**You and I 6/22-23-24**

Thought this would be easier. Coming home to a warm bed, a slow song, a blank screen to fill with memories from tonight—it seemed an ideal set up. But where I thought I might feel the deep ache of longing for someone I keep leaving, I don't. Though, to be fair, I could also just be extraordinarily tired. It's 4:35 in the morning after an evening that began at 8:30. It makes me giggle with gratitude to know you wanted to be delusionally sleepy with me tonight.

Longing makes short work of writing, for me. My thoughts want to fill the space between us. A bridge is built quickly, but carefully, constructed of sturdy words like hear, see, believe, understand, support, appreciate, and love, always woven together by you and I.

All together, the bridge reads something close to: I hear you laugh when I think of almost vegan cookies, see you bite your lip and groove when I think of a fifth of Beethoven, believe your every word, believe in you always; I understand you when I read your old letters to me littered delicately with doodles, support you as you adventure into new landscapes of concrete and earth alike, appreciate you for making time and creating space; I love you when I hear "Above the Clouds of Pompeii" by Bears Den and "you're the one" by Kaytranada, when I hold a strawberry up to my lips and inhale the smoke of burning weed, when I walk into a garage bursting at its seams with records, memorabilia and memories. I love you most when I'm with you, and even more when I'm not.

In an economy regulated by scarcity, I'm fortunate beyond belief that there is no shortage of you and I.

The last year of my life sometimes made me feel like an island, less idyllic and more threatening than I'd like to admit. It was especially hard because longing lost its luster; I, in turn, lost my sense of longing. The rising tides of uncertainty and insecurity seemed to drown the bridges of my life that once stood dry and resolute. But buried immobile somewhere in the center of my island I reminded myself that tides change and things built with love and care remain. Especially when bound by you and I.

When I think of tonight (which should now read "two-nights ago"), I will think of the look on your face framed by cherry-chocolate hair as I walked in to hug you. It was a small smile that said "I am strong but hurting." The martini-making lesson for you and your family, the crystal cordial glasses, the drink orders of everyone at that table. The talking husky and the quiet Kota. The tears that fell, and the tears that didn't. I will think of the way I kept thinking it was time to go, but knew better than to say it out loud in case it manifested.

I will think of the way we mapped out our life together, trying to navigate the future topography of children’s names, school districts, living preferences, and long-term goals. I’ll remember the fact that we both have cold hands, that we both floss regularly. The fact that I finally got to tell you how I love how little makeup you wear, how you let almost anyone cut your hair. That you're a folder and not a crumpler, that you don't wash your feet every day in the shower and how for god knows why, I'm totally okay with that.

I will think of the way I never wanted to leave tonight. And if we find out the secret to living the life we laid down together on kitchen table, I will love you even more knowing I might not ever have to leave you.

**Hands 7/23**

I don't know if I've ever held yours before tonight.

You said that mine are soft, after caressing them with both of yours. I put down my drink to feel your hands, and remarked they felt slightly worn.

You had just been climbing.

You felt mine again, but this time not with both hands. Like synchronized strokes, your fingers brushed across my palm as they laced themselves into mine.

Sweaty. A heat, bubbling up from my stomach, and it wasn't the tequila.

For the first time in three years, I felt, with all *but* my hands, the enthralling potential of the unknown. With you. I wanted to whisper more, longer, lighter with my fingertips, and I tried to. But I'm ignorant in that language, and selfishly I don't want to make space between us for a translator.

Your hands are worked but not wearied, artful but never ostentatious, strong but never suffocating. They're warm and dry and remind me of home, which is to say, my hands felt at home in yours.

I know you're leaving eventually, and I know I will have a hard time letting go. (I wonder if you will, too.) So here's to holding hands, holding on, holding you.

**Dumpster fire 7/27**

I can't stop clenching my teeth. I twist to crack my neck every 10 minutes, and am met with the same unsatisfying grainy crunch I used to get when I squeezed the paw of my stuffed animal cat. I said tonight that I want to flex every muscle in my body for 20 minutes, punch the wall with my pinky.

