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YELLOW



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ELLA DEUTCHMAN

To Lynn Lilienthal, whom I continue to be lucky to love

Thank you to Peter and Hugh, for workshopping this excavation of my soul with care and humor. To Aurora and Michelle, for being on my defense committee, and doing so with such wholeheartedness and love. To Maya, for ideas and lyric analysis and being the most relatable person ever. To Zev for being a beautiful mixture of hilarious and caring and perseverant. To Safta and Papa for your deep kindness. To Grandpa for inspiring me every day. Thank you to Mom for fostering in me a love for hydrangeas and sunshine and rambunctiousness, for doing yoga at airport gates and dancing in T.S.A. lines. Thank you to Dad for all the music, literal and otherwise, silly and serious, for making me laugh when I'm sad, for all of our bike rides. To Louie the dog for flopping and Julia the cat for butting her head against me. To all of my professors who've inspired me. To Rabbi Emma, for teaching us all how to work towards community with grace, wit, compassion, and individual-recipient emails. Thank you to the Hudson, Mississippi, and Guadalquivir Rivers, for letting me run beside you. To Jeffrey, for an unblinking kindness that has kept me so warm. Thank you to Parsons, for the inextinguishable effervescence in your eyes and all of the photos, to Siri, for grounding hugs and conversations. Thank you to Lolita, for the homes you concoct and care for wherever you go, to Gabs, for unbridled love manifesting in laughter and listening, to Hannah, for escalating the level of hilarity and raunchiness to previously un-summitted altitudes. Thank you to Julia, for an authenticity and earnestness I aspire to, to Isabel, for being a sanctuary. To Phoebe, for being set alight by what bogs others down, to Lily, for letting our respective weirdnesses and exuberances frolic together in all kinds of light.

“...there is time enough to gather plenty of wild oats and sow them too, and sing to little Oom, and listen to Ool’s joke, and watch newts, and still the story isn’t over. Still there are seeds to be gathered, and room in the bag of stars.”

-Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction*



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SIDE A

“People whose favorite songs are happy listen to them about 175 times on average. But those who favor ‘bittersweet’ songs listen almost 800 times, according to a study by University of Michigan professors Fred Conrad and Jason Corey.”

-Susan Cain, *Bittersweet*

Lemon Soul

You asked me what I wanted
I gave you lemons.

You asked why?
Why lemons and why for me?

I should've known then that you didn't understand my soul, no
I should've known that when you told me
you didn't believe in souls.

Yellow like goldenrod, a fallow fire, black-eyed-susans, sunflowers. Yellow like the sun in my eyes you held your hand up to shield me from, as though I needed that, you are no longer tall in the face of bountiful light. Yellow like everything as it turns, the moment of, leaves, yellow as the swirls of texture in the sun-porch where I sleep, disease, a pale cardigan, a faded prayer. Yellow like white t-shirt sweat-stains, fever-dreams, electrolyte-water, buzzing bees, highlighters, all the things I thought I could've said to you, all the things you'll never say to me. Yellow like the spots in my vision before I pass out, sunspots when we make ourselves enter the dark. A dream gone thready, snagged on a nail embedded in the windowsill. Yellow like my hope, brilliant idiocy, running aglow and amok and crazy. Scattered upon this September grass, filling clay receptacles across the way. Yellow like your hair before it deepened. Yellowed like all the pages I've written about your eyes. Aglow like my body when it rains. Burning in a manner you weren't brave enough to feel. Reverberating like sunbeams on our legs. Slick like oil inside sweltering afternoons. Lonely like a lamp in a windowless room, a bulb whose home never opens the shades. Cavernous like the sun when it flickers out. Incandescent like my heart. Sweet haunting like the rising moon, autumn compounding, everything falls. Bright as lemon on my tastebuds, a healing-something-swollen like bonfires that stain your jeans with songs and smoke. Yellow like my hope when I was younger, before it fell. Yellow like my hope, perennial.

Gather these materials:

- Everything you've ever loved, everything you may love
- A backpack, one that belonged to a courageous ancestor. You will stuff all the love inside, sling it over your shoulders. It will almost shatter your frame
- Sturdy boots
- The lies you've barraged yourself with. Pluck them from invasive roots, let them curl and brown
- Quotes that spark chills through your tissue
- Self-perceptions that obscure your self, to ignite, kindling
- Vibrant leaves
- Your mother's and father's eyes, even when yours can't meet them
- Jackets, sweaters, blankets
- Mugs of tea replete with honey
- Your own hand. To place on your heart. To hear it resound
- Books, worn and unopened
- The understanding that you need not identify with the dead leaves and grayed snow, you are the rivulets running beneath it, you are the soil where light rests
- The love of your friends. The ones you know and the ones you'll know soon. Their love will hold your whole heart for you, when your bones quake

Pre-dawn

We know your body
doesn't house my reciprocal ache so
stop beaming your eyes into mine
they will not play hostess

your light feels welcome in mine because
I spent years piling melting cookies in your palms
ensconcing you in cerulean quilts
you'd gift my fire your oxygen
tie your boots up pre-dawn

flour's dregs reside in my palms' love-lines
every cabinet unhinged in chocolate pursuit
threads snagged and running, disintegrating sky
my eyes aren't your hostel
yours aren't my custodian

that transient gaze isn't a kindness
alighting upon my face like harbor

our eyes aren't eachothers' homes
clear my threshold and
employ your virtue
to close the door like you
mean it.

This one body

I can't think of anything closer to prayer:
coming home from a night-shift
creaking open the door,
only to be

ensconced in an instant
oven birthing zucchini bread
friends' limbs cradling.

Nestling into couch-gravity
palms embracing shoulders
fingers stroking hair
blankets on cold flesh as
laughter reverberates from bellies

weren't we always this one body?

Julia strummed guitar,
Lily strummed my leg
my arm enveloped Phoebe
Lily and Phoebe's hands clasped

Lily cried at their three-part harmony
*"Wrapping your left arm around my right / ready to walk me through
the night"*

eyelids drawn
windows vast
light feeding our favorite
fires

Crimson Leaves From The Sidewalk

The evening before I flew from New York to Minnesota for my last year of college, my mom and I kayaked in the Croton River, an off-shoot of the Hudson, named for our town. The tide was low, we pulled our kayaks across ankle-deep water for part of it, soles of feet on smooth rocks. My mom swam, I went up to the edge of my clothes. We moved water with paddles moved by our arms as birds fished, a carcass decomposed, ducks swam, eagles and hawks soared, sky pastelled. My mom lifted her paddle overhead as we floated through the tiny section of tiny rapids. We gazed as flock after flock of birds launched from cattails into the sky. On our way downstream, the tide rose. We sang a variety of songs, among them “Beauty In The World”, “All I Want”, “Closer to Fine”, and, one of my mother’s favorite summer jams, “About Damn Time” (she nods her head in vehemence to the lyrics, “Oh, I’ve been so down and under pressure / I’m way too fine to feel this stressed, yeah”). I think one, albeit not the only reason, my mom enjoys Lizzo songs so much is because saying the word “bitch” brings her unbridled joy. She’ll laugh and smile in a sly way, like she is the young adult in the situation, up to something.

Cathy Deutchman is always up to something. I remember several childhood instances that involved me or my siblings bringing up in conversation something Mom said while talking on the phone. Various details about various people’s personal lives, things I don’t remember at all now, but at the time perhaps were a big deal, at least to the people they concerned. She’d grow irritated, and tell us we weren’t supposed to be listening. But we’d laugh, because it would be less of an issue of listening than simply of hearing- you can hear my mom on the phone wherever you are in the house, even if she

is outside of it (watering the garden provides ample phone-conversation time. As does sitting in the car finishing a conversation you had while driving). I brought this up to my friend Lola once a couple years ago. She said, “ohh, that’s where you get it from.” I didn’t realize this was one of her things I harbor inside of me until then. I called Mom to tell her about it.

Other things of my mother’s that are now mine, too- opening every shade and window. Her striped overalls from when she was 16. Yoga. Picking up crimson leaves from the sidewalk in order to behold them longer. Her old sweaters. Quoting Mary Oliver poems. Emotional oversharing. Running. An intolerance to sit for even a semi-sustained period of time, resulting in road-trip grumpiness. Tears about time’s passing.

Before I went to college for the first time, my mom, inspired by Phil from “Modern Family”, gave me a list of things to keep in mind as I left home. One of these things was to know your boundaries and what feels good for your body, which, as my mom told me, I think maybe on our way to kayaking, included masturbating. A few weeks before I left for college this year, she told my brother, Zev and I, that she, inspired by her friends, had bought condoms from CVS and was going to put them in the linen closet. While studying abroad in Seville, my mother, over the phone, said, “Ella, you don’t have to tell me, but I really hope you have a Spanish lover.”.

When I came home from my summer job, New York was humid, scorching, and scorched. Our fridge contained coconut water, which I began to drink. One morning, Mom got annoyed about it, saying that coconut water is expensive and I was drinking too much of it. On the drive to LaGuardia Airport two weeks later, her face crumpled; she began to say, interspersed with tears and sniffles, “Ella I’m so sorry for when I blew up at you. It’s just that I’m not used to it when you all come home and it

takes a bit to adjust and I was just thinking about how I got upset with you about the coconut water, and today at my event at the temple I brought so much coconut water but nobody drank it so this morning I was looking at all the coconut water in the fridge and I thought, who is going to drink all this coconut water? Ella won't be here to. I should've just let you drink the coconut water. I'm so sorry." I told her I'd forgotten about it, because I had. She cried.

When I think of home, I think of my mother. My mother, who sits shotgun with her legs on the dash and yells, "owowowowwwwww, party people" and pounds the roof of the car in exclamation. Who leaves our front door unlocked, who my dad jokes is the unofficial "mayor of Croton," due to the fact that she knows everybody. Who, concerned that my sister Maya and I were working too hard in high school, told us to "be a little bad." Who dances with our dog, Louie, after dinner. Who always informs us when it's a full moon, who likes to show off her canker sores and other physical maladies at the dinner table. Who belly laughs with all of herself. Who, upon my return home from studying abroad and traveling, had left a piece of driftwood on my nightstand, painted with vines and the words, "Welcome home, traveling Ella," and had leaned against my mirror a print of a girl standing in a clearing in a creek, wearing shorts and a bikini top, jacket and bag tossed over a branch, saying she bought it for me because the girl was just like me.

