



Bob Dylan

"Don't Think Twice, it's All Right"

The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan

05/1963

Columbia

On "Don't Think Twice, it's All Right" by Bob Dylan

Nora Seilheimer

Bob Dylan (a young Bob Dylan, anyway) believed in the first thought. He obeyed the impulse to leave a relationship that no longer served one or both people involved. *Don't think twice*, he sang. *It's all right*. When I discovered my ex, Chad, was engaged, I leaned on Bob for reassurance that my first thought to leave Chad was the right one. That my choice not to work through both our counts of infidelity was the right one. That my choice to respond to his engagement by blowing two weeks' worth of tips on five pairs of shoes from Zappo's was the right one. That my choice to retrieve said shoes from the UPS Customer Center in the South Loop of Chicago in the middle of a blizzard was the right one.

Regardless of the outcome, the woman behind the counter promised me warmth.

When I call your number, you can head on back. A long red acrylic nail stretched out of her fingerless glove and pointed to the automatic sliding door scraped with scuffmarks behind her. *They got the heat on in there.*

I nodded, pressed play on my cell, and let Bob sing to me through one of my ear buds for the hundredth time about his breakup with Suze Rotolo. The first few finger-picked notes trickled past my eardrums and tapped the underside of my breastbone as I slumped against the colorless cinder block wall trying not to cry. In front of strangers. Again. I knew he'd soon tell me I should keep travelin' on like he did. A man who put Suze on the cover of his sophomore album.

Easier said than done.

Other frigid and bundled Chicagoans slouched in tattered chairs with loose legs that whimpered under their weight. Soaked floor mats drew a path to the heated room while melted snow and ice seeped from underneath their black rubber bottoms. No one spoke. Everyone was waiting for something. And my thoughts drifted to the engagement ring Chad bought me but never used. Did he offer her the same ring?

Bob chimed in.

Well it ain't no use to sit and wonder why, babe, if you don't know by now.

So did the woman behind the counter.

Six-seventy-three...Six-seventy three!

I removed my ear bud and waved my slip in the air for her to see. She nodded and pressed a button on the wall behind her. I imagined a burst of warmth wrapping around my bare face and neck, but when the door slid open I entered another space just as cold as the first. Tricky red-nails must have told us the heat was on to keep us from complaining while we huddled in what we thought was the only freezing room. I had to hand it to her, though. It worked. Sometimes the thought of something is all we need to be content, to resist reconsideration.

I passed a man carrying a large box out in front of him. My eyes landed on his for a split second; just long enough to offer the good ol' Midwestern closed-mouth smile before darting to the wet rubber floor. My brain messaged my feet to keep walking, but they refused. They stopped.

So did his.

He called out my name like he'd never done before. "Nora?"

Chad's fearful tone sounded foreign wrapped around my name. Even though I hadn't heard his voice in over a year I had grown accustomed to him enveloping "Nora" in love, lust, the casual check-in, or *where are you come here I have to show you something*.

But never fear.

"Nora, hey, uh, how are you, um..." He motioned his box at me. "Let me just...just hold on a sec."

Chad walked back to the counter. I studied him through the circular window on the sliding door. Frozen. I barely recognized him in his glasses: brown plastic, full-rimmed, rectangular. He almost never wore them when we were together. His backwards baseball cap rang familiar though, so did the brown curls looping around its edge. I used to call those curls his wings. In that moment they looked more like hooks.

He balanced his box on the edge of the counter and asked the woman with red nails something, presumably to guard his package while we talked. She waved her hand at the box, coloring the air between them crimson, and shook her head. Chad asked again flipping his palms up toward the ceiling for emphasis. She pointed at the door and turned away from him.

I turned away from him too, not wanting him to realize I'd been watching, and hurtled my awakened senses at a second set of frigid and bundled Chicagoans. A folding wall isolated them from the rest of the warehouse where our packages sat in numerical order. *A Christmas Story* played on a TV perched on a cart. No one spoke. Everyone was still waiting on something. Still holding out for warmth.

Chad walked back through the sliding door. Black letters soldiering across the box's side told me it housed a Kitchen Aid mixer.

A gift that didn't make it to our wedding shower.

Oh, right. Congratulations.

We exchanged updates while Chad held on to the box. His knuckles turned white as he gripped its corners and asked how my parents were doing. *Tell them I said hello*. I nodded, *sure*. But I wouldn't remember to do this since I wasn't really listening. Instead I was captivated by a thin strip of fog growing at the top of his lenses. It wasn't big enough to block his vision, but it was noticeable enough to raise questions about his increasing body temperature in a room that could have kept corpses fresh.

The woman behind the counter did promise heat.

I told him about my new apartment on the north side. My mouth unmoored from my mind, and I wondered if he thought of me when he proposed to her. For her sake, I hoped not. For my sake, I hoped yes. It didn't need to be anything big, no movie-like montage of

our greatest hits. Just a glimmer, his mind's eye coasting by his memory of me at five miles per hour.

And even though Bob told me not to, I've thought about this moment a million times since. Even my husband knows the story. Each time I tell it, each time I resurrect it from my mind's graveyard of failed loves, that strip of fog becomes increasingly significant. Over the past eight years its role has expanded from a minor detail to the protagonist, the star of the show, and I want to give it a body. I want to give it a name.

I've crafted complete conversations with that strip of fog like it's seized a message from Chad's uninhibited response system destined to let me know he's thought about it more than twice, too. And when he does, it makes him sweat. That even though we both knew it would never have worked, even though we'd both marry wonderful partners we'd undoubtedly choose over each other, the love we had is worth remembering. Our memory of the other is worth bearing the weight of so that we can recall it as much as we like and then decide, again, to not think twice about it.

Sometimes the anticipation of a memory resurfacing is all a heart needs.

Sometimes being that memory is all you need to say *fare thee well*.

Before Chad stumbled through his goodbye, his eyes peeped at the fog collecting above them. He didn't set the box down to wipe it away. He didn't say anything about its presence.

He just let it be. Without a second thought.