But the reality is, my body is exhausted. My eyes are drooping, lopsided, one eye drier than the other. Even as I flex my muscles, they scream out for reprieve. I want to be generous enough to give it to them, but my brain hasn't been entirely in control.

It's been churning clumsily over the taste of hibiscus iced tea, the same color as the earrings you wore that day, red with salmon skin; the way synchronicities occur.

We are in the in between.

I cannot process the vast newness of us.

Music helps.

Looking at you helps.

I'm—

**Positive space 9/21**

The hardest part of long distance is turning around and finding only negative space. Where you once slipped whimsically into my blind spots, I'm lucky now to catch a whisper of your scent, a taste of your touch, an echo of your shadow. My wires are crossed and I'm reminded of how we started, of the toll we took on my body. Instead of wanting to punch a wall with my pinky, I overheat, heave uncontrollably, sink into couches, gaze at everything and nothing.

I'm resettling into calling this place my home rather than our home. I was just falling into the rhythm of showing you the proper place to put our silverware, of asking you to put the cap on our toothpaste, of showing you how to make our bed, of having silverware, toothpaste, and a bed to call ours. And though our goodbye wasn't as abrupt as it could have been (for which I'll always be grateful), that was ours, too. I'm just trying to own that.

I'm sad and lost because I'm still focused on finding the places you are not; in time, I hope to master the ability to find the places you are: my thoughts, dreams, computer screen; your own home and the other end of the phone. Words like reductive and non-words like “uncomfortability,” pictures of camping, my threaded earring, lyrics about what could have been and your river, the smell of pine, and the mere mention of freckles. I'm sad, but here's to noticing the positive space.

**nightly expiration 9/22**

Our trader joe's yogurt expired today and I'm just now remembering that as I typed out 9/22. I'll have to churn out some smoothies in the next two days to use it up before it actually goes bad.

I find myself crying every time I see your face—not usually in pictures, but always when we zoom. When I can see the finer muscle movements, the real time blinking, the delicate shudder of the corners of your lips when we start to miss each other the most.

After we say goodbye, I ache for a soundtrack to long to. I skip most songs, dissatisfied with the feelings they stir in me (or frankly, fail to stir in me.) To be clear, the feelings are there. Heavy, muddy, causing a nearly insurmountable lethargy during most hours of the day; music helps me make a little sense of it.

Upon rereading that paragraph, I think I would amend my introductory sentence to this: "After we say goodnight, I long for a soundtrack to ache to." The aching is primary, the longing secondary.

I have strange pains throughout the day. An inability to work, wake, walk anywhere but from my bedroom to my bathroom and back again. Eli has been [read: resorted to] helping me make a list of things to accomplish each afternoon. The part of me that wants to giggle at this hour thinks that he does so only to avoid hearing about how dismally unproductive my days are over dinner. The other part of me knows he's kinder, far more caring than that. He knows, and has always known.

I know very little, and pretend to know much. But in the towering emptiness of night, the words I flourish are shabby armor, let alone weaponry, for the raging battles all around and inside me.

Better throw some extra spinach in my smoothie and hope I don't feel so expired tomorrow.

**Dam 9/23**

The day started with levity, a new connection, and a clearer vision of my academic future. It started with shock and awe. I swapped life stories with Pamela Schaff, the director of the USC MS in narrative medicine, among other things. Even in speaking about our expositions, it felt obvious that our arcs were bound to each other. You taught me about synchronicities and I haven't been able to let it go.

Afterward, I drove to my Halmonee so I could fix her phone. We shared laughs while I cleared her Kakao Talk data which had monopolized a scary amount of her storage. With a small silver fork, I munched on daechu—Korean dates—and watermelon she sliced for me. Before I left, I opened some packages for her. Soap and cleaning supplies sent from her two daughters. We laughed about that, too.

Driving home, I told myself that I could never have helped my grandma, cooked for my sister, hosted friends and family, fell in love with you if I hadn't been unemployed for the better part of a year; something tells me I should be grateful, and something else tells me that I would have made time for all those things anyways. Maybe not, maybe so.