I am able to be that girl in a clearing in a creek, to be me, because of her. Because she'd take us to swim in the river when the season was over and it's technically illegal, shedding belongings onto rocks. Because she intuits that wilderness traversed beckons gleaming water. Because her whole self understands that autumn's beginning need not necessitate jubilation's end.

Resolve

When I recall how
my twelve-year-old self reprimanded
herself for maple soft-serve she ate on a summer vacation
my eyes well up.

I remember thinking;
Well, if I berate myself enough after
each dessert I will reach
the point where the self-loathing that haunts each lick supersedes
the pleasure of sugar and cream
melting on my tongue.

I remember staring in the mirror and perceiving
amorphous flesh.
I remember compliments
when my body would fluctuate smaller. I remember an urge to vanquish
my stomach. I remember an elementary school friend telling me that she probably
couldn't borrow a bathing suit because it wouldn't
fit.

In high school, I suffered persistent health issues and I tried
not eating gluten or dairy, to see if that resolved
anything. It didn't, my Dad said I should start eating
those foods again and I didn't
want to because I liked
my body's littleness.

I remember believing
smallness would resolve
a longing vaster
than any words
I'd been taught

My twin and I spoke before walking

conversations on hardwood
my mother says we had no need to get up
on the floor we had each other and our words

we grew up tangled our
selves in each other
when one of us hit ground
both of us lie there

heart in smithereens if an ax grazed hers
projections of ourselves played
upon eachother's faces

to reconcile self
when you can't stand
your self
to look your twin in her eyes when you can't see
your own

Now
we've run plenty
cradled by earth
lovers of its alchemy

sprawled on my soil her
on her's
we gift words back and forth

Maya,
two gulls fluttered over this lake drenched
in the dregs of September sun

dappling each of my chest's estuaries

fire leaves flicker verdant
crimson gold trees stand
for centuries of this raw pulse and you
call always when my soul needs
yours.

1751

I have been dating this boy, who came over last night, we baked apple pie. When we walked into the house with our Trader Joe's bag of ingredients, Lola and Hannah were sitting on the couch, watching Star Trek. He and Hannah had not met before. This morning, Lola and Hannah were sitting eating breakfast at the dining room table when I came out of my room. I asked Hannah what her Jeffrey impression was. She looked at me. "Is this a request?" She asked. I tilted my head. "Yes...?" "Okay," she says, and, with a curt nod, as though she'd been waiting for this moment, she pushed back her chair, stood up, and proceeded to do an impersonation of him. I had meant the other type of impression. We could not stop laughing.

In my poetic memory class, we created self portraits. I brought mine home, and unveiled it to Lola and Gabby, who began to shake with laughter from the couch. It turns out I had forgotten eyebrows, and given myself the shoulders of a football player. Defiantly, I scrawled on thick eyebrows with a black pen, determined to prove that my art skills had not frozen at a 6th grade level. Natalie added nostrils to make the nose look less phallic, and we plastered my self-rendering to the wall, where she holds court till this day, making eye contact with whomever dares look her way. It is annotated with song lyrics.

Sophomore year, entrenched in our covid-stasis, one way we passed the time was writing down funny or apt things we said on post-its, and sticking them to the wall. We're in a new house now, but we've brought the quotes with us. On the precipice between the dining room and the living room the wall settles into a kind of large archway, lined by fairy lights and plastered with our post-its. Some memorable ones include, "Josh Hutcherson! He was my sexual awakening. Second only to adolescent Simba" and, "Short term goal is a nordic man, long term goal is an NJB."

Wind Arrived

Sun strikes my foot
wind arrived last night
sweeping leaves' blush to cheekbones

you emanated October
palms pressed to my face's flush
limbs enshrining my hope and still

his eyes on mine muck
up golden hours twice
buried now when that longing
unmatched bellowed as prayer in
bone my sinew grew mightier
careening through glowing afternoons to his
body who never felt
the same but his eyes see mine and I
am nineteen and enamored-
perennially.

Your lips
pressed a softer sacrament into
my throat

I feel the fire of you-
less blue, enduring
tended by held hands

I feel the flame of you-
firewood ribs, kindling fingers I feel

your blaze and I can't
taste it yet.

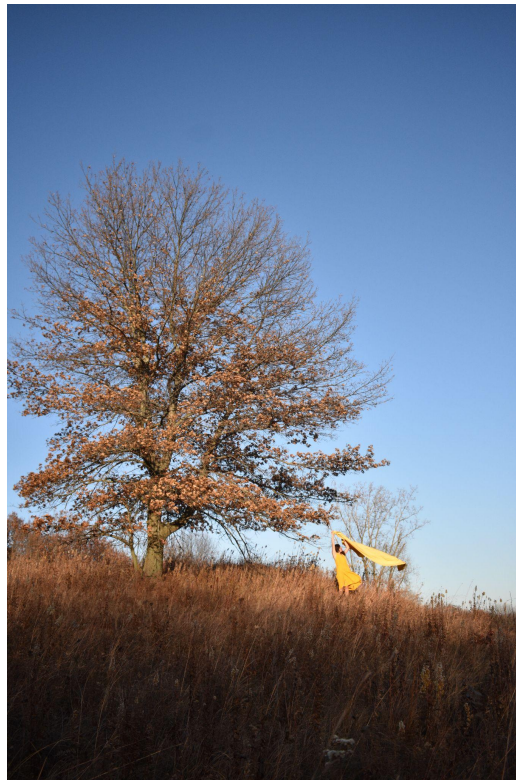
Prayer

in another life we
could write off dust as prayer
my heart doesn't stop after
I've no longer met you.

Primeval

The fever of my body's wanting will subsume
all your switchgrass-aster-laden
prairies I present pastoral I am in fact

primeval I've shirked my prancing,
I am tearing through your
meadows I am wildfire I am roaring and
not like a lioness that elegant deposit of female prowess I am
ripping goldenrod with bleeding cuticles I am devouring the milkweed dipping
it in the red blaze I am cutting my feet's callus on burdock root I am drinking the crimson of it not
raspberry nor rose colored, ax-red I am pouring
hot ash down my throat blush blazing atop all my muscles I am
not waiting for the pace of growth I am alighting
lighting everything I am scorching songbirds burning bison you've exploited your desires I am
scintillating every blade of
mine.



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I remember how my body felt as I ran by the river-

Lemon leaves, crimson lights
a hope my body could never
consummate as wind razed and
soured the space between ribs

October sun blazing biceps
I am an artery of this light

November's pervasive night kindling
rib cage's sparks,
snowflakes melting into skin
so alive in this dark

radiant December gleams off ice, I almost
slip, the light steadies my face.
The sky holds the kind of blue I pray
to

footfalls haunted at their hinge
by overcast horizons, fumes sequestered in
snowbanks

shirking off sleeplessness and smoke.
Sprinting
through setting
suns

drenched by a blue sky's upheaval.
Pink warming my skin,
body aglow as it sprints
through raindrops

felt as I ran by the river,

I remember how my body

snow falling in eyes,
seeping into sneakers.
Heart pumping April
through pores
green swelling from crevices

led by
honey light longing and
feet's ceaseless meeting of soil

beneath
uncleaved clouds.
Chest reclaiming itself as
I carve my light through the evening

wanting quaking every muscle,
gleaming blue rushing beside and
inside me

calousses and calves moonlit.
Ligaments tugging
at dusk, exalting
each night

“C.S. Lewis called it, ‘that unnameable something, desire for which pierces us like a rapier at the smell of bonfire, the sound of wild ducks flying overhead, the title of The Well at the World’s End, the opening lines of ‘Kubla Khan’, the morning cobwebs in late summer, or the noise of falling waves.’”

-Susan Cain, Bittersweet

I’ve spent a lot of time staring at different iterations of the Hudson River. Silver current interspersed with emerald branches during summer storms. Achingly blue on clear days. Lilac-colored in the sunset. I’ve watched geese beckon and eagles soar and tides overtake beaches, I’ve smelled brine and heard sloshing and pedaled my feet relentlessly along paths and it never quite does what I’m waiting for it to.

Floodplains

Would you come tell me something? Because I didn't cradle them, because I rushed, because I was raging, and broad-shouldered, they thought I must be a man. You will be of my bank before I can blink, but I don't mind, I am lonely. Please, come, tell me about your infatuations, your worn boots, the cherry syrup in your coffee drink. Gaze at me from behind ice-beaded eyelashes, tell me about your awe of time, how many miles you ran, what you learned today. Tell me how food melts on your tongue, how it feels to wrinkle, step on hardwood.

I write with my whole body, sky as paper, riverbanks as pen, alluvial plains spurting out, oxbows meandering away. How do you bear it, the skin containing you? How do you not burst? How can you unload without floodplains?

I am so deftly made metaphor, and I don't think you are listening. I am not just a deposit of your desire. What you are reading is one point on one side of one face of a polyhedron, I don't want to be grasped by you, I just want you to see how you see what you want to see.

Do you love me or your idea of me? Do you love me or your love for me? Your heartache is stone, it will be sand soon. I am not so different from you, I am yearning to be held, to behold. Almost every day I see you, careening like me. To listen to whirling leaves, stammering snow, unfurling buds—the symphony astounds anew all the time.

You've described me as "gleaming," "ancient," "blue," I could go on. Adjectives are bottles, I run through all of them.

Locks and dams

I am pouring jugs of steaming water upon
my face until hair clings
to my cheeks like it loves
me. With each drop
down the drain my skin sheds
another blazing October I am learning
to relinquish
stale infatuation. The river's meander coalesces
into my calves I am learning to forget
desire that rushed through lines
in my palms,
flooded ribs'
banks I am learning to unclench a
yearning I prayed
to.

For an era it blazed
my arteries- the idea
of our bodies enmeshed, our veins
tributaries of a common lake.

I drenched myself in the light I thought
we could concoct. Your salinity's vestiges still
dwell in my elbows'
creases I've trekked beyond
the freshwater ponds they all covet
I've bathed where you run brackish. If you cared
about me how your words said
you could've ceased allowing your eyes to pour
into mine like they could almost

love me.

You've never gotten your eyes
under lock so
it nags at naked ankles even now

undulating through creeks it pools in echoes of rivulets left
by past Springs' storms that frigid,
lukewarm remembering of how much

my love dammed
itself on the thought of you.



