

**SOMETIMES
IT
RISES
QUICKLY**

or

the inherent trauma of sex work might lowkey be ur fault tbh

a longread zine by Kit Snicket

for phoenix and william and anyone who's
ever sucked dick for cash or loved someone
who did.

Last summer my friend, whose partner had just moved in with her, called me before work to purge some feels. The two of them had lived together for about a week, but this was the first time she was leaving for work since they'd shared a home. So far he'd said all the right things about supporting her career, and he'd even backed it up with actions, but he had not yet had to experience the reality of her leaving their shared space to go see a client, and like all sex workers, she'd had so many partners who had told her they accepted her work and her, and then...didn't.

"I'm afraid it's gonna be weird," she said, "I know it won't be, he's so great, but I'm scared it will be." It was painful to hear my friend, who I love, say those words. Because I knew exactly what she was feeling, I've felt those same feelings so hard so many times.

Usually the people who make you feel that way aren't great and usually it is weird. You don't always feel it right away, especially if you don't want to, especially if you pour all your faith and love into believing that they really mean the PC fictions that

they spout in their efforts to be a good person, a good ally, a good radical, a good partner.

“Oh no, of course your job doesn’t matter.”

“Who do you think I am that I would leave you over something like that?”

“Look, I know the stuff you do with those guys isn’t real.”

“Believe for me that I’m not the kind of person who just sees you as a nameless whore. I can’t be that person because I say I’m not, goddamnit.”

But the weirdness lurks there, under the surface of all. And even if they try to push it down *because good people support sex workers, good men support sex workers, and they are good man and because they are good man they believe that sex work is real work no matter how many times they say, “hey, at least you don’t have to work a real job”* it always rises to the top and sits there like the slime of rotted food over dishes left to soak too long

in a full sink. Sometimes it rises quickly, a scum of rancid grease over the grey water, but sometimes it takes years of you believing them because you want to so bad, and you're in love, and you've ignored so many things because you just want to be a *fucking person*. And then one day they can't be with a whore, you understand, they want a real relationship one day. And your labor makes that impossible because it makes you less-than.

The worst is when they use their love for you, or who they think you are or want you to be, to shame you:

"I love you so much, I hate to see your work make you unhappy."

"I love you so much, I hate to see you doing that work, it's so dangerous."

"I love you so much, I hate to see you degrading yourself like this."

As if all labor under capitalism isn't degrading, as if gendered labor isn't doubly so. But *they love you so much, how could you?* They love you despite your labor, therefore they love you more than you must love yourself.

The fear of being cast aside lives in the instinctual, animal parts of our brains that we allow to overdevelop because we are never not under threat of violence, in any of its multitudinous forms. Civvies don't live with it, so when we tell our friends and partners about our anxieties, they all too often take it as a personal attack. They interpret us voicing our fears as us judging them, or saying we don't trust them, when the reality is the opposite. You can't express fear of betrayal to someone you don't trust.

To say, "I'm scared you'll betray me" is also to say, "I trust you."

Sex work is inherently traumatic not because of the labor itself, but because of the way we are treated because of our labor. It's the reactions to our work, the rejection, and often violence, we face because of

it, that traumatizes us.

It isn't limited to partners. Every so often I'll make friends with someone, usually a woman or another femme, but not always. Everything will seem great until I start meeting her friends and this civvie broad introduces me as "this is Kit, she's an escort," in a stage whisper as if I'm an alien from another planet, there to be exhibited. Or until we get comfortable enough that she feels she can ask questions about my job and it becomes all we talk about. I've gotten better at sniffing those people out now, but it still happens sometimes. And shit, you wanna talk about emotional pain?

People think that the emotional pain that comes from sex work is the emptiness that must come with offering your body up to strangers, that we crack under the accumulation of hands on our skin, but clients aren't the ones that mark us most. The pain comes from others, the ones who reduce us to nothing but a set of holes for rent but don't even pay for that privilege.

Being reduced to nothing but your job by somebody you thought was a friend is some real fucking

emotional pain. Never being just Kit, but always being Kit the whore, is pain.

Especially when you're constantly bombarded by messages saying that your labor makes you different, even subhuman.

Especially when you've been hearing that hookers aren't the same as women since before it occurred to you that you might not be able to make it as a ballerina or a princess or a painter.

I talk ad nauseam to my friends who are also sex workers about the way we've been injured by men so many times it gets into our DNA. We never have to say that so, so, so many of those injuries have been related to our work, specifically men's inability to accept our work. We talk about the way we assume the worst off the bat, assume that any petty annoyance is ultimately related to our labor, and how hard that is to unlearn.

The first time I had to get up and leave my partner to go to an appointment I thought about that phone call last summer and all the conversations since then. I

sat next to him on my bed, putting on my whore face, more makeup than I ever wear in my normal life, shading the sides of my nose to make it look narrower, shading under my cheekbones to make them look thinner, sharper, making myself look more fragile, less working class.

Like my friend's partner, my partner had never shown themselves to be anything but down for the hos. The first time I realized I might love them a little bit we were drunk outside a bar and they were telling me they respect us so much for our ability to do such difficult, dangerous work.

But saying the right things and living the right way are different, and lots and lots and lots of people say, and even on some level believe the right things until they have to live them, until they see their partner go off to suck dick not for pleasure, but for something as base as money.

Every sex worker who's been working any amount of time and tried to simultaneously have a relationship knows this painfully and intimately. Nobody else knows it, not really. The most

empathetic civvies speak of stigma with the best intentions, and their hearts are good and they aren't wrong, but they don't know the pain of labor-based rejection the way we do. They don't know what haunts that first time we have to go from the space we share with our partners to the spaces where we work, that anxiety is only ours. It lives in our bones and collects in the knots in our necks, our backs, all the places we carry the stress of being constantly othered.

Whorephobia isn't just people killing us because we're whores. It isn't just dead hooker jokes and people telling us we're dirty or diseased. It's little shit too.

It's people saying they support us and respect our labor but couldn't ever date one of us.

It's people treating us like zoo animals by reducing us to our jobs.

It's people who say they love us leaving us not because the relationship has run its course, but because they don't feel comfortable with our mode

of survival under capitalism.

Whorephobia, in all its forms, both micro and macro is what traumatizes us more than anything.

I came home after my session to find my partner still in my house, still in my bed, calmly looking at memes and listening to music, still unbothered by my job. The sad thing is, when I first wrote this at the beginning of 2017 I was willing to accept that as support. The most tragic thing about the way stigma manifests is how it becomes so easy to accept apathy as support, "oh," you say, "they don't care what I do. How generous of them, how accepting they are," as if that's enough, as if it's any more than the barest minimum.

It took me a very long time after that relationship had run its course to realize that they, like so many other civvies I've tried to be friends with over the years, didn't really do more than give the most basic lip service to their support of sex workers.

My friend's partner hasn't just remained unbothered by her job, but he's also stayed supporting us in real, substantial ways. He speaks up for us, he takes

the time to educate himself about the issues that affect us. He's one of the few truly good men I've ever met, and I'm almost as lucky to know him as I am to know his wife.

That's how it goes. Sometimes we get happy endings, usually we don't, but somehow me and all my hooker friends, all of us queer sex working femmes, all of us survivors of so much violence, stay living despite everything.