I'm still hoping to come home to you and Eli crying of laughter while you load the dishwasher. I desperately want to see your black Patagonia duffel tucked neatly in the corner of the wall and my dresser. It's strange—I'm now taking care of my body, waking up on time, sleeping reasonably well, reading, talking to friends, eating plenty—all the things I couldn't do when my depression was untreated. But each night brings a new bout of deep, deep aching. Tears that refuse to dam.

**purple sand 9/24**

I have begun writing our story.

What a melodramatic load of nonsense. We began penning this in our minds and in the pages of our lives long before tonight; what I mean to say is this: with the added understanding of being in love with my best friend from forever ago, I have started to try to make sense of our time intertwined.

I must give credit to you, Annabelle. You have provided me ample emotional and literary capital to begin. This is why I have been rereading the letter you wrote me, which so stunningly reflects on my grandparents’ story as a foreground for ours. For a love bred in late night suburbia under the cover of a delightfully dingy, decorated garage.

I'm afraid to go on for much longer—afraid I'll use up too many words. But know that tonight, I'm thinking of all of us, not just what we are now. And in that wholeness, I will be perpetually on the verge of untamable tears and an unbridled want to be near you.

**emotional topo lines 9/26**

Today was the first day I didn't cry after saying goodbye to you. Crying from sadness, anger, or happiness is not something I've ever had a problem with; the only reason I bring it up now is because lately, it's been caused by a bottomless hopelessness.

Grief, longing, melancholy—these are words that often feel like home. As a thinker, romantic, dare I say writer, I find these are the seeds from which my most potent words spring, especially when sown with care.

But hopelessness is unfamiliar and deadening.

We have done all we can—*you* have done all you can—to ensure I can resume my life in LA with the support I need. And yet, I'm unable to leave you alone in Wisconsin. I know you're not alone, but something deep and immovable is urging me to be near you, now.

It is more for me than you, I suspect. Trying to identify that deep and immovable thing yields little else other than words like I and need and love and lost. For perhaps the second time, I admit I am without direction. Many people will comment on the way I seem to wade through my life with a sense of self-assurance, and this is something I take pride in. But I see no reason to ignore the blatant, though prickly, truth that your existence and the thing we are together—they confound me.

Como told me tonight that this is a good thing. When she asked how things were going, I said, "It's fucking hard, and I miss her and I'm not sure what to do about it." She responded, "Oh, I'm happy it's going so well!" So I guess I'll put my trust in the people that have lived longer than I. Here's to being confounded lost in love.

**Crest 9/28**

I walked by the spot on the grass where I nearly passed out yesterday. Hypoglycemia—apparently it runs in our blood, though I'm not sure it's actually genetic. Sometimes I think my family just tells ourselves we inherit things from others so we don't feel so alone.

I tend to stray from using medical terminology—for most people, hypoglycemia doesn't paint all too vivid a picture. But deadened limbs, flashes of white, head rolling between the cradle of salted hands, mind oscillating between a blurred reality and the clarity of darkness.

I used to liken my depression—and occasionally still do—to the feeling of floating. Of being content to exist forever in that oscillation. Others will call this apathy, that terrifying notion of wanting and feeling nothing. My experience of apathy, of floating, tends toward drowning rather than swimming. In the liminal space of nothing, between the worst and best of everything, I'm closer to the worst.

But of late, the ocean is less about depression and more about you. The way we've pushed and pulled, washed away the markings of those before, but never forgotten the prints they've made in the depths of the sand. The way we've charged headlong into a riptide tearing us in opposite directions and refused to let go, the way you've leapt at the crest of some of your greatest fears and refused to back down. The sea, strong and infinite as it is blue, will always remind me of you.

And yet I seem to fixate the prints buried deep. Like the princess and the pea—even the smallest grain of sand that some stranger moved out of place in your life causes in me an inconsolable ache. I struggle to name it—hatred, anger, confusion, frustration—but know that naming it won't make it any less ugly, unfair to you and the woman you are now.

So I tell you, and you listen, and you open. And you ask, suggest, promise and quiet my aching mind.

