

Love, a Friend

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Love, a Friend

I claw at your door
at the dawn of night.
I'm an animal caged.
I just graze, I don't bite.

I wait in the corners
too feared to explore.
I sleek by like a cat
curiously ignored.

I'm the shadow you drag
leaving the misfortune party.
With people like you
I've raised a whole army.

I keep my voice quiet,
nothing but a purr.
I consume like cancer,
carefully, I'm at work.

I start with a thought
drown it out with disaster.
I take a sprained mind
and I push it to fracture.

I'm told that you're lonely,
Well, I'm lonely too.
My name's Misery,
and I'm pleased to meet you.

Consumption

Sometimes, I let my mind consume me.
I let it open its mouth around me
and shove me in. I let it chew me slowly,
let it roll me on its tongue, cut me
with its teeth, and rejoice in the savory
taste of my addictive sadness. For a while,
it's nice to be *really* tasted. To be
appreciated for the zing of my anxiety.

My scent buries itself in my mind's
taste buds. We both enjoy the high
of panic. But my heart interferes,
pressuring my mind's jaws, forcing
it to crunch me harder than we'd planned.
I fall further into my mind's throat,
starting to see the places I'm headed,
and I want to get out now.

Get out before I dip into the hatred,
the special kind I save for myself. Out
before I hit the pit of its stomach
and I can't see light anymore. So I force
myself to crawl out slowly, coughed up
with the rest of what's purged.
When I get out, I'm always angry.
I always blame someone else
for letting me go. For not catching
me as I fell in.

Obsessive Empathy

Empathy is a strong bastard.
Relentless in its grip, supernatural
in its pull. It slowly pushes

rationality out of you.
*You can't even fix yourself,
let alone someone else.*

But Empathy doesn't hear that.
Empathy keeps your eyes open,
like targets, like flickers

of light, lost in eternal rings
of darkness. You don't just
feel empathetic, you are Empathy.

It holds you, it becomes you.
My boyfriend says,
"Wow. You're creative with

finding ways to make yourself
feel bad." It's funny because
it's true. Because Empathy can

make you pull out your hair,
lie and say, *trichotillomania*,
because that makes more sense

than saying, *My OCD is in my
brain. My OCD is my thoughts.*
It's Empathy in its most obsessive

form. A repeat of: How to Feel
Bad for Someone, How to Make
Their Problems Yours...

Empathy curls you into a ball,
throws you onto the bed,
and twists itself into you.

You lay still for hours, feeling
Empathy eat at your organs.
It starts in your stomach, stretches

and sighs, making itself at home.
Then it sneaks into your bones,
slithering its way to your chest

where it expands and stuns
your muscles. The knot of
Empathy is so solid you

think you could pull it out.
But if you pull it out, it takes
your heart with it.

All the blood and tissue of your
being alive. That knot? Keep it
there. Let it ride with your heart-

beat. Let it discover places you've
been trying to hide. You only feel
bad, because you're so human.

Words

Words aren't supposed to be untamable.

They aren't supposed to run, ravage,
and retreat. I'm a writer, and writers know
how to cage their words. Writer's know when
to feed, coddle, and bathe them. We know
when to step back, when they start to show
their teeth. Writer's know words can be destructive,
we know how to stuff them full of promise.

Writer's don't let their words escape
them. Writer's don't lose track of the cages
and scramble to find which words fit where.

Writers can't get lost in their heads,
not when words are animals, it's not safe.

But my words escaped, and I can't capture them.

The ones I do, fight amongst each other,
and through blood and claw, some die.

The words I have left, don't make sense
without the others. But writers can manipulate.

We can *make it*, make sense. With a handful
of words, we can write a whole story.

The words I have left are vicious,

And so my story will be.

Generations

Birtherd from Mothers who sought
to smoke the flames of ideals birtherd
before us, we dismantled the rules
we didn't like. We walked the earth

gently at first, blending and fading
into preset roles: wives, sisters,
daughters, mothers ourselves.
We built relationships like homes,

keeping the foundations strong.
But we stuffed the walls with persuasive
patience. Sometimes we crack,
and our false contentment oozes

from the plaster, onto the floor.
We smile and nod, hoping you don't
realize what you're stepping in.
We notice our pieces escaping, we hurry

to sponge them off the kitchen tiles.
Then we wash your feet and fix you
supper. We pretend your love is our
religion. We encourage you to watch

the news. (it makes us look normal; society
is crazy) We wait until you're attached,
then we attack. We parade the earth like
it owes us restitution. What did it take

from us? Whatever you have that we don't.
Outside, they tell us to smile, dress up,
have children. Inside, you belong to us.
We oblige with subtle contempt. You hide

the cast iron pans, replace the sharp knives
with butter ones, exchange our glass
for plastic. But we find new weapons
nestled in our being right, forged from

how deeply you're wrong. It wouldn't be feminism without a fight, without you telling us: "all's fair in love and war." We don't misjudge character; we rebuild

it by breaking it, the same way you tried breaking us.