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*"I forget about you long enough / to forget why I needed to"*²⁵

1751

Hannah occasionally embarks on elaborate, often nighttime, baking projects. This weekend she made soft pretzels. Several weekends ago, she was baking apple crisp. Her first step to the apple crisp was making the streusel, or, as she deemed it, a “hat for the crisp.” She turned it into a song, whose chorus goes, “hat for the crisp, hat hat for the crisp. Hat for the crisp, hat hat for the crisp,” and which gives way to an endless amount of verse possibilities, such as, “hat for the crisp, and my rhymes are outrageous, hat for the crisp and covid is contagious.” We riffed off each other in the kitchen, and have been singing this song ever since.

I can’t even recall how this arose, but yesterday, over breakfast, Hannah and I began talking to each other in couplets, and referring to each other as fellow brothers in a monastery. In our scenario, Hannah is the wayward monk, and I am a more pious one. Hannah enlightens me to the ways of the world, of flesh and sin, while I struggle with my faith. An example of an exchange would be: “Oh brother Ella, do you not desire / the touch of a woman who could light your fire?” “Oh brother Hannah, I do, but of course / although I yearn so, it is the Lord’s word I endorse.” We carried on like this for forty-five minutes, laughing all around the living room, dining room, and kitchen, and resulting in Hannah being very late for class. We picked it right back up when I walked in the door last night.

Hannah is also a superb freestylist. Give her three words, and she is off. One night, post-dinner, we gave her the words “boobs,” “bowl,” and “Ibiza.” She proceeded to go on for several minutes without stopping, detailing a vacation and a dramatic love affair instigated in an Italian restaurant. Gabby brought out the cajon, kept the beat.

Over winter break, Hannah was close by visiting her grandparents, and so she came over to visit. Over tea in the little breakfast nook in my kitchen, my mom requested for Hannah to freestyle for her. Hannah, having just met my mother not fifteen minutes ago, obliged, with the words “Louie” (our dog), “Alaska” (because I want to visit Alaska someday), and “Buddha” (there is a little stone Buddha in our kitchen, present from my grandmother to my mom). My mom could not stop laughing. We then told her of our monastery-brother-schtick, and proceeded to exchange a few remarks. Delighted, she asked, “Sooo- do you think I could be brother Cathy?”

Sore Muscles

Forty plaid shirts at the apple orchard among patchwork leaves
amidst gray-gold sky we sung to birch as we began to leave.

Did lyrics rasped whisper omens to you as red lights blued?
My belly's autumn fire clung and lurched, seeping from leaves.

Atop my desk a plant named for my hometown glows with new green
blinking awake for that litany rung to Earth, tender leaves.

I've scoured my pores of this ash in your wake, but not in dreams
sore muscles intuit how this goes, strung on mirth, can't quite leave

this reservoir of light, cheeks pinking, twenty-one forever
carved thighs that run from dearth could glean some knowledge, honey- leaves.

Couldn't discover myself in the unmeeting of your eyes
my body's always known what's stunned us first roars even as it leaves.

And you by the fire, cradled by nightmares, native to breeze
I unearthed your eyes, cunned by their worth, as wind waltzed with rogue leaves

that couldn't realize a home, and I found mine as they flew
sung to goddesses scorching with doubt, sunned by Earth and her leaves

On a lake

I discover myself at the lake each time
in gray lilac light
in pines and oak

how did we find each other
how will we continue?

We've excavated our souls' gleams
raw on polished wood and I've
seen sufficient bent fork tines, shattered porcelain
been the plate picked at and pushed aside
my stomach stirs for re-earthing

and I've
banned motorboats from all my reservoirs
you are welcome by canoe or foot
through the mangroves and the brambles
we can rest our toes in sun-drenched blue

and I've
loved with myriad iterations of my heart
but not once with the one your palm pressed upon
can you make me light as sun on a lake?

“The individual is a member of a community of interdependent parts.”

-Aldo Leopold, A Sand County Almanac

Nine years ago, my brother really wanted to get a dog, but I didn't, because I knew that I would love the dog and that the dog would die. My mother told me that it is better to love and lose than never love at all. I still didn't want us to get a dog. We got one anyway.

His name is Louie, often called Louie D., or Louie Deutchman, or Shoopster, or Shoopalooa, or King Louie, or Lululemon. He thinks my bed is his, and he is probably right, because he sleeps on it not just during Thanksgiving and winter break and scattered weeks in the summer.

At some point post-dinner time, Louie will bound or trudge up the stairs. He'll jump onto my bed and flop, often upon my pillow.

For years, when it was time for me to sleep or to meditate, I would lift him from slumber, plop his still unsteady-from-sleep paws upon the floor, and exile him from the room. He took up space, he snored. And, most significantly, I liked to have my door closed while I slept. But my door closed the opposite way, so that Louie could let himself in but not out, and so invariably, either in the middle of the night or earlier than I wanted to be awake, my commitment to my door's closure means Louie's barking would wrench me from sleep. For these reasons, I kicked him out each night. I'd barricade my door with my hamper and desk chair so he could not come in. For this reason, my door is marred with scratch marks and the echoes of howls.

This past winter break, Jeffrey became enchanted with Louie over facetime, and felt appalled by my Louie exile. It's the most outraged I've witnessed him, eyes distressed, imploring me to let Louie remain on my bed, detailing the injustice. My mother did the same, one night, as I tried to plop a sleepy Louie upon the blueberry sheets of her bed. I relented.

For the rest of break, I'd scooch Louie off of the pillow, but not off the bed. I'd leave my door open a crack so he could leverage his way out. We slept nestled together. I didn't want to sleep any other way.

Questions About Grief

- If grief is a vessel, can you hold me?
- Do we forget the hard things or the beautiful things or some kind of combination?
- How long will my mom be sad? Forever? And is there something beautiful in that?
- Is latching onto improbable hope inevitable?
- How much is this aging my indefatigable grandfather?
- Where does all of the love go?
- How much can Gigi sense, as I sit beside her hospital bed? I have a sense she can sense all of it
- Is there rest or nothing and can those be the same?
- How do people know that it's lovely to send cold cuts and fruit in addition to the desserts?
- How long will the roast beef last?
- Where does all the art go?
- Does it rework something inside of our chests?
- Will Grandpa throw away or give away all the slip covers for the couches he just picked up from the dry cleaner that he never liked anyway, not in principle nor in practice?
- How do you live without somebody you've lived with for fifty-nine years? Who you've loved since you were sixteen?
- What will my toddler cousins lose, unable to grow up with her?
- What will my grandfather eat? Will he live in this vibrant apartment alone?
- Will he love someone again?
- How can we write an obituary for somebody who is still here?
- How much peace is there, if any?
- Why can't I make it better?
- How will we ever do Thanksgiving again?
- Will Mom have a stroke when she's in her early eighties, like Gigi and like Gigi's mom? And how will I possibly get through? Will I have a daughter who can hold me? Will I have a stroke when I'm in my early eighties? Will my daughter have a daughter who can hold her?
- Will she be happy to be home for her last days? Will it deliver some peace?
- What does it mean, my brother was born on her birthday, she died the day after mine?
- How deeply do the fissures in Grandpa's throat ache?
- How to articulate the heartbreak of Grandpa on the phone with insurance, to take Gigi off of it? For him to tell them she is about to die? For him to have to call back when the line gets disconnected, to say it again?
- Is letting go a chore or a prayer?
- Where does all of the love go?

1751

I missed school last week because I was spending my grandmother's last days with her. She'd fallen and broke her hip two weeks ago, and had a stroke a few days later. Although she had not been in excellent health prior to these issues, it felt sudden. I can't comprehend it, the trajectory of her asking me about school and what my friends were up to on a Thursday, her death ten days later. My friends checked in on me the whole time I was away, texting and calling and sending pictures of their Halloween costumes (they'd all dressed up as Clue characters), wishing me a happy birthday (my grandmother died the day after my birthday). Unprompted, Julia texted me asking what time my flight was, saying she could pick me up from MSP. Lola had already been planning on it, and she came with a birthday card and a muffin.

I'd felt physically unwell for the past week. Exhausted and headachey and most of all, a profound sense of all not being well. But I deplaned in Minnesota on Halloween and felt the fibers of me alight, grow lighter.

We got home and the ice cream sandwich pillow we hide around the house as a joke was lying right on my bed. (There is a Baby Groot stuffed toy that we hide as well. The first time Jeffrey came over, somebody had hidden Baby Groot underneath my pillow).

My bones had felt too heavy to run for a few days before I arrived back. I went for a run through the golden hour, catching the dregs of the leaves and the light. People sat beside front yard firepits with candy. Lola made tomato soup and grilled cheese and we all sat and ate together.

A couple weeks ago, I asked Lily if she would cook for me for my birthday present. She agreed. The day before I got back, she texted asking if I would be home and free at 8pm. I was wondering if maybe she was going to surprise cook for me then. I asked Julia, and she said no.

I eventually got myself in the shower. I got out of the shower and I heard Phoebe's voice, which was funny, because Phoebe doesn't live with us, and usually when she's over she's upstairs. Spread out on our table were three kinds of fancy cheese, honey comb, apple cake with candles in it, crackers, and wine. They all sang happy birthday to me.

“But the terrible beauty of transience is much greater than we are.”

-Susan Cain, *Bittersweet*

This past summer, before returning to college, I cried twice about the passage of time, and teared up a handful of others. On the deck of my family’s house, dark already encroaching upon the Hudson River, my body trembled as my mom held my hand. My mother, tears echoing back through her eyes, told me she used to cry about time, too. On the first day of third grade, she cried to her mom, bemoaning the notion that there would never be another day of third grade, not ever. We had just been with my grandparents and cousins and uncle and aunt on vacation, and it was special, and I knew it wouldn’t last.

Julia, Lily, and Phoebe and I went to a Hanukkah party in South Minneapolis on Sunday, the first night of Hanukkah. I wore slightly too large corduroy pants that were my grandmother's and a purple shirt that was my mother's (my wardrobe now consists of Gigi's pants and Mom's sweaters). It was about 5 degrees outside. The party was held at a church (classic) and I was meeting the others there, because they were coming from community sing caroling, and I was coming from my run. I got there first, and my anxiety-fuelled instinct was to stand in the lobby until they got there, but I told myself that wasn't values-based and instead ambled around, peering at the sufganiyot and beeswax Shabbat candles and handcrafted mugs, apple strudel and vegan desserts and the modern-day yenta matchmaking service and everybody's beautiful curly hair. I bought my mother a print of lilacs with a Mary Oliver quote that said; "I tell you this to break your heart, by which I mean only that it break open and never close again to the rest of the world."

