But Saying It Out Loud is Very Hard

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Summary

There was something there; there’d always been something there, but neither was fully willing to act on it, not yet. Mamihlapinatapei, Gillian thought absently. (Noun. Yagan, an indigenous language of Tierra del Fuego): The wordless yet meaningful look shared by two people who desire to initiate something, but are both reluctant to start. It had been the word on her weird-word-a-day calendar last Tuesday. She found herself wishing for an English equivalent that didn’t exist more often than she’d ever admit.

Notes

In which Gillian Anderson is sick on the set of X-Files some time in the 90s and David Duchovny takes care of her because, you know what, apparently we have an emotional kink for this or something. But hey: we are who we are, ya know?

See the end of the work for more notes.

Gillian was sick—not anything major, just a cold—but still under the weather. David was trying very hard not to find the entire thing adorable: the groggy cadence to her speech, the repetitive scrunch of a tissue-filled hand over her reddened nose, the way she would occasionally shiver and move closer to him, unconsciously seeking his body heat.

He still found it adorable.
Of course, he wouldn't dare SAY that, at least not in so many words; Gilly wasn't especially fond of the word "adorable" anyway, and even less so when she was feeling tired or sick or vulnerable (or, in this case, all three). He kept the thought to himself, but imagined he was still emoting it fairly obviously.

For example, he couldn't stop smoothing her hair; it was addictive, like petting a sleepy cat. Every time he did it, she would lean subtly into the touch and sigh a little, which was David’s first clue that she really wasn't feeling well; on set, she was usually flirtatious and teasing and vivacious, never this passive and subdued and pitiful. David was equal parts concerned and smitten.

Because she was still Gilly, she was top notch at hiding how lousy she felt, though David could detect the faint tell-tale hoarseness to her voice, the lack of her usual energy and spark as she delivered her lines (even the flirting ones). Worst of all, there was something tired and hollow about her ordinarily playful, inquisitive eyes, and David had secretly made it his mission to nurse the customary brightness back into them.

It seemed she hadn't even told their director that she was feeling unwell, so of course David took it upon himself to goad her into doing so. In one of the scenes they were shooting that day, Scully and Mulder were chasing down another dubiously paranormal something or other, and the script said they hopped into the car and sped away. David had a better idea.

"Hey, Chris; what if we had them running towards the aliens here instead of driving? I just feel like it would be more in character for Mulder, you know?"

He glanced at Gillian out of the side of his eyes; she did not look pleased. She was too proud a person and too good an actor to differ with genuine character development though, and remained silent.

David nudged her. "Don't you think so, Gilly?"

She made a vague sniffling sound and shrugged, which Chris apparently took as a yes.

"Alright, well if that's okay with all concerned, I think we can still shoot it that way now; just set the cameras for a longer pan, okay? We can edit the fx in later." Chris was clearly oblivious to Gillian’s plight, and David wondered if it was willful ignorance, genuine obtuseness, a product of her considerable acting talents, or some combination of all of them.

They rehearsed the take a few times, and each one saw Gillian with her head and heart barely in it, messing up lines David knew she had memorized, struggling to cover up her sniffling and slightly labored breathing. Chris finally seemed to sense that something was amiss. "You doing alright, Gillian?" he asked, eyebrows raised, in between a rehearsal. "You don't quite seem yourself today." David nudged her again, more emphatically this time. "Yeah, Gilly," he said. "You okay?"

She glared at him, but even that expression was bereft of its usual poignance. Something inside David (he won’t say it’s his heart) promptly melted.

"I'm fine," she said to Chris. "Just a little tired and out of sorts, that's all."

"Is that all, Gilly?" David asked pointedly.

"Yes, David," Gillian said testily. "It is."

"Okay, then let's do it!" David answered, overly chipper.

"Ready to shoot?" Chris asked, more to Gillian than David.
Gillian nodded weakly, her smile painted on, and David nearly rolled his eyes because, really, how far were they going to go in the name of verisimilitude?

After two takes, Gillian needed a break to catch her breath and blow her nose. David frowned, watching as she stashed a few tissues up the sleeve of her blazer for later.

"We're having some issues getting both of you in the shot at the same time," Chris explained as they walked back over to their marks. "Gillian, do you think you can run just a little faster this time around? Just to make sure the camera can get both of you at once."