I am going to sleep feeling light, strong, nimble of thought and liberated in emotion. This is rare, especially for days of present. I once wrote, "I hope to never forget the inherent privilege of the wealthy," in reference to the richness of friendship. Now, I write: I hope to never undervalue the kindness in clarity.

Can't wait to take pictures together in 10 years.

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**The day per Patti 9/28**

Today I wake, longing for you. I lay with the dog for a while, then pull myself out of bed, throw on a swimsuit, grab a cider (no beers), chips, embark on my walk to the beach. I swim twice, both times making sure to float for as long as the waves allow. I shower after each dip, washing away salt and sand. I read M train for most of the day, traveling with Patti to Europe rockaway beach cafe after cafe through hurricane sandy and a 14-hour flight to Tokyo. She turns 66 remembers her husband asks him to come back for he has been gone long enough. She washes his old flannels in the sink and promises to wash them again if he, in turn, promises the impossible. I am close to tears thinking of one of us left without the other. I pull myself back by remembering that when I read the books your father gave me, I discover another piece of him and a new love for you. Though the sun is still high, the dog is calling and the beach is waving goodbye. I walk home wishing I was holding you instead of a beach chair. As it turns out, the dog was asleep when I arrived at the condo and was not calling after all. Dinner was an in-n-out double double with a glass of red wine. A nap was in order after a dose of honest conversation with Como. You were the soundtrack to my drive home, and I listened to you all night in bed.

**9/31, also according to Patti**

We made tentative plans to work together today via video chat. They were scrapped when my Halmonee called and said she needed me to fix her phone—again. I spent most of the day doing research on galaxy note 8s, fidgeting with her device, driving southeast through LA county. The 10 the 5 Rosecrans La Mirada Landmark Community "oh mama" mochi store back to the 5 the 10. It took 4 hours.

When I returned home, I called Dre to wish her a happy birthday but left a message when she didn't pick up. My Dad sent me a zoom invite and we spent half the time walking them through the logistics of my fictional visit to see Dre and the other half arguing about my aunt's health—neither of which are under our collective control. It was unsurprising that I felt uncharacteristically empty after the call. Three sips of beer sat golden and warm, already having dripped all its sweat onto a coaster.

I ate leftovers of salmon asparagus potatoes pizza and found myself halfway through a comfortingly mediocre Netflix movie with Eli. The dishes needed washing, tea needed brewing, you needed to sleep. The night ended as it normally has of late, with you as my soundtrack.

There I sat, the sole audience member waiting humbly underneath the cavernous wooden ceilings of the Sydney opera house. I strained to hear the distant echoes of your proclamations of love.

I wish the walls of my bedroom could hold more than pictures and paint.

**Sentence 10/1**

Tonight was the first time I left a conversation of ours before its natural end. Like your time in New York, like my time at the bar, we barely said goodbye before we arrived somewhere new. I knew it was a gamble making plans for later in the evening—I'd hoped it wouldn't cut too much into our time together, but as it turned out, I would have given up watching every episode of avatar just to stay with you tonight.

Lindsay has a nose bridge like yours, freckles like yours, teeth and a smile like yours. In many ways I saw you tonight, and in others I seemed to see nothing of you at all.

I focused on your phrase, "I have to do this alone," when perhaps by doing so I blinded myself to all the other words pouring freely from your mind courageously laid bare.

For not seeing, hearing, and knowing what you needed, I'm sorry. For not acknowledging my bias, I'm sorry.

My bias is this: for four months, I felt like a prisoner in my own home, body, mind. It was self-imposed solitary confinement, and my sentence was a slow destruction. As we know, people give my life meaning and light; when I no longer cared to see them, I settled apathetically into the cold darkness of a day repeated.

After addressing the state of my mental health with the help of friends and my parents, I hoped to prevent all of my loved ones from sitting through such a sentence. Annie, when I heard you utter the phrase, "I have to do this alone," I assumed the end of the sentence.

I never wanted to make you feel like I wasn't hearing your whole story, but I know that I probably did. Which is hard to stomach, considering how much you might already feel like the void of life is failing to respond to your call.