They arrived. The band was playing klezmer music, and some people were dancing, but not many. Julia said, "I want to dance! Let's dance," and took my hand, reassuring me that she could lead when I told her I didn't know what I was doing. And we danced, spinning in circles and limbs over shoulders and some fumbling on my end as my smile soared open my cheeks, our hair bouncing, right in the center of the room. I felt people's eyes on us. More people began to dance. She spun me in and dipped me. I felt like that scene in Greta Gerwig's *Little Women*, where Jo and Laurie are bounding around the porch outside of the party. I felt the aliveness thrumming into my body's extremities.

Things I Appreciate About My Body, To Remember When I Feel Aggravation Towards It

- My skin. It's clearness. How it glows
- My rosy cheeks I used to not be able to stand
- My calves
- The deep brown of my hair, how it gained its thickness back, the shades of coffee and toffee in it
- The chestnut of my eyes, how I can look myself in the eyes in the mirror, how I can look others in their eyes
- The high-set of my breasts
- My thick eyebrows, the way they complete my face
- My butt
- All the sun that my skin has soaked in
- The stress fracture in my metatarsal for healing so I can run again
- The way my neck looks with my hair swept back
- My mind-body connection, the unclogged conduit running through all of me

“Poignancy, she told me, is the richest feeling humans experience, one that gives meaning to life... It’s the state you enter when you cry tears of joy- which tend to come during precious moments suffused with their imminent ending.”

Susan Cain, *Bittersweet*

Louie was having a hard time hopping up to my parents’ bed, and so my mom bought him a ramp. I feel my body ache at that, both at its implications and its tenderness.

I am letting go! Watch me, I am letting go

like buds poised at the ready,
rain that didn't fall last fall,
lion's breath,
scratchy goodbyes,
confluence of sun and snow,
slow-wave sleep.

I am letting go like you
are a myth I've outgrown,
casting aside a fleece that stifled
my limbs,
I am leaping naked,
enthralled with dawns as well
as dusks.

I am letting
you go like it was never
about you
anyway, it was always about light.

I am nobody's embers
but my own, I'm too tired to speak
riddles with you.

I won't lie about the cerulean navy blue this bathes
my heart in,
that my heartbeat bounds through a pasture it spotted
in the estuary of our eyes,
that when my chest gapes
I will never not see
the way I believed
you could see
me.



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Forever

Honey never goes bad, when kept from air and water. Not only does it last indefinitely, but there's evidence that humans have procured it for a long time, too- 8,000 year old cave paintings of honey collection have been found in Valencia, Spain, and it is thought that advanced beekeeping took place in ancient Colchis, along the Black Sea's coast.

For a while it appeared that the oldest honey was 3,000 years old, found in the Egyptian King Tut's tomb. But archaeologists have excavated 5,500 year old honey, from Sakire, Borjomi, in the south of the country of Georgia. It was found in 2003, during the construction of an oil pipeline, and reported in 2012. They found three types- linden, meadow flower, and berry- in ceramic vessels in a noblewoman's tomb, sustenance for her expedition to the afterlife.

Honey's lack of water, abundance of sugar, and acidity keep it from bacteria's claim. It will crystallize and grow cloudier over time, but continue to nourish you. I read recently that fermentation is one of the most primitive forms of food preservation. Particularly moist honey, when kept somewhere warm, tends to froth, ferment, and taste sharp. Mead is known to be one of the oldest things to get us drunk.

Golden hours pulse with honey light. Setting trees, bricks, and skin aglow. Everything illuminated, striking and soft. These hours ferment quicker than anything I've known. Yellow to rose to shadow to navy to streetlight. Life set aflame, then vision siphoned away.

What do we starve as we sequester honey in jars, as if it could feed us forever?

"Everybody's saying that / Hell's the hippest way to go / Well I don't think so"

Solstice

it may be our last year of days so deep into the dark
can we dance for the thing itself and
its goodbye?

Lead-out groove

Like Daylight

I remember a late afternoon, around twelve-years-old, shower steam pulsing around with 4pm light, singing the song “Enchanted,” from the Speak Now album. This song resonated with me, it was my favorite for a while. It has lyrics like, “Walls of insincerity / Shifting eyes and vacancy / Vanished when I saw your face,” building into a bridge that goes, “Please don’t be in love with someone else / please don’t have somebody waiting on you.” At twelve, with my perennially crimson cheeks and overbite, my hyper-attunement to my changes in mood, I had never been in love, I would not come anywhere close to that for years. Love felt like something that fell upon you when you got older- less cumbersome than your period and more mystical than a driver’s license, akin to air rushing through your hair while biking, to blazing peach sunsets, to the river’s rush. Pangs would kindle in my chest each evening, as golden hours blued, and maybe I thought love was the actualization of that ache, the firework it cascaded into. Me and my next-door neighbor and best friend, Cassie, would sit on her porch as it rained and sing every Taylor Swift song we knew.

In a Rolling Stone article on “The 500 Greatest Albums of All Time,” Joni Mitchell’s *Blue* is third. In their description, Rolling Stone writes, “The songs had such stark, emotional intensity that it shocked the men around her: “Kris Kristofferson said to me, ‘Oh, Joni. Save something for yourself.’ The vulnerability freaked them out.”

Taylor Swift is rerecording her records. In doing so, in 2021, she released the ten-minute version of 2012's "All Too Well," transforming a bittersweet eulogy of a breakup into a vital proclamation of selfhood, the way she had always intended it to be.

In a New York Times article called "Taylor Swift's 'All Too Well' and the Weaponization of Memory," Lindsay Zoladz writes, "With its release, the millennial 'You're So Vain' has suddenly become the millennial 'Idiot Wind.'" She writes,

The power of the new version comes from its unapologetic messiness, the way it allows a woman's subjective emotional experience to take up a defiantly excessive amount of time and space. That was most apparent when Swift played the entire song this weekend on 'Saturday Night Live.' During a transfixing performance, she moved through a cycle of feelings as elemental as the seasons.

Swift used to be unable to sing "All Too Well" live without breaking down. Now, it's one of her favorites to perform. Because, as Zoladz says, "the song just isn't about him (her ex) anymore." Maybe it never was.

But it begs the question- why was a 21-year-old Swift counseled to edit out her vitriol? You can almost picture it- her sitting in a studio with lyrics like "and I was never good at telling jokes, but the punchline goes / 'I'll get older but your lovers stay my age'" and "just between us, did the love affair maim you too?" and being told, "woah woah woah, we are going to have to tone that wayyy down. Take out the references to the 9 year age gap and scratch the seething and just be a little less angry, okay? The wistfulness is great, but the rage and the righteousness, super unbecoming. And the intensity of it, it's all just a little too much, don't you think?"

Maybe, as Mitchell surmised, it is because “the vulnerability freaked them out.”

Which begs the question- why we are so frightened of feeling? Why are we so scared of women telling the truth? Of saying they were wronged? Of asserting their desire?

We are so uncomfortable with uncomfortable stories. We have a societal allergy to forthcomingness when we deem it too messy, too sad, too raw. Too much.

As a fifteen-year-old, I couldn't think of a song more antithetical to my experience than “Fifteen”. There were no “very first dates” and “feelin' like flyin'.” There was a lot of staring at online flashcards about Earth Science until my eyes glazed over, and suppressing mental anguish from my undiagnosed O.C.D.. I was suffering in a way I did not have the language to articulate, experiencing intrusive thoughts that made me wither with shame. This manifested in profound tiredness, dozens of missed days of school, and my parents shuttling me to about a dozen different specialists. I had an inkling that whatever was wrong was rooted in my mind, but deeper than that, I feared that whatever was wrong was rooted in my bones, in the very essence of me, and so I was terrified. I spent days burrowing beneath blankets, trying to numb my fear by binge-watching Friends and avoiding eye contact. My hair thinned. I'd listen to the reputation album on the elliptical- “even in my worst lies, you saw the truth in me / and I woke up just in time.”

Swift, in addition to rerecording her old masters, has been prolific in new material, releasing a tenth studio album, *Midnights*, this October. Swift is known, and knows herself, for her eras. In *Midnights*, Swift, more than ever before, offers herself to us as writer herself, “mastermind,” insomniac, “the problem,” poet, scorned woman, scarlet woman, more than just “a one-night or a wife,” vigilante, author, adult, uneasy role model. She's shed the *Folklore-Evermore*-Era flannel onto the

hardwood, washed the pine-scent and escapism from her hair. She's thickened the eyeliner and snark- there are no presents sent to the "boys who broke [her] heart" in this album. She's arrived home alone from the party, warmth of the wine fading, eyeshadow gleaming in the candlelight, ruminating about everything she didn't say.

Which brings me to everything she did say, which brings me to time, the rusting of blood wounds, the blush brought about by the recollection of the blush, wine stains you can no longer smell but can never not see; to the bridge of the song "Maroon", *Midnight's* second track: "And I wake with your memory over me / that's a real fucking legacy to leave," the breath between "legacy" and "to leave" - memory as legacy, *leaving* as legacy.

*I reached a point where I felt incapacitated by the intrusive thoughts- I'd begun to experience what is called hit-and-run O.C.D.. Every time I passed a pedestrian on the street, I became terrified that I couldn't know with absolute certainty that I hadn't hit them, even though I knew logically that I hadn't. I called a therapist, and began to engage in Exposure-Response-Prevention Therapy, which involves intentional exposure to your fears, and acceptance of the uncertainty surrounding them. I began to run, and meditate daily. I began to laugh again, real belly laughs. I found myself at college in Minnesota, far from home. I danced to Lizzo in the bathroom and talked about philosophy and politics in the cafeteria, and every day I worked to wrest my attention from rumination to the present moment. I fell into a deep infatuation with a boy on my dorm floor, his voice and his effervescent eyes. The album *Lover* came out. I ran laps around the college track before my 9:40am classes, listening to "Paper Rings"- "I hate accidents, except when we went from friends to this"...*

If one was into Taylor Swift discourse and lyric analysis, they might be quick to draw parallels between the song “Maroon” and the album *Red*. She sings, in “Maroon,” “The one I was dancing with / In New York, no shoes.” She sings in “All Too Well (Ten Minute Version),” “When your Brooklyn broke my skin and bones.” In the eponymous “Red,” we have a list of colors comparable to those in “Maroon” - “Losing him was blue like I’d never known / Missing him was dark gray all alone” and “The burgundy on my t-shirt... so scarlet, it was maroon,” respectively. In “State of Grace,” from *Red*, she sings, both prophetically and, with hindsight, ironically; “We fall in love ‘til it hurts or bleeds / Or fades in time.” It’s interesting, too, the shift from simile to description from “Red” to “Maroon” - perhaps that is part of its coming of age, things solidifying from what they are like into what they are. As Maya said, maroon is like red grown-up. Maroon is red left to ferment. Lastly, we have the lyric; “Sobbing with your head in your hands / Ain’t that the way shit always ends?” And the image from “All Too Well: The Short Film”, right after the caption “the breaking point,” where Dylan O’Brien’s character breaks up with Sadie Sink’s character, head in his hands.