She nodded, dejected and more than a little exhausted, but ever professional. David had had enough and took her aside. "Gilly, look: you don't have to do this if you're sick."

"You were the one who suggested it," she said, trying to snipe but mostly just sounding weary and sniffly. "And who says I'm sick? I feel like a million bucks." Fixing her posture and consciously manipulating her features, she quite convincingly feigned a look of playful pride. He might've even believed her if he didn't know her so well.

"Gilly," David said with exaggerated patience. "Come on."

"Don't patronize me," she said, with slightly more convincing vigor.

"That's my girl." He patted her head again, and she tried not to smile.

"David, really, I'm fine," she said, patting his chest fondly, though the sneeze that immediately followed the statement negated it for the most part.

"Uh-huh," David said, "yeah. Sure."

She sneezed again, and when David waggled his eyebrows, she murmured her concession into the tissue. "Okay, so I'm not fine in the traditional sense of the word, but I am fine to film today. I promise."

David sighed and put his hands up in mock surrender; he knew when he'd lost a battle (especially since he lost them to Gillian so often). Then, though, he stuck a finger in the air, mimicking an aha! gesture. "But just in case, I'm getting you some hot chocolate later."

Gillian actually did smile this time, and laid a hand on his arm. "Thank you."

He placed his own, larger hand on top of Gillian's and squeezed. "You're welcome."

They did eventually manage to get a shot with both of them in the frame; it was only the one and it was far from perfect, but it was also becoming more and more obvious that Gillian really wasn't up for doing something so strenuous. She still hadn't said anything--she was quietly and miserably going along with every new instruction--and David was beginning to feel hot, uncomfortable curls of guilt that his plan had misfired so terribly.

"It's not ideal," Chris began, frowning as he reviewed the footage, then sighed after glancing back at the fatigued form of Gillian, "but it'll do for now. Next scene--Mulder and Scully in the car, back on the chase. Let's move!"

"At least you get to sit down for this one," David murmured to Gillian. She sighed a laugh that turned into a cough, which she stifled in the crook of her arm.

They made it through the next several hours of filming with no real trouble, save the occasional
sneeze from Gillian (“They can just go on the gag reel,” David reassured her when she started to get embarrassed and apologetic), but late in the afternoon it began to pour buckets in the way it only ever seemed to do in Vancouver. They tried to plow through it, but Gillian was shivering so hard that her teeth were chattering and the rain was affecting the visual quality anyway, so Chris reluctantly sent them back to their trailers until the weather decided to let up.

Gillian practically ran in the direction of hers and the warmth it promised, and David followed behind her. He stopped briefly by catering and snagged the promised hot chocolate, then found a PA he could bribe into going to the closest pharmacy for some cold medicine and cough drops. Pleased with himself, he knocked shave-and-haircut on the door of Gillian’s trailer. “Who is it?” she croaked.

“Scully, it’s me.”

There was a pause, then the door swung open. “Funny,” she said. “Very funny.”

David held up the Styrofoam cup. “I come bearing gifts,” he said.

Gillian took the cup and pressed it to her cheek, warming herself. “Oh, thank-you,” she said as she ushered him inside.

She collapsed languidly on the couch and shut her eyes, then waved vaguely around the room. “Sit wherever you like,” she said, taking a sip of the hot chocolate as she pulled a handful of tissues from the box on a nearby table.

David, suddenly fidgety and anxious, stayed standing. “How are you feeling?” he asked.

Gillian opened one eye. “Still fine,” she said carefully.

“You keep on using that word,” David said, affecting a terrible Spanish accent. “I do not think you know what it means.”

Gillian snorted. “Clever.”

“I try.”

They slipped into an easy, comfortable silence; Gillian didn’t seem to be in the mood to chat, and David was happy (much more than happy, really) to simply quietly exist in the same space as her. They’d been working together for going on five years now, and knew each other better than probably anyone else did. Once, during an interview, David had compared their work relationship to an arranged marriage: neither had had any say in the other half of the pairing—it had simply happened. But he was often struck by just how lucky they had been; how lucky they indeed still were.

