



fault line

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ode to instagram sulking

in the dim-dull light of the fraternity party, my hair glows / green. i always wanted to dye my hair green, but this isn't / the night. this wasn't supposed to be the night for anything: told myself i would dress / in a canadian tuxedo like the theme called for, spent seventeen years living / on the canadian border so this is (almost) the same comfort as home, of course. instead i'm drunk / again & telling my roommate, "i like you as more than a friend," & all she / can say is, "i already know." there's a girl living across the quad from us who started / dating the girl randomly assigned as her first-year roommate, & in all the time i spend / scrolling through her social media, i can't tell when it began. in their first / picture together, she wears a jean skirt & says, "don't even know how i've lived 18 yrs w/out u 4ft away / from me at all times." her prom dress shines in green satin & i think / of everyone to already ask about my roommate as if she were my girlfriend, as if i knew / what to call her. moments shift so easily into the next & nothing serves as a life / line. in all seventeen years i spent living on the canadian border, i never bought a nexus. i never dyed / my hair. i never could determine what was green, glowing, light—of course / i'm colorblind. look how the girls look at each other. look how they look. of course all either could say / is, "i already know."

this isn't a night that changes / anything at all.



with you / I'm always waiting for the green light / the white flag / the text that ends all of this / ache /
not being / one door down / sometimes I go by a Dunkin Donuts and / think about that time / you
brought me home / green tea from the one / across the street because / I couldn't have dairy and / then
we drove to therapy / together because I went with / you every week / most people can't say they /
would bring their best friend / or girlfriend / or anyone / to meet their therapist / I had her phone
number / business card / & the promise that / nothing would happen to / you / her office had nice
chairs / I would always sit next / to you like the couple on / a documentary that sits / really close when
they answer / open ended questions / to a camera / april and andy but under running / water / that tea
was soft / it just meant a lot that you / actively got something for me / in therapy, I / always had options
/ emancipation, child services, your aunt / written out on my phone / always the back up plan / always
the what if / always prepared for the worst / we would hold hands / and your therapist would ask what
we / were / and you pretended not / to hear the question / but you never brought Daiton's / name up /
just more tea bags / pomegranate flavor from weis because / you shop at the worst places / date the
worst people / take the first way out / and / I hate when people / say / timing is to blame / because that
seems like a bullshit / excuse to me, something to / blame instead of our / throats and fingers / but / if
anything had played out / a few seconds faster / or slower / with us / I think I'd still be drinking / green
tea in the mornings / and / now we're back at the stop light / waiting for the color to / match my eyes /
listening to lorde and getting / drunk on kisses / constantly unraveling in your / smile, Gatsby falling onto
/ pillow cushions / I just want to sleep next / to boiling water / and your hair / absence comes in / the
most inconvenient ways / and maybe I'm jaded, but / baby, green always looked good on you



you don't know how to drive stick?

well it's like this, it is like come

here, go away,

touch me

go away,

I can't remember how that halo
made its way around my neck, and I
don't know if it's a collar or a
noose, but I – I'm gonna
vomit if if you look at

me

I'm gonna replace all the seat stuffing
with my organs if you don't do
something to scale this electricity,
can you? stop doing that thing
with your eyes

that thing with your lips
where they're all dewy and
and soft it's kinda tweaking me out

what happens when you spill all over
and nobody is there to clean it up?

road trip to Jupiter

let's get high off of watching everything we know

disappear. it's all we wanted.

pop stars like bubbles,

tell me you're made of **disaster**

I'll point to the galaxy

& agree.

let's become meteorites , slamtogetheruntil one of us

s