

Making medium rare decisions

[Business](#), [Management](#)



Societal pressures often lead to people feeling inadequate. Jim knows this feeling all too well. Being a 30-year-old man working at a dull job (Boyle 3), it was easy for him to feel incompetent. When Jim was approached by Alena, he did anything for her because he thought she could fill the void in his life. Jim gave up meat and protested against animal cruelty (Boyle 4). He risked his own safety to impress Alena and have a chance at feeling whole. This pattern of self neglect is proof of Jim's personality. In "Carnal Knowledge" by T. C. Boyle, the character Jim is dominated by his crippling absence of companionship, lack of sense of self, and no feeling of belonging.

It can be concluded that Jim has an insignificant amount of relationships left in his life. Jim's 30th birthday consisted of a quiet day ending with dinner at his mom's and maybe going to a bar (Boyle 2). When Jim meets Alena, he is instantly taken aback by her physical stature and wants to start a relationship with her (Boyle 2). His decisions for the rest of the story are made based on keeping his relationship with Alena. Jim protests (Boyle 3), illegally releases turkeys (Boyle 11), and even takes a punch to the face (Boyle 6) all for a girl that he met less than a week ago. These actions show Jim no longer cares about his health and is only focused on Alena and satiating his need for companionship. Any identity he had before meeting Alena dissipates as these decisions and actions create a new, false identity that Jim adopts as his own. Jim's sense of self throughout the whole story is shaky. Jim identifies himself as "Alena Jorgensen's lover" (Boyle 6). The lie begins at the beginning of the story when Jim tells Alena that he doesn't eat meat, neglecting to tell her about the pastrami sandwich he ate for lunch (Boyle 5). He disregards all of his own qualities and adopts Alena's. As Jim

stays with Alena, he is convinced to lie to his work and eventually stops contact with them all together (Boyle 7). Jim's lack of identity allows him to become something he is not and eventually causes self-harm when Alena does not share the same intense feelings about the relationship. His sense of self is not the only thing that generates this damaging outcome. Jim constantly searching for a place to belong keeps him unbounded and influences his rash life choices. A group of people that Jim classifies as friends arises from the protesting group.

Alena tells him “ you are one of us now” (Boyle 7) and further establishes his belief that he is apart of this social clique; however, he does not belong. Jim is not there for the same reason the others are and, therefore, does not fit in. Jim is so blinded by all of his false qualities, his new lover, and radical beliefs that he does not recognize his false friends until it is too late and Alena runs off with one of them (Boyle 13). After Alena is gone, Jim is back to being just Jim. He throws his new friends and his new beliefs away and accepts that he does not belong with them by getting a cheeseburger to eat (Boyle 14).

Throughout the story Carnal Knowledge, the narrator Jim learns that you cannot throw away your qualities, beliefs, job, or friends in order to develop a lasting relationship and feel whole. His need for companionship was exploited when he did illegal things for Alena. Jim's sense of self was disrupted when he threw away his beliefs and embraced Alena's. Jim's lack of belonging was made prominent when he stopped going to work in order to protest.