David finally settled on the other end of the long couch already 75% occupied by not-so-long Gillian. There were stacks of books on her coffee table: a number of Ann Patchett novels, a marked up copy of Anna Karenina, some Ibsen plays, some Tennessee Williams, Harriet the Spy, Mrs. Dalloway, collection after collection of poetry. David shut his eyes and grabbed something at random—an especially battered paperback copy of Satan Says by Sharon Olds. “I love that book,” Gillian said in a small, sleepy voice.

David smiled. "That's a good enough recommendation for me."

Gillian tried to scootch back further on the sofa so that their personal space bubbles wouldn't overlap, but before she got a chance to go much of anywhere David maneuvered her so that her legs draped over his lap. Finishing her hot chocolate, she smiled but said nothing, and then lay back and
closed her eyes. David opened the book, resting it on her shins as he read. In minutes, she was snoring softly. And, dear reader, as I’m sure you could’ve guessed: he found it absolutely adorable.

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Gillian was asleep and David was still reading Sharon Olds when the knocking started. David tried at first to ignore it, not wishing to disturb Gillian now that she was finally napping peacefully; at one point, in her sleep, Gillian had gotten cold and clearly uncomfortable, so David had covered her with a blanket and carefully helped her move so that she was laying on a pillow. Minutes later, she had knocked the pillow off of the sofa and curled up against his chest instead. Her eyes were closed and she was still snoring (it cracked him up, that she snored; he was never going to let her hear the end of it), so he let himself grin and stroke her hair. He loved being close to her in any capacity, but he especially loved being behind her; she was so small and delicate, and, despite the knowledge that she was more than capable of kicking serious ass both in character and out, he liked feeling like he had her back, like he could protect her.

The knocking continued, though, dragging David out of the poetry. He closed the book; Gillian woke with a start and immediately began to cough. It sounded almost violent, and David shot her a concerned look. They knocked more insistently. Gillian stopped coughing just long enough to choke out the words, “Can you please get that?”

David opened the door and stepped outside. It was the PA from earlier. He had a plastic bag from London Drugs in his hand and an apologetic look on his face. “The good news,” he said, “is that I got, like, five different types of cold medicine and cough drops. And some of that vapo-rub stuff. And plenty of tissues; the expensive lotiony kind.”

“What’s the bad news?” asked David.

The PA winced slightly. “Chris thinks it’s okay to start filming again.”

David scowled. “It’s still raining,” he pointed out.

The PA shrugged. “He says it’s slowed down enough that the shots shouldn’t be blurry or obscured or anything.” He clapped David on the shoulder. “Sorry, man; I'm just the messenger.”

David ducked back inside, hiding the drugstore bag behind his back. Gillian was sitting up on the couch, alternatedly drinking dainty sips from a glass of water and rubbing her temples. She looked up when she heard David walk back in and smiled at him a little. “Hi.”

“Hey,” David said. “You want the good news or the bad news?”

Gillian groaned. “Chris wants to start shooting again.”

“You know, sometimes I swear you’re a mind-reader, Gilly.”

She didn’t laugh, though; she tried, but it came out more a whimper, and she looked near tears. “But it’s still raining,” she said hopelessly.

“It’s slowed down enough that visibility shouldn’t be too bad,” David said, rolling his eyes. “But, hey,” he said, brightening. “I did promise good news too.”

He brought out the bag with a flourish and dropped it gently into Gillian’s lap. She began pawing through it--curious at first, then visibly touched. “David,” she said, her voice earnest and a bit wavery. “Thank-you. So much.”
Slightly uncomfortable with the sudden emotional tenor of the conversation, David shrugged her off. “We gotta be able to get through a take without you being all,” he waved a hand at her, “gross and sniffly.”

Gillian offered him her patented withering stare, intimidating even with her red eyes and runny nose. “You are too kind,” she said, affecting an exaggerated Southern accent. (He didn't even try not to find that adorable; he did try not to find it sexy, but failed miserably.) She opened one of the blister packs of cold medicine, popped two pills in her mouth, and swallowed them dry. “Let’s go film this fucker.”

He grabbed her tiny shoulders and pointed her gently towards the door. “Right behind you.” Just where I like to be.

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They tried. They really, really did. They gave it their best shot for a good two hours, but it just wasn’t meant to be.