Taylor Swift wrote and directed a short film, casting actors with the same age gap she and Jake Gyllenhaal had when they dated (he is who the song is presumably written about). Sink plays *Her*, O’Brien plays *Him*. *She* leaves her red scarf on *His* sister’s stairwell. We see the lovers kiss in the woods, we see the lovers fight in a kitchen, we see the lovers twisted in bedsheets. We see *Him* break up with *Her*. The end of the film flashes forwards to a thirteen-year-later future, where Swift has replaced Sink, and is reading and signing copies of a book called *All Too Well* to a golden-lit bookstore. *He* stands outside in the snow, wrapped in a red scarf, gazing in.

As Maya has also said, “All Too Well (10 Minute Version)” is the ultimate refutation to gaslighting. It wields specific, wrenching details- “You who charmed my dad with self-effacing jokes / Sippin’ coffee like you’re on a late night show / But then he watched me watch the front door all night, willin’ you to come / And he said ‘It’s supposed to be fun turning twenty-one”” coupled with the repetition of its long outro: “I was there, I was there”, and it’s last line: “It was rare, you remember it”, in order to concoct something indisputable- testimony from a woman who refuses to have the emotional ramifications of her relationship relegated to melodrama, to teenage-girl-sensitivity. It is a seething archive of a song, a jolt to everyone who has hurt someone. You are wrapped in the red scarf of a love that’s over now, and *you remember it*.

The boy with the effervescent eyes and I became friends. I don’t think I’d ever had a crush before, not a real one, and my body burned. I’d lie sleepless in my extra-long twin sheets. I told him I liked him. He told me he wasn’t over his ex-girlfriend. We got sent home because of the pandemic. We FaceTimed each other for hours.

We went to work on a chestnut-blueberry farm together. My bed was six inches from his. Our eye contact grew longer and harder. I sang “I Think He Knows”- “His hands around a cold glass / Make me want to know that / Body like it’s mine.” I sang “August”- “Salt air, and the rust on your door / I never needed anything more.” I sang “Fearless”- “But you’re just so cool / run your hands through your hair / Absentmindedly making me want you.”

Looking back at *Red* (2012), and comparing it to *Red (Taylor’s Version)* (2021), you will find it replete with nuances. What one would assume to be the raw material, the decade-older *Red*, when the woman singing about being twenty-two years old was actually twenty-two years old, while bursting

with feeling, is not as holistic as we may have believed it to be, as discussed earlier, with the dilution of “All Too Well.” And the new version, presumably less censored, brings up the point that an album changes over time, and begs the question, which some critics have engaged- when an album so deeply entrenched in youthful feeling is rerecorded a decade later, can it feel the same? Should it feel the same? Maybe the retrospect, the nostalgia, the new love, the haunting of the old love, the scents and scars and stars all coalesce into the re-recorded album. Maybe it congeals into a new work of art entirely, with the passage of time bringing something dormant to its activation temperature. A song called “22” is a different song when sung by a twenty-two year old vs. when it is sung by a thirty-two year old. Maybe that can be part of the art itself.

Which brings me to the song “Nothing New,” beloved on the re-recorded album, absent on the first. It features Phoebe Bridgers, an American singer-songwriter a generation below Swift. It begins with Swift intoning, in a worn, too-learned-to-be-ethereal voice, “They tell you while you’re young / ‘Girls go out and have your fun’ / Then they hunt and slay the ones who actually do it,” and moves towards a resonant chorus; “I wake up in the middle of the night / It’s like I can feel time moving / How can a person know everything at 18 / But nothing at 22? / And will you still want me / When I’m nothing new?”, and a later on pre-chorus, remarking, “People love an ingenue.” Poignant commentary: about the transience of youth, the fetishization of youth, the shelf-life of women. About the contradictory expectations imposed upon women, the absurdity of it. Maya wrote “How can a person know everything at 18 / But nothing at 22?” on a whiteboard in one of her college’s buildings. The next day, somebody had scrawled, “the Dunning-Kruger effect” (a phenomenon in which the less we know, the less we know about how much we know).

But what resonates the most with me about this song at this moment in my life is the emphatic “I can feel time moving,” how over the course of the song, the choruses say, “it’s *like* I can feel time moving,” and how the last one ends with the definitive, removes the qualifier. This mirrors the *Red* to “Maroon” shift, and beyond the semantics, I feel it to be true, I can *feel* time moving. I feel myself “happy, free, confused and lonely at the same time.” I feel myself “fall(ing) in love ‘til it hurts or bleeds / or fades in time,” “dust(ing) off highest hopes,” “dancing like we’re made of starlight.” And most of all, I feel the fleetingness of it all, I feel the moments end as they happen, I know the transience of midnight breakfasts and living with seven good friends, of pounding our dining room table as we sing camp songs around it, of the bulk of my time containing an explicit intention to learn, of long midday runs, of feeling on the precipice of my whole life, of everything.

He kissed me. He changed his mind. He said he wanted to try being with me. And then he didn’t. We were together for two seconds, but it didn’t feel like that. And the whole time, I listened to folklore on repeat as I biked helmetless through rural Ohio. I listened to Red as I plunked chestnuts into halved milk jugs. I listened to Speak Now as I cooked in the old milk house. As Swift sings, “loving him was... like the colors of autumn so bright just before they lose it all.” As Swift sings, “it’s hard to be at a party when you feel like an open wound / it’s hard to be anywhere these days when all I want is you.” As Swift sings, “all that I know is I don’t know / how to be something you miss.”

In a conversation with Maya on the phone, she told me about a conversation she had with someone who feels skeptical about Taylor Swift because of her lack of subtlety. Everything is so extreme, he said. There is no nuance. But Maya and I exclaimed upon how that is the whole point—there’s not a lot of layers in, “...weepin’ in a party bathroom / Some actress askin’ me what happened,

you / That's what happened, you," or, "missing him was dark gray all alone," and that is the whole point, that is the catharsis of it all. Things are exactly what they are. You are what happened, the dark gray of missing him was all alone.

I returned to a sequestered college Spring, covid looming. Fearless (Taylor's Version) came out. I stayed up to listen to it, bawling. I'd shuffle back and forth from my apartment and the makeshift gym through the February cold snap, ellipticalling again, this time in a sweat-drenched cloth mask, listening to "Mr. Perfectly Fine" and "You All Over Me" and "Don't You" and "Bye Bye Baby," over and over and over again. The first time I caught sight of the boy, my friend, again was at a Line 3 protest. Afterwards, I crumpled onto the sidewalk outside of my apartment amidst the burgeoning Spring. Lily, my friend-soulmate through all of this, picked me back up. She has never stopped picking me back up. The lines of "Mr. Perfectly Fine" ran on repeat through my days- "And I never got past what you put me through / but it's wonderful to see that it never phased you."

Maya's been reading a lot of Joan Didion lately, and is in her "let me tell you what I mean" era, and Red is Taylor Swift at the peak of her "let me tell you what I mean" era. With lyrics like, "I'm really gonna miss you picking fights / And me, falling for it screaming that I'm right / And you would hide away and find your peace of mind / With some indie record that's much cooler than mine," from songs with names like "We Are Never Ever Getting Back Together," she is telling us exactly how she feels. I think we often assume eloquent writing correlates with nuance, which I believe is generally beneficial, but it's so refreshing to hear something said so definitively. Loving him is "like driving a new maserati down a dead end street." Loving him was "blue like I'd never known." And that's all that needs to be

said on the matter. There's something to be said for being twenty-two, the marrow of things unadulterated because we are not yet adults, and proclaiming everything precisely how we feel it to be.

I studied abroad in Seville. I donned little shirts and stayed at discotecas until 4am and walked miles on cobblestones listening to Joni Mitchell and kissed strangers. Someone's drink spilled on my shoes, and I called it my "rum on my Blundstones" era. I called it my reputation era. I had a constant low-grade stomach ache from all the oil-drenched food I ate. I missed frozen rivers and the type of people who juggle barefoot across campus. I listened to Taylor Swift albums as I ran by the Guadalquivir river, sweltering, sleeping in too late. There's a song called "I Did Something Bad" on reputation. It goes, "They said I did something bad / But why's it feel so good? / Most fun I ever had / And I'd do it over and over and over again if I could." And I couldn't relate.

In the foreword to 2012 *Red*'s liner notes, Swift writes,

My experiences in love have taught me difficult lessons, especially my experiences with crazy love. The red relationships...The ones that went from zero to a hundred miles per hour and then hit a wall and exploded. And it was awful. And ridiculous. And desperate. And thrilling. There is something to be said for being young and needing someone so badly, you jump in head first without looking... And there's something to be proud of about moving on and realizing that real love shines golden like starlight.... Maybe I'll write a whole album about that kind of love if I ever find it."

Flash forward seven years later, to the last track on Swift's seventh studio album, *Lover*. It's called "Daylight." She sings, "Threw out our cloaks and our daggers because it's morning now / it's brighter now," and, "I once believed love would be burning red / But it's golden / Like daylight." She

knew all along- in the aftermath of red's iteration of love, she knew its scintillating took more than it gave. And she waited, and she stumbled into something golden, and she realized that, however romantic and feverish the nighttime is, spangled with constellations and second-guessing, starlight is perhaps not the most golden of light. On the last track of Swift's sixth studio album, *reputation*, she sings, "I want your midnights / But I'll be cleaning up bottles with you on New Year's Day." And that is love. Not just the drunkenness, but the hungover retrieving of the receptacle that held the substance that intoxicated you. Not only the eve of the thing but the thing itself; lust and consummation, midnight and morning, and not just tomorrow but each tomorrow- this New Year's Day and next year's New Year's Day- "forevermore." Love is daylight pulsing through your blinds after a fortnight of gray December, washing everything in honey, exposing the dust. Love is sunbeams scattering fog. Love waits till each shooting star and 2am has tucked themselves in, love treks groggily into golden afternoons, brandishing mugs of cardamom-laden coffee.