I know this conversation has many more sentences, many more ends than tonight's, but I am sorry. Please let me be sorry, Annie. By your nature and the nature of our love, I know the words, "Don't apologize!!" will have already been stamped in your mind. I'm not here to police your words and I'm certainly not here to tell you what to do, but know that tonight I lacked self-awareness and risked hurting you.

Lindsay made me promise to introduce the two of you. She helped me find the silver linings of each passing month in the covid era. My sister was there, when she rarely has been in moments like this. I hoped for more words with more worth, but time without you has been taxing.

I’m confident the returns are going to be priceless.

**Aromatherapy 10/9**

Today I learned how to lean into family—or perhaps I always knew how, but today I put the possible into practice.

On a day marked by another goodbye, there was copious room for sadness and dread and heaviness; I chose not to let that room fill itself, to let that room dictate the motions of my present. Instead, I created more room for family. I filled it with a B3 salad—butternut, beets, burrata—steak sandwiches with homemade chimola, horseradish sauce and caramelized onions and Tuscan peasant soup properly named ribollita and cherry pie and red wine and vermouth bianco and soda and scotch and black tea. And as my stomach grew, the space for intense hopelessness and longing slowly abated.

I suppose this could be summed up as stress eating, but I prefer the aforementioned verbiage. Also I wasn't stressed, so I'd rather not use a misnomer. But I did seem to find solace in the warm creative space of my kitchen.

Leaning into family looked like showing affection, sharing gratitude, engaging intentionally and being light and loving. I even apologized for yelling aloud after I thought I burned the squash? Never have I been so present while cooking.

I credit my family for being kind, asking me about you, being appreciative and patient. But I credit us for making goodbyes increasingly more manageable. For distilling days of emotions into last nights shared in bed. I credit you for being strong, prepared—for grappling with fear and uncertainty with unparalleled poise and pragmatism.

I'm going to bed with pine from a candle, sniffing my pillows, hoping to breathe in traces of you.

**Unfinished 10/12**

I do the things that remind me of you. It's comforting to know these things include reading, drinking coffee in small doses, lighting candles, spending time outside, phone banking, writing, making calls to friends, cherishing my grandparents, and exercising. These socially accepted productive parts of my day are tempered with plenty of self-validated time to daydream, miss you, feel a healthy amount of sadness, and occasionally, cry.

**Space 10/13**

I'll take a page out of yesterday's book [read: meager paragraph] and continue to reflect on the places I find you, on the pieces of my life you have marked as ours.

In truth, these places and pieces have, very quietly, woven together a tapestry of such stunning color, specificity, and scope, it's worthy of even the most enviable college girl's dorm room.

In what I hope is a wonderful progression, I examined the sunflowers you gifted me upon my return; instead of missing the hands that once carried them, I felt the warmth of your touch when you hold me, still asleep and unaware, after a fitful nightmare. When I danced my way around the kitchen and through the preparation of a meal for loved ones, I lamented not that you were absent from the table, but reveled in the idea that you would be present in the future. I smell the wax of white fir burning before bed and think not of the cold and empty place beside me, but of the delicate way smoke scented like you dripped decadently into the air, curling its way around the room, cradling my entire being.

I believe I mentioned to you how exhilarating my return home was after two short weeks, the soul-stirring notion of reuniting with the half of me I left with you. It seems, paradoxically, both a hyperbole and an understatement to note that this was, is, and I suspect always will be, the most inertia I've ever felt. If there were ever a rocket that contained within it sufficient initial thrust to propel it past the gravitational grip of "real life"...my dear, I'm certain we'll be entering into lifelong orbit shortly.

Ruminations on negative space, positive space, have yielded a necessary focus on the noun and not the adjective. Annabelle, the space is ours to take. Yet oddly, I'm not all that desperate to stake a claim on it yet. Americans have a tendency of doing that without care or caution. I'm confident that it will be waiting for us to occupy, enjoy, and pass along when the time is right. But just thinking about that privilege makes me feel whole and alive, wholly alive.