They’d been filming for close to twelve hours--a solid four of them through a steady rain that just wouldn’t let up--and everyone, healthy cast and crew members included, was beginning to feel chilled and exhausted. David kept losing track of his longer chunks of dialogue; the extras kept forgetting their marks. Even Chris seemed almost ready to call it a day, though he still wanted to push through.

And then there was Gillian.

Maybe it was the rain or maybe it was the exertion of filming or maybe it was just plain bone tiredness, but she was far sicker than she’d been only that morning. She was shaky and frighteningly pale and as it got colder and darker her sneezing and coughing grew worse and worse and--finally--Chris said “Alright, that’s enough for the day. Everyone pack up and head home. We start same time tomorrow morning.”

David was getting some of his things together before he went to change back into his street clothes when he saw Chris approach Gillian. He moved slightly closer, to listen in, because of course he did. Because he had her back.

“Are you going to be okay to work tomorrow?”

“Of course I will,” Gillian said dismissively, though her voice was audibly cracking on every other word and, really, it was nearly gone.

“Are you sure?” Chris asked suspiciously.

“Yes,” Gillian said impatiently.

“Because I don’t want you running yourself into the ground and getting pneumonia or something,” he said, and though he sounded a bit grumpy about it all, he wasn’t, really; he was just worried. And tired. They all were.

“I’m not going to get pneumonia,” Gillian said with a dismissive little shake of her head. Chris stared at her exasperatedly. “Really,” she said, more seriously this time. “I just need a good night’s sleep and some NyQuil and I’ll be good as new in the morning.”

“And you’re positive about that?”
“Chris.”

He threw his hands in the air (Gillian had that effect on men, apparently), and muttered something that sounded like, “Suit yourself.” (On his way out, though, he did pat Gillian on the shoulder with more than a little affection, and David smiled).

Gillian caught David’s eye as he stood pretending to pack up his stuff for the fifth time. “Eavesdropping?” she asked.

“Never.”

“Uh-huh.”

They started to walk back to their trailers together, their hands hanging almost close enough to clasp together. “Doing anything fun tonight?” David asked.

Gillian laughed. “Yeah, I’ve got a big night on the town planned,” she deadpanned. “First, I’m going to eat a giant bowl of chicken noodle soup. Then I’m going to put on my flannel pajamas and slip into a NyQuil coma as I watch old episodes of E.R.”

“Sounds invigorating.”

“I’m sure it will be.”

They had arrived at the steps up to their trailers, but neither moved to go inside. David stuck his hands in his pockets and rattled some loose change; Gillian quietly blew her nose for what felt like the thousandth time that day (or even that hour).

“Gilly.”

She looked up at David. “Hmm?”

“What would you say to maybe taking your crazy night to my place?” He didn’t quite meet her eyes as he asked, as though he were afraid she’d reject him if she thought he was too serious.

The corners of her mouth twitched but she managed to suppress her grin as she said, quite solemnly, “I’ll see how my schedule looks and let you know, but I think I’m booked solid.”

“I bet you are. You’re so popular.”

“Unbearably so,” she said, flipping her hair before walking inside her trailer. She shut the door behind her and waited a beat before opening it again and sticking her head back out. “David.”

“Yeah?”

“I’d love to come over.”

* * *

Gillian loved David’s apartment. She truly, truly loved it.

It was warm and simply furnished and surprisingly clean and inviting and—above all—it smelled like him. She’d been there for a few parties and get togethers and even for drinks with just the two of them a few times, though she’d never been over this late alone, and especially not without a specific reason to be there. Well, she did sort of have a reason; she wasn’t feeling well. He wanted to make sure she was okay, that someone was there to bring her
more tissues and hot chocolate and blankets and Sudafed. But that somehow made it all the more nerve wracking--what was she expecting to get out of tonight? Was David going to simply take care of her? How much? Did she even want that? (Though, why wouldn’t she want that?) That’s what friends did, right? But what if they were edging over into something like more than friends? Did she want that? What then?

“Hey.”

David’s voice shook her out of her reverie, and she blinked. “Hi.”

“Where’d you go?” he asked, joining her on the couch.

“Just thinking,” she said, playing with a loose thread on her sweater. “Nowhere especially interesting.”