I came back to school for fall semester, skinny-dipping in the green dregs of summer, ensconced in the limbs of my friends, reading poems and about different climate discourses, running through a reddening fall in golden hour light. I started dating my boyfriend. He baked me banana bread for a picnic. He gave me a gift for each night of Hanukkah. He learned the guitar chords for the song "invisible string" so he could sing it to me. He sang, "time, mystical time / cutting me open, then healing me fine." He sang, "something wrapped all of my past mistakes in barbed wire / Chains around my demons / Wool to brave the seasons." He sang "And isn't it just so pretty to think / All along there was some / Invisible string / Tying you to me?" I helped him with the lyrics he forgot.

All this to say, “All Too Well” had been my favorite Taylor Swift song for years. Last fall, when the ten-minute-version came out, every fiber of myself vibrated with it. I sang it seated at a sidewalk table in Seville. I sang it standing on a chair at a Friendsgiving dinner party. I belted it in the shower, with my friends and my sister, I ran to it, I couldn’t stop, I couldn’t help myself, it blazed in my bones. I felt the short film play out beneath my collarbone, felt it quaking inside of me, felt it reverberating from a vacancy in my chest. I listened to it, all ten unvarnished minutes of it, multiple times a day.

I think I could count on my fingers and toes the times I’ve listened to “All Too Well” since this September. I tried to belt it in the car a bit ago, and I didn’t believe myself how I used to. It didn’t radiate from my bones like before, it didn’t burn.

And honestly, that makes me want to cry. I miss it. I miss the ache. I am now mourning not so much a situation itself, but the ferocity it stoked in me, the immense feeling. It astounded me- my capacity to feel, the three a.m rush of it, seismic aches swelling up from my chest, scintillating eyes. It was something to believe in, a great lake for the tributary of my longing. It was something I could always almost have. The turbulence, the tears- it felt like aliveness, like something to pray to. I am mourning the immensity of my mourning.

On the album *1989*, there’s a bonus track called “New Romantics”. It goes, “We wait for trains that just aren’t coming”. It goes, “Heartbreak is the national anthem / We sing it proudly.” It goes “Please take my hand and / Please take me dancing, and / Please leave me stranded / It’s so romantic.” Heartbreak jilts us on the dance floor. Heartbreak abandons us to the immensity of our own hearts. Heartbreak leaves us pining for overgrown tracks. There is something intoxicating in the exaltation of devastation.

As Swift says, in *Red*'s liner notes, "there's something to be learned from waiting all day for a train that's never coming."

I believed the train was magic, but it wasn't. The magic was everything else- the vibrance of that autumn, the soil caked on my palms, the golden hour light blazing in my own eyes. The calluses on my feet, muscles in my legs, breathing in wildflowers. The dawn pulsing through the charged uncertainty. I pray to that.

At the end of an essay I wrote two years ago I talked about fear. One of them was, "exchanging electric blue jackets for sensible black ones." I haven't worn my electric blue jacket all winter.

I have a tan peacoat I have been wearing instead. It was a 21st birthday present from my grandparents. I call it my "Only Living Boy in New York" jacket because I think it makes me look like Paul Simon.

At the end of "All Too Well (Ten Minute Version)," Swift sings, "Cause in this city's barren cold / I still remember the first fall of snow / And how it glistened as it fell / I remember it all too well."

I will carry every winter I've lived in my body. Ones that I can't remember, ones with snow day sledding and burnt tongues from mini-marshmallow-laden hot chocolates, ones where I sequestered myself beneath blankets, ones where I scarcely felt the chill.

Today, St. Paul is cold but not bitter. The record snowfall has accumulated into foot-high banks, ice caked on asphalt, sludge on the streets and white upon rooftops. The sun has been submerged for days, and the weather app hosts a column of cloud icons. I miss the sub-zero sunlight.

I still run up to the boy I was in love with when I see him walking ahead of me. I still see wilderness-light in his eyes. I start conversations, and I am better about ending them.

This winter is anything but barren- as Rabbi Emma pointed out to me yesterday, the maple branches are budding. The trees roil with sap. Lamplight and string lights spill onto snowflakes. The melody of my friends' laughter resounds. Rabbit tracks prance across backyards. Not to mention all the dormant vibrancy- Earth preparing for the splendor of Minnesota Spring, my bones quake with the potential of it.

My tendons will hold each snowfall, as sun softens ice into melt, water to pool in crevices and stream through muscles, joining the rivers rushing through limbs.

This January, my hands vibrate with a light that need not scorch and a cold that need not bite. The ocean vast in my ribs glistens in the daylight thrumming through me.

SIDE B

“Like winds and sunsets, wild things were taken for granted until progress began to do away with them.”

-Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac*

Carpet

Yesterday, with our two-degree-light-laden bodies
sprawled on the carpet
you told me it seemed
as if I were trying to stare into your soul
and I wondered what else
I would possibly be doing.

So far

My longing,
in constant pursuit
of vehicles and honey
settled into your crevices, and-

it hails from the open road
seeks embraces closed to it
my longing launches itself against windows
floors it through red lights
it devotes itself
to overgrown tracks
wonders how many quarter miles can we sprint
before our limbs lie decked in sapphire
my longing latches onto doors with slivers of light
seeping through the grain
it plays
long games with nothing but itself
adheres to the most luminous eyes
around and around.

Honey,
your palms whispered to mine they did
not shirk from my sweltering.
Nestled shotgun in your automobile I am a woman
intertwining our fingers.
Eyes tugging at buttons unbeknownst
to hands, fabrics inherited from
my mother and
her mother.

When we realize ourselves strewn on soil roads girded by
colorless trees and sky, I will drizzle honey onto your lips' routes,
unleash watercolors gifted by my grandmother,
to paint your car

azure, magenta, afternoon sunlight, forest at least
until next rain.

My longing hasn't shrunk, but in this moonlight
I don't need to reach so far.

Yellow like sunbeams gleaming off snowbanks, a gray-clad sunset, candles ignited in each room. Yellow like lights strewn on pines, every lamp ablaze, pouring from windows in shrinking afternoons, warmth from the inside while outside light toasts other skin, verdants other hemispheres' forests. Yellow like the glow our bodies concoct when they connect. Like the coldplay song, honey drenching my tongue. Yellow like life's end. Lust curdled and left, afternoon asters, pills, papers on prescription bottles. Yellow emanating from street lamps, held by the snow of stretching nights. Quintillions of snowflakes intensifying sun, sharper than the summer, mightier than your hold on me. A slower pace, light gone languid, the same burn but slowed by the need to bundle, breath snagged on iced-over nostrils. Saffron, the gold of my grandmother's necklace, bed sheets we've rumped, sunflowers. Yellow like the feeling in my chest when I'm ensconced in my friends brazen limbs, dancing eyes. Thrumming in my pulse, softening in yours. The time of day that compels me to tears, a borrowed dress, my high-vis vest, turmeric staining my teeth. Your gaze's tyranny, you say you don't mean it, I believe eyes over words. Dorm fluorescents I might never physically inhabit again. The beat-beat-beat, petals shedding, sullied snow. Blazing through my bedroom blinds' open space.

Tributaries

Would I know if I wanted you
scrawled in my bones like a code
ferocious?

Would I feel an itching pulse need
like lakes
groveling for rain?

Would it scorch my reservoirs
briny and boisterous
tsunamis in the creek?

Or could it be a Sunday-afternoon valley
laden with lavender, September sun
tossing raspberries, skeins of geese, soil-caked speaker

could it be wilder generations of women whispering
love can love you back
we've encoded that in
all the tributaries of your veins

Outage

If you found yourself submerged
in fall's first fall
of snow caught
unbeknownst between night and November

If a storm barricaded
your car with snowbanks
windshield opaqued
no mirrors in sight

If everyone else's house lay
laden with lights and pine
porch lights rollicking
windows spilling honey and
yours sat stark in a power outage

honey I can't say
that my upper-body
strength would suffice to clear the snow but
I would
find a shovel let the chill chap
my hands

carve lyrics into the billions
of snowflakes accumulated upon the trunk

Lily and Phoebe are in New York city for a week before the end of break, and I went in and visited them yesterday afternoon, meditating on the train ride over, reading Joan Didion's *Slouching Towards Bethlehem* in the Grand Central food court while eating a slice of pizza. We walked down the spiral of the Guggenheim museum, Phoebe drawn to Nick Cave's Soundsuits, to the iridescence of the tondos. Lily observed how she thought Alex Katz' best work was near the middle of his life. I wondered if maybe when we were older if we would appreciate more of the abstract stuff. She said, "god, I hope not." I wondered about the 1,000 plus iterations of Ada Katz, Alex's wife, in his works, about women as muses, about if we can ever distill the essence of each other, even those we love deepest and longest. We talked to my sister on speakerphone while resting on a bench in the museum, and got chastised by a middle-aged woman for our raucousness in the gallery. I saw three women with white hair sitting close on a bench, and wondered aloud to Lily and Phoebe if that would be us. I hope to the universe that that will be us.

Years ago, at the dinner table, my Dad was talking about how my brother was street-smart. I asked him if I was street-smart too. "You have a lot of other strengths, Ella," he said. Phoebe has a lot of strengths, and one of them is that she is street-smart. She is so adept at navigating the world and its complications, of flourishing amidst uncertainty, of analyzing a need in a situation and taking action towards said need, all the time with bright eyes and a breathy nonchalance, it floors me. Last night, Lily and I were sooo hungry, we wanted dumplings. Phoebe's phone was at 1%, so using Lily's phone, she directed us from 5th avenue to Chinatown and into a dumpling restaurant called King Dumpling. We ate paper plates of kimchi sesame pancakes and hot dumplings in a matter of minutes.

Stomachs warm, we reentered the cold. I really wanted gelato. Lily really wanted sweet milk tea. Phoebe said, “let’s walk towards gelato, and if the tea is meant to be, we will stumble upon it.” Across the street was a sign for “Prince Tea House.” It was celebration themed, plastered with birthday and wedding and holiday decor. Lily ordered English toffee milk tea. A singing robot waiter brought it to us, and a human waiter placed it on our table, three china teacups and a teapot placed over a tea candle (which made me realize for the first time ever the connection!). Phoebe poured some for Lily. Lily poured some for Phoebe. We drank all of it. While Lily was in the bathroom, Phoebe and I clasped hands and sang Fiona Apple.

