies—Nancy's certainly been in enough hotel rooms with her to know—and the packed bag, not to mention the shoes still on her feet, mean that Judy traveled to the other side of the globe on what appears to have been a mere whim without any intention of actually spending time there. And that's just not the Judith Silverman way of doing things.

Nancy thinks, *You shouldn't be here*, and, *How did you even know where to find me?* but settles for frowning at the locked door and asking, "How'd you get in here?"

"I have my ways," Judy answers, and laughs half-heartedly, inclining her head towards Nancy, "and I learned from the best..." Then, as if hearing the unspoken question hanging in the air, she continues, more soberly, "I had to see you."

"So badly that you flew halfway around the world to do it?"

"Apparently." The dry tone with which she says this is just so very *Judy* that Nancy almost smiles in spite of herself. "Though I suppose I should have called first," she adds, a hint of accusation in her voice.

Nancy's gaze wanders back to the suitcase. "Maybe," she says quietly. Judy doesn't actually ask where she was all night, and she's not about to volunteer the information, so there's silence for another moment before her curiosity gets the better of her and she blurts out, "Judy, what's going on?"

Judy tucks her hair behind her ears. It's something she only does in uncomfortable situations, as if she doesn't want anything, even her hair, to get in the way or distract her; Nancy's not even sure she realizes she's doing it. Then she answers, "I have to know what it is I'm waiting for," and her arms fold protectively across her chest—another thing she only does during

these sorts of moments—as she looks up hesitantly to meet Nancy's eyes. She doesn't need to explain further, really, but she does anyway.

"We've been doing this for almost fifteen years, Nancy," she says, sounding so sad that it's heartbreaking, and suddenly the guilt is back full force. Her voice lowers to almost a whisper as she adds, "I don't know if I can, anymore."

They probably should have had this conversation years ago, Nancy thinks, but she knows they never have because neither of them really wants to be having it even now; it'll mean the end of something, no matter what is said or what decisions are made. Oh, they've gone their separate ways before, and Nancy knows that it was usually because of something she did—and more often than she likes to admit, the someone else she did it with. But each time they've always fallen back into this odd relationship, once the anger has faded, and she's never once promised it wouldn't happen again. Judy's never asked her to do so, either—maybe because she knew it would be a lie anyway.

Judy watches her expectantly, waiting for Nancy to say something, anything, but there's only silence, so she finally gets to the point of this whole thing. "I need to know if you're ever going to stop leaving."

"I don't know," Nancy says, fully aware this makes it sound like she's avoiding the question, but it's the most honest thing she can come up with that she's willing to say out loud. "I don't really have an answer to that."

But the tone of her voice and the expression on her face say differently, she supposes, because Judy just gives her a sad smile and answers, "Yes, you do." And without another word, she is turning to pick up her suitcase and go. A sudden panic grips Nancy and she impulsively reaches out to grab Judy's arm and pull her closer, kissing her gently, never letting go or loosening her grip.

Judy lets her, for a moment, and Nancy thinks maybe she won't go after all. But then she's pulling away, just enough to break the kiss, and Nancy can see tears in her eyes. And suddenly Judy is hugging her so tightly it almost hurts, her head buried into her shoulder, and they stand that way for a few moments, Nancy trying not to think about the fact that even now Judy can probably smell some other woman's perfume on her clothes and see the small crescent-shaped marks left by fingernails cutting into the skin at the curve of her neck.

Maybe she notices, and maybe she doesn't; Judy doesn't say anything. But then Nancy never really expected her to, anyway.

"I do love you," Nancy says quietly.

"Sometimes love isn't enough," Judy replies, stepping away and wiping tears from her face with a shaking hand. She picks up her suitcase and turns to go, pausing with her hand on the doorknob long enough to say, "Email me when you get home, so I know you've gotten back safely?"

"Okay," Nancy says softly. This is just all wrong and not the way it's supposed to go. She considers suggesting that they both get some sleep—

she'll even take the couch, or get herself a different room—and talk more about it when they're rested and calmer and when she's had time to think of the right things to say. The outcome won't change, though, because she won't change—she's not even sure she could if she wanted to—and maybe this is better because she can't bear the thought of hurting Judy any more by trying to continue this.

So she just watches, feeling helpless, as Judy steps out into the hall. And as the door clicks quietly closed, she whispers, "I'm sorry," trying not to wonder if actually saying it to Judy for once would have made any difference.

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