David didn’t look wholly convinced, but he let it go. “I know you said you were thinking of having soup, but what would you say to a large pepperoni and mushroom pizza instead?” he asked, rubbing his hands together.

Gillian wrinkled her nose. “I’d say...that I’m not very hungry and that my throat is too sore,” she pouted, then placed her head on his shoulder. “I’m sorry.”

"Your throat is sore?" he asked. She shrugged a single shoulder.

"Only a little," she answered.

David felt her forehead and frowned. "You're pretty warm," he murmured.

Gillian stifled a sneeze into her wrist. "I can be your space heater for the night, then," she said with a sleepy giggle.

He ruffled her hair (like she was his kid sister, she rationalized) and then pressed a slow, gentle kiss to her temple (like she was decidedly not his kid sister, she realized). Heat rushed to her face and she quickly sat up, flushed and nervous.

"David--" she said waringly, just as he said, "Gillian, hey, I'm sorry."

They looked at each other for a long moment before laughing awkwardly; Gillian carefully set her hand on top of David's, and he didn't pull away. "I didn't," she began slowly, "not...want that. It's just...I just--I need more time. Or something."

"Or something," David repeated in a tone Gillian couldn't quite read. She sighed.

"David--" she said again, but he cut her off.

"No, no, you're right," he said. "It's...yeah."

Gillian smiled. "That's a pretty apt way of putting it."

Both of them suddenly self-conscious, David gingerly wrapped an arm around Gillian, as though worried she might break away; the thought made Gillian oddly sad. They spent so much of their not-acting lives like this--close but barely touching. He turned to look at her, to try to read her, and at the same moment she glanced up at him. Their eyes met, and held. Gillian was too tired to be embarrassed; David was too immersed in her to remember that perhaps he should've been embarrassed. There was something there; there’d always been something there, but neither was fully
willing to act on it, not yet. *Mamihlapinatapei*, Gillian thought absently. *(Noun. Yagan, an indigenous language of Tierra del Fuego): The wordless yet meaningful look shared by two people who desire to initiate something, but are both reluctant to start.* It had been the word on her weird-word-a-day calendar last Tuesday. She found herself wishing for an English equivalent that didn’t exist more often than she’d ever admit.

Out of nowhere the knot of tension between them loosened, and then it dissolved entirely. Suddenly too exhausted to even sit up, Gillian bonelessly slumped over onto David, tucking her head in the crook of his shoulder again. She felt him still at her faint warmth, the soft weight of her body, and then accept it, lean into it.

Gillian let out a breath she didn’t realize she’d been holding, and on the next shaky inhalation she took in a gulpful of David’s familiar scent. She slid down a little so that her head was braced against his chest, her new favorite place since their trailer nap earlier, and listened to the sure beating of his heart. For a moment, she almost forgot to feel sick and pathetic and anxious. That is, until she had to bring an elbow up to her face to smother a series of rattling, wracking coughs. David gently rubbed her back until the fit subsided. “This...sucks,” she gasped, her chest aching, and then--without thinking twice or even once about it--she grabbed David’s hand. “Thank-you.”

He didn’t ask for what. He didn’t need to. He brushed a few soft lovelocks of pale red hair away from her face, traced the smooth line of her jaw with his little finger. “You’re welcome,” he did whisper. *No, thank you,* he didn’t.

Pizza and soup and *E.R.* reruns all but forgotten, Gillian drifted off, her head now pillowed on David’s lap. David continued to read the Sharon Olds poetry collection he’d stolen from Gillian’s dressing room (she didn’t seem too bothered by it, really) until he, too, fell asleep; he spooned himself protectively around Gillian as best as he could on the small couch. They stayed like that until morning, and it wasn’t enough, except that it was.

End Notes

The title comes from the song "Futile Devices" by Sufijan Stevens. It's kindof perfect for this fic and full of parallels that weren't even intentional on our part.

This was actually inspired by the season eight episode "Empedocles": throughout it Gillian Anderson just seems sniffly and tired and unwell, but they didn't incorporate that into the episode at all, which was sort of disappointing.

Some of the books and plays we have her reading/in her trailer are little Easter eggs--can y'all guess which ones? And why?

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