Next, we walked down a few blocks to Little Italy, went into a restaurant brimming with gold light and vast gelato bins. We got pistachio gelato and tiramisu, it all melted on my tongue, the food and the moment. The gelato came in a silver receptacle, we spooned it into our mouths. Lily’s voice and gaze grew serious, she said, “You know- I think this is one of the top seven desserts of my life.”



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Elemental

The heater's cranking resounds,
melody we move to.
Your gaze isn't a warm front;
it's violet skies
too elemental to see

"I'll do anything you say / if you say it with your hands"

“Whatever pain you can’t get rid of, make it your creative offering- or find someone who makes it for you.”

-Susan Cain, *Bittersweet*

After dinner the night before Maya and I left home for Spring semester this year, we gathered to either side of our dad as he played the upright piano in the dining room. The piano was a wedding gift to my parents from my great-grandmother, my mom’s dad’s mom. We sang “Liability”- “I know that it’s exciting running through the night, but / every perfect summer’s eating me alive until you’re gone.” (Mine and Maya’s favorite song from the Lorde album *Melodrama*. One of the only albums we’ve realized that everybody in my family likes.) We sang “Was A Sunny Day,” and “The 59th Street Bridge Song”- “Life, I love you, all is groovy,” both of which my Dad used to sing to me and Maya and Zev as lullabies, stationed outside our rooms in the hallway light. We sang “Till There Was You”- “Then there was music / And wonderful roses / They tell me in sweet fragrant meadows.” I hear Dad’s voice resounding in my head as I read those lyrics, warm and deep. We sang Joni Mitchell, me begging my dad to play “The Last Time I Saw Richard,” which goes, “I’m gonna blow this damn candle out / I don’t want nobody coming up to my table / I’ve got nothing to talk to anybody about.” For years now, I have spent evenings twirling around the living room singing Joni Mitchell until I am implored “dayenu” by one of my parents. We sang “You’re Gonna Make Me Lonesome When You Go”- “Purple clover, Queen Anne’s lace / Crimson hair across your face / You could make me cry if you don’t know,” which Dad thinks is the most beautifully written pop song of all time. My Dad doesn’t sing often. I felt the moment flee as it filled the air, and I begged my dad to keep playing, one more song.

Moments that warm something within my bones, alight from the inside out

- The vibrant yellow of the turmeric coconut rice I cooked, its lingering in my cuticles
- Lily's laugh resounding from all the way upstairs
- Lily and Natalie randomly beginning to sing and dance to "Say My Name" at 11:30pm
- Analyzing Noah Kahan lyrics for an hour with Maya over the phone while I cooked the turmeric rice
- Mom telling me the mantra, "Everything is unfolding as it should" and reminding me to dance through uncertainty
- Leaves unfurling
- The unbridled-ness of Dad's laughter when he thinks something is really funny
- The bounce of my pigtails
- How Zev and I make random funny sounds when we talk on the phone
- Wearing my great-grandmother's ring
- Kids building igloos on campus
- Running when it's -3 degrees out, and feeling like a wintery beacon of might
- Talking to Lily and Rabbi Emma about souls
- Dancing in the chapel yesterday, bodies unbound by anything, leaping in our socks

I can't help myself

I have this dream of you and me and
I don't know if it's mine or yours. In the dream
it is twelve years from
now
and we are in a cabin
amongst senescent
woods.

Sunlight flows through vast windows
our dogs naps in a puddle of light.

Frames on our walls hold
less-weathered
(although imagining our eyes weary makes me want to cry)
iterations of us:

packs and calf muscles bulging in the mountains of Peru
cheeks close in the low-light of Paris
you in a tux, me clasping lilacs and lilies to my breastbone.

You are strumming chords
on the same guitar you played for me
in my sun-porch college bedroom,
twenty-one on my twin bed.

Your voice has deepened, carries more:
coffee and sky, soil and light. We sing
"Buckets of Rain"-

I'm taking you with me,

honey baby when I go

You sing like falling water; me, like a serrated knife.
I am still trying to imitate Dylan.

Our son nestles
into my shoulder, face aglow
with a smile that gets remarked upon by strangers.
We named him
Antonio, after the Encanto character
who looks like you.

It won't be an easy commute to a city
from so deep amidst maples and pines and
old-growth keeps
being felled, anyway.

But I can't
help myself.

Even if growing up means
pressing only practical dreams to my lips
I still picture us
in the sun, honey-

I want to believe in beautiful things

“...the ‘bittersweet’: a tendency to states of longing, poignancy, and sorrow; an acute awareness of passing time; and a curiously piercing joy at the beauty of the world.”

-Susan Cain, Bittersweet

Sometimes, when I’m home, I will get out of the shower, Hudson River’s gleaming late-afternoon-light mixing with the steam. My dad’s jazz piano-playing percolates. I’ll go downstairs. Louie will be flopped in a light puddle on the couch, dust motes dancing in the air, I’ll rest my hand on him. A bright ache will well inside of me, and I swear I can feel time moving.

Julia, Lily, and Phoebe had been going to community sing gatherings at Wolfe Park weekly. They'd come back singing, with brighter eyes. Last week, Julia texted and asked me if I wanted to come to a community sing potluck.

I felt tentative about joining, worried my singing would be subpar and I would take away from it. Later that day, I was walking to campus, and I saw Julia was walking ahead of me.

"Ella, I really hope you can come to the potluck!" She called out to me from across the street. "I think you'll really, really like it. I really want you to be there." She brought it up to me in all our ensuing conversations. I decided to go, walked to Breadsmith to get a babka to bring. As we walked from the car to the front door in the light of the almost-snow-moon, Julia said to me,

"Okay. Now is the time to open up your heart, to be receptive to anything and everyone. It's a space of openness." We entered, yellow light spilling onto a kitchen laden with grain and kale salads, cider steaming on the stove next to a gold-colored stew, wild rice and mango and focaccia, dozens of people unafraid of eye contact. We went upstairs, placed our coats upon somebody's bed. Several people introduced themselves to me, expressed excitement at the babka. Then, a slender woman with a long gray braid, wearing leggings beneath a long skirt began to sing, and everyone flocked to the living room, singing too. I perched on a yoga bolster leaning against the couch. We began to sing, and I began to sway, bodies intertwined with Julia and Phoebe. The song leader paused briefly to take off her leggings in the side porch, because of the warmth gathering. Her mother sat on the couch behind her as she sang, blue eyes gleaming. A fifteen year-old dog ambled around. I can't remember almost any of the lyrics, but I loved them.

There was a pause, we retreated to the kitchen for more dessert and began to dance, limbs unleashed. We were among the youngest at the potluck, and the adults all smiled at us. Julia lifted me up. A copy of *The Overstory* by Richard Powers sat on the stairs. Phoebe had stuck a blow pop in her hair, the pink of it matching her jumpsuit, and when the girl sitting behind her asked her about it, she gave it to her to eat.

Keep this next part

Architects of
beauty wouldn't
choose to chisel out my features they'd
dash out my unibrow
elongate my legs
fiddle with my nose
gouge out my stomach
hike-up my cheekbones
inflate my breasts and
jut out my hips

keep this next part, though, to remember- I
live through and with this body in
moments
nestling into pockets of light
open to everything's
pulse I am enamored with my strides'
quickness the
ripples in my hair
sinews in my calves
tears that
undulate from my face I exalt my hips'
vivacity
whisper ballads to my eyebrows' arches gather
xanthisma for my rib cage's
yearning. My
zeal blossoms through each crack in the plaster



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Things that Ground Me

- Articulating that which I am feeling to the people I am with
- Meditating
- Running, like the kind of running where anxiety becomes fuel, and you just go and go and go and I am alive and I am flying and my body is so, so strong.
- Singing with my friends. Even though their harmonies are beautiful and I feel self-conscious, the release of it, it frees something in me.
- Yoga
- My friends. Their eye contact, their arms wrapped around me. So many times, and like one time in particular when I was so anxious and unrelentingly checking my phone, and coming up with unfounded scenarios in my head about somebody hating me, and Lily and Natalie and Julia and Siri all wrapped me up in blankets and limbs and sang to me and made me tea and made me promise I wouldn't check my phone again, and told me it would be okay. And it was
- Walking
- Being near water
- Sleep. The restorative, eight-hour plus kind, where you don't need to pee in the middle of the night, and your room is chilly and your blankets are an alcove of warmth, and you wake up with that feeling of well-being radiating from your pores
- Writing
- Proverbially and literally opening my chest to present experience
- Not checking my phone
- Focusing my attention on what I am sensing rather than what I am thinking
- Being outside. When the sun strikes the trees like honey gold. Or brings pale light to the fading leaves we trample. Or when the bitingness of the air brings clarity to your brain, or the rain on your bare skin reminds you of your aliveness
- Poems or songs or other words that articulate what I believed to be singular to me

1751

On Thursday, Siri drove me to a women's health clinic in Minneapolis to get an IUD. I'd been procrastinating getting said IUD for months, partially out of fear that I would pass out. Wednesday night, perched in a chair in the upstairs kitchen, everybody gave me advice. They reminded me to take ibuprofen before the appointment, and to drink juice to keep my blood sugar up, and to make sure I eat breakfast beforehand and then maybe also a snack. They said, "Ella, this is *so* exciting, because now you won't get pregnant!" and did a little dance.

On the way over, I ate leftover dates from Tuesday night's Tu Bishvat seder. Siri went into the room with me. As a peer sex educator, she was fascinated at the process, curious to see the actual IUD. When made aware of my fainting propensity, the nurse put Siri in charge of an ice pack.

The doctor came in. I grew lightheaded as she detailed complications and alternative ways of getting the IUD put in. But Siri came and held my hand and looked into my eyes and gave me mental math problems (Lola usually goes with me to CVS to get shots, and distracts me by making me do multiplication.)

Then, in about three minutes, the whole thing was done, and we chatted with the doctor, giddy. She praised our math ability. Siri told her we live in a house with six other friends. The doctor told me my uterus seemed strong. Siri offered for us to get a treat in celebration. We went and got lunch back at school instead.

The past night, there'd been a car alarm going off on the street outside our house. Talking to Lily later that day, she told me she'd kept waking up, and then hoping I wasn't waking up, too. She said she was feeling sympathetic uterus pains, and she had to keep reminding herself that she wasn't the one getting the IUD. Lola was gladdened at how helpful Siri had been. She'd texted her some tips.