Unstable

I hold my teddy bear in the back seat. Mommy's outside, screaming at Uncle Karl. My sister wants to listen but keeps looking back at me. I can't hear Mommy, and we've been in the car for a while now. We shopped at K-Mart and ate Little Ceasar's. Suddenly, Mommy takes off, bolts, like she's forgotten something important. Why is she running? We always check the cart before we put it back, we always check the counter, and the store is in the other direction. I unbuckle myself to see more. The main road is busy, cars flying by so fast their colors mix. Mommy runs and doesn't stop. You're supposed to look both ways. I hear Uncle Karl scream Mommy's name. My sister pulls me from the sleeve of my t-shirt and tells me to sit back down, "Ignore her." Uncle Karl still runs towards Mommy, screaming her name, flailing his arms. I watch her run into the middle of the main road. I Begin to scream "Mo--" My sister pulls me back again this time with such force I feel the cotton of my shirt rip. She's scared and angry with me for not listening. "Don't look." she says. I hear tires skid, horns beep, my sister crushes me into a hug. Her heartbeat's heavy, I feel it inside my chest. I push against her until I hear Uncle Karl walking back to the car with Mommy. Mommy is crying, and now he is yelling at her. I want to yell at him. To tell him she forgot to look, but that's my sister's job. And she doesn't say anything. She lets Uncle Karl yell at Mommy. And we drove home more silently than we had if one of us kids did something wrong, and were waiting to go home and get hit. But no one got hit, even though Mommy wanted to.

To the Man Who Received My Broken Heart,

Just like the worst of things, I came when you thought you had settled. When you thought all of your demons were well-fed and rested, I shook mine awake. But I didn't lie. I didn't surprise push you down a slide. I said *this could get ugly*. You said *but you're so beautiful*. Haven't you seen *White Oleander*? I threaten you like I can have anyone. Like I have men breaking down doors to marry me. Silly, catching and keeping are two different things. Men don't miss me. Men take a breath of relief when I leave. Men who don't beat women, consider it. Maybe from the 52 phone calls, the apps that send the same texts 106 times, finally answering and wishing they hadn't, or shutting off their phone and making me find them. Attention seekers. Why do you miss me? How could you? I've given so little affection to miss. I've called you names someone would slap a sailor for. I've punched you for calling me lesser ones. You're happy I apologize every time, but don't men who beat women say sorry often? Don't we do it again? Maybe your last girlfriend was crazier than me. Maybe I just abuse you a little less. I'm not a feminist, I'm just mean. I don't stand up for "our" rights. I stand up for what I'm owed. I start fights with the intention of winning, not being right. You accept all of me, and I hate the way you vacuum.

Phoenix

My mother was the rough type.
Not in a handy man sort of way,
rather a *don't poke the bear* type.

My mother never said, 'I love you'.
She expected us to know.
I'm working late, dinner is made.

She didn't care much for hugs.
She held our hands for safety,
coddled us only if we were hurt.

She taught us independence.
Dad wasn't special for leaving,
It's what men do.

My mother only lied to us
about stupid things like
Santa and the Easter bunny,

but never about things we wanted
her to. My mother never cared
about little kid shit. Being popular,

fitting in, having friends.
What do I worry about? Bills.
But she did read to me the nights

she came home early. She let us
have our sleepovers
with the Nintendo 64 she bought us.

One day she drove me to middle school
because I missed the bus. On our way,
she pulled over to the side of the road.

She leaned her head out the window,
It's a baby bird.
She ran to grab it from the street

and carried it into the woods.
His wings were broken.
I asked why she saved the bird,

why pick it up at all.
Nothing should have to die like that.

Dawn

It's a crazy beautiful
sight to watch someone
good fall apart. To see
all their good ways shine

on their way to the bottom.
To witness their pure misfortune
of love, beat them down
so patiently. "People wonder

why I don't leave" she says.
"But it's because I love her."
To watch her love her woman
is a stupid beautiful sight.

Her woman birthed me, so
I know who she *really* is.
But Dawn. She has the name of
a new beginning. A promise

of another try. Another day,
another life. And yes, she lives
up to it. Her woman loves her
in the same way she taught me

to love, brutally, with intentions
of self-preservation. I don't condone
violence, although I become it
quickly. Dawn's patience and

heart seem endless. But she's 50,
so her stress limit's not.
Dawn's breaking. And each time
means less of a new beginning.

Each time, she falls so graciously.
Without hate or blame, and a hard
sense of humor, she laughs
and cries. When I fall apart,

it isn't pretty. I take people down
when I go. My collapse is not artistic
enough to remember. But when
Dawn breaks, I never forget it.

Roses

I painted the house for you.
It's a beautiful rose petal red.
It's a mix of love,
with a dash of our hope
on top of the things that you said.

I painted the walls for you.
It's a color you'll be shocked to see.
I wish I'd be there,
oh, the look on your face
when you finally understand me.

I lied to my heart for you.
I told it, *tonight he'll come home*.
It's better to lie
than to give it the truth
hearts hate having to break alone.

I lied to my family for you.
They told me how lucky I was.
The luckiest girl
sitting home by myself
while my man's out getting fucked.

I wrote a letter for you.
I hope what I say is enough.
I deserve to live
a life better than this
I don't blame you; I blame lust.

I painted the house for you.
It's a beautiful rose petal red.
It's a mix of pain
with the rust of regret
on top the hatred you bred.

Listen girl,

You have one brain.
Normal people have
48 thoughts per minute.
Times that by
batshit fucking crazy,
and you have 1563.

For once,
can you focus on a singular
worry. “One day's burden
is enough for one day.”
You can worry about
whatever you want, all day,
as long as it's *one* thing.

This bullshit pandemic,
it should be enough. Don't worry
about leaving the window open
on a beautiful day because you
forgot the heat was on.
Don't hate yourself for ruining

dinner because you were
playing with the cat. Don't
be mad at mortality. Don't smile
then worry you're forgetting
something worth worrying
about. You have one brain.
Don't make it wish it wasn't yours.

Titles

Titles never mean what we think.
We called my stepfather “Daddy”
but there was a lot more ‘Dad’
in Mom. A lot more ‘Mom’ in you,

my sister. Titles struggled to make sense
in our family. Grandmothers, grandfathers,
daughters, sons, children, siblings, parents,
all were one. We each lived parenting

the other, all while being children ourselves.
We had no lines to cross. We accepted and dealt
punishment equally, without bias of titles.
Respect was given from broken hearts,

not because of age. I used to think you and I
were the most mature. I used to think we
were the disruption in the cyclical irrational,
anger driven society we called Family.

Until we aged and fed into the muscle
memories of the mind. We are in truth,
very much the same. Some days, I reach
inside my throat, digging deeper each time,

not to pull you out, but to let them know:
we are disruptive. Our children will be children,
and we will be their parents. We won’t bury them
in our concerns. Rather, rightfully, they will bury us.

Take What's Yours

I take my daughter
to many churches.
I never hit her
over her head with
the same fucking book.

I never taught her
to fear eternity, never
drowned her in
scriptures, only
because I was

familiar with them.
This was the one
mistake I didn't
want—no—couldn't
make. I can't own

what she believes.
Her god is not mine
to worry about.
Pick one, take it
home, keep it

safe. Or, pick parts
of them, take what's
yours, and give it
a new name.

There are no
household religious
rules to follow, so
she is unafraid

of worship. There's no
devil coaxing her this
way or that, no
disappointed god.
No trickster of an
antichrist, meant

to confuse and conform.

No, she takes what's
hers. And I let her
forget the pieces she
doesn't want.

US.

“I had all and then most of you, some and now none of you.” - Lord Huron

You've held me longer than I
could've held myself. Had

I struggled more, giving all
of the fight the energy and

hate it deserved, I think then
you would've let go. Most

of me, at least. The slew of
pills I've swallowed to shut you

up, should show I have some
will left. You're heavy and

humble when you steal my Now.
But one day, I will have none

of this. I will rip you out of
my being. I don't belong to you.

Letter from my Brain to my Heart

What you've released is causing havoc
in my home. A weakness wallows

through my wires, disconnecting lines
of communication. I don't babysit things

I don't create. Parts of me are the only
things I want to see walk my floors, flood

my basements, and crowd my rooms.
Your weakness is foreign and irresponsible.

It screams and stomps around the same
way you beat, compulsively. Though I have

the haven of my frontal lobe, your weakness
pounds at its doors. I think I'm stronger, but

I've been wrong before. I'm trying
to save us both. The squish of your weakness

should find no relief in my hardwired
atmosphere. I'm not engineered to make

its stay a comfort. Yet it breathes with
a contentment that rattles my logical cage.

You, my fraternal twin. I should've wrapped
you in my bolts, churned out the mushy,

ravenous organ you've become. I regret
I've let you grow; your worries were ridiculous

from the start. Now you shadow my every
decision. I should've eaten what I thought

was an extension of myself. For me,
knowledge fulfills. Emotions die

of malnutrition here. But this weakness
is strong. I appreciate its determination,

but not within my walls.