Sap

You touch me I am
roiling
I've been brewing in
pastures
steeping on each summit
snow-capped and skipping gold
skin and light,
clouds converge
I braise this beat I can't
clasp but I can
unfurl
I want you
to churn with me
I want you to feel
the fire licking
your muscles, too. I want
Flames are fleeing their wood-burning
stove-
can you feel it, too?
it's all I want
to be,
a wayward vector of heat
casting off iron and stone,
uncouthed from moonlight I want
to flicker in this lilac
dawn I am exhausted
of midnight.
Please,
don't go.

Not when roses backlight my cheekbones, not when I am
hurling sparks upon hardwood and snow
please can our fingertips gallivant? will you
shirk when my blaze confronts you?
I am tearing
 at glaciers till my soles can
 sink
into soil I am yanking at constellations till my teeth
 pierce blueberry skies
 please
 is it too much to ask? You are
 one face
 of my fire's tetrahedron
 my devotion
 is of bruise and snowmelt
 river's marrow and milkweed
 my burning snags
 on moss in every gaze's shadows
 my pupils
flint caught in the crags.
No man
is architect of forest nor sugar
I can feel
sap thrum beneath bark with my
 palms
 I love you. I fear
 the maple latent
 in your regard.
I am breathing to distill
each mourning.

“...neuroscientists Matthew Sachs and Antonio Damasio, along with psychologist Assal Habibi, reviewed the entire research literature on sad music, and posited that yearning melodies help our body to achieve homeostasis.”

-Susan Cain, Bittersweet

My dad has curated a variety of playlists for me for several years now, with titles like “Angsty Teen Playlist” and “Explorations in Dad Sharp.” His office overflows with records. Over winter break, he asked me and Maya, “What percentage of the music you listen to do you think falls into the earnest singer-songwriter category?” It is largely thanks to my dad that the music I listen to doesn’t consist solely of twenty-somethings extrapolating about their malaise.

So Tender

I didn't realize I feared
roses until you sent them to me
in a cardboard box outside
my door
while rain plinked sidewalk ice.

I couldn't stop
grinning as I wrested
off rubber bands,
chopped stems at forty-five degree angles
unsheathed blossoms from outer petals
placed each one in a pitcher-

No boy had ever
gifted me flowers,
and these
glow fuschia and sunset-
colored from thick stems laden
with wide leaves.

I forgot about the thorns. They didn't
prick me.

I rested the roses
on the dining table
their petals dispersed
like a runway.

Lola came home
face rosy from outside's
gray light,
told me it was sacrilege
to keep something

so tender in a pitcher,
so we housewarmed a vase
and showed them in.

One rose
snapped
in the move

Lola said I could welcome
it home beside my bed,
but I decided
to press it.

I didn't have time,
but I opened a yellow book of poems
my grandma chose
for me on my 16th birthday,
aching upon seeing
her handwriting

I enclosed
the yellow rose in plastic
working to uncramp
the petals before
I crushed them.

I don't remember what poem it rests on,
but my fingers rang with violence
rushing to euthanize
light
in its prime.



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Today I am sitting at Dunn Brothers with Natalie, who we often call Parsons, which originates from her sleepaway camp days. Growing up, Natalie went to an all-girls sleepaway camp in Maine. Two summers ago, I worked there with her, where she was known ubiquitously as Parsons, and it's now seeped over into the Macalester realm, too. Parsons was a sight to behold as a camp counselor- serving as the emotional rock and logistical point person for 45 fifteen-year-old-girls, clad in her camp shirts and button earrings, welding jewelry, wielding her effervescent spirit. She performed dance routines for her campers and crafted rings for her CITs, mediated and managed.

But anyway, I am sitting at Dunn Brothers with Parsons, who is working on her honors project in International Studies, face dewy in the morning light. Lola is sitting at a table diagonal from us, working on her's. Natalie gets up and talks to Lola, they look over at me. I get up and inquire as to what they are saying. Lola says,

“Oh, you know, we were just commenting on how if I was looking at you and didn't know you I would know exactly what you were doing.”

“What do you mean?” I ask.

“It's just evident from the way you hold your body,” Lola says. “Like, I could take one look at you and know you were writing about trees or something.” I laugh, face aglow.

“You two are some of the least subtle people I know,” Lola said to me and Natalie. “But in very different ways. With Ella, it's more of your body language and the way you hold yourself. Natalie, I see everything right on your face.” Lola looks at me.

“It's the Hokas combined with the pretty earrings that really get me,” she says.

Last night, I sat with Lola and Natalie at the jazz band concert, where Gabby was playing drums. The music compelled my body to move. Somebody sang and played piano, alone on the stage. My hand rested on Natalie's leg, Lola's rested on mine. And I had everything I needed.

Confluence

I am afraid of the unbearable kindness
of everything you say to me

You gaze at me
like I am light

just soft enough to stare
into, golden hour held
by the river.

Don't you understand I don't deserve it?

I half-believe myself
too brackish to nourish,
a refraction of warmth.
I half-believe
my currents to run
in directions that serve
only me.

Your words;
flint for desire to subsume
all my dams,
thoughts pressed tender
from palms
to nerve endings.

Do you understand? I am quivering
at the confluence of our eyes

“In the modern West, we tend to think that narratives proceed in a straight and finite line: that beginnings give ways to endings, and endings are a cause for sorrow,”

-Susan Cain, Bittersweet

8/31/22

Last night, Lola told me it would be our last first day of school, which brought tears to my eyes. This morning, I sang the lines from Fifteen by Taylor Swift that go, “It’s your freshman year and you’re gonna be here / for the next four years / in this town.” She fully began to cry, expressing her irritation that I could possibly do that to her while I felt glee swell in my chest because I knew through the wetness of her cheeks that she understood.

I went to my ecology class in the science building which I still don’t know how to navigate. I sat in the back, the student in front of me asked if I was a first-year. I smiled and said no.

I walked into the same building I’ve worked in for the past three years and felt every sensation I’ve experienced there graze against my skin.

The dappled shadows on the campus grass are scattered with sparse dandelions, and sparser yellow leaves. Sun glows on my toes, breeze shifts my hair.

9/6/22

Yesterday, I cooked dinner. My body felt tired, because I’d ellipticalled and walked a bunch and then spent two hours on my feet in the kitchen, but in a satisfied, almost joyous way. The windows were open. I could see the wildflowers in our backyard, goldenrod and purple asters. I listened to music reverberate from my speaker, I sang many songs with my whole body. We ate outside, the sun was setting, earlier than it used to. I lit a candle and the wind blew it out.



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“I was reminiscing just the other day” 86

Torches

Green buds glow on dark branch torches
how do we hold each other when fear floods
past bays
streaming through streets?

A bald eagle soars
through vast blue will love
trickle away
when goosebumps protrude
through sopping layers?

when my callouses stand
caked in a silt roiled
from adolescence's riverbank?

I know so much love
crouched lights dappling the sky,

I grieve for my perennial ache
the first to unfurl and undulate
upon everything paved

"The idea you had of me, who was she?"

For the past two years, a clothing rack has lived in my room, holding dresses and jackets. It'd been bothering me lately- it contains many articles of clothing, and I thought my room would feel more open and freer without it. So yesterday, I decided to relocate it to the basement, since most of what's on it is dresses, which I'm not going to be wearing in March, anyway. Liberated by this decision, I wheeled it to the stairs. I lifted it to descend the first little staircase, almost toppling over with the weight of everything hanging from it. I then approached the second, longer staircase. I tried to eke it down, but due to the slanted ceiling and the angle at which I had the rack positioned, it became wedged. I tried pushing it. I tried pulling it. All I managed to do was peel paint off the ceiling, see it crackle onto the floor. I texted my house group chat to say, "Hi so um I may have gotten my clothing rack stuck in the basement staircase." Lola said, "That's the most Ella Deutchman text I've ever received."

Later, Julia, back from snowboarding, came to help me with her toolkit. We used an allen wrench to disassemble the rack, and then to put it back together, while Julia sipped her hard seltzer. Natalie offered support and commentary from the other staircase. Once we were done, Julia looked through each of my dresses, giving input on each one. We tried them on, twirled around.

I have this morning ritual, where I will scamper through the french-doors of my sun porch and say “Gabs!! Good morning Gabby!” and proceed to nestle into Gabby’s shoulder. Ten inches taller than me, our bodies are perfectly positioned for mine to fold into her’s. Her eyes gleam when I do this. “Ella!” she exclaims, and I wrap my arms around her waist, and it is the sweetest way to start the day.

A friend who may lease the house next year when we move out came over with five of his friends. I got up from eating my apple and cheese and crackers to show them around.

Lola came home just as they were leaving. They left. She said,

“Ella, I came home and was like what is going on. So many big shoes!” A little later, her eyes seemed sad. She patted the wall of the living room, caressing it.

“But this is our girl house,” she said. “We need to give it lots of love, so it remembers.”

Yellow like marigolds, dandelions, drooping daffodils, spring come too late. Like lengthening light, sun sparking off everybody's eyes. Yellow like my fear as it visits, the ring around my middle finger, tinging nascent leaves. Like the bedsheets I stretched out after months of hibernation, the way we teach kids to color stars, a bike I remember him having. Like the light that just left a lake I dream of diving in, naked in a navy night. Yellow like the callouses hardening on my feet's edges, the seam on everybody's shoes. Like the hair of the woman who cut mine, colorful carrots, increasingly hospitable golden hours. Eyes I see in every tree, especially birch. Anxiety curdling in my muscles when I can't make meaning of your gaze. Afterglow of my terror, sprouts in the wake. Yellow like Friday night candles that bring me home, yellow like sunset sweeping new green, yellow like ducks afloat in the bathtub. My fingertips drumming my collarbone, unearthing the edge of what glows. Light on concrete pillars. Craving a vastness that overtakes. Sun caressing my cheek as it rests upon her shoulder.

Rain unfolds

from the sky,
my fevers rest
in the nightstand drawer,
tucked between extra sheets.

Yesterday branches brewed gold
tendrils towards the light,
buds burgeoning.

I keep
feeling your face
in 9ams pulsing
through blinds, our
bodies ensconced
in arms and sheets.

Between you and the down
of my comforter, my burning considers
forsaking retirement.

I'm afraid
of the light
you exalt in my eyes.
I'm afraid
of my body's
transience.
I'm afraid
of how unafraid
I'm feeling
these days,

itching to open
windows

as raindrops cling half-frozen
to sprouts,
eyes whacking
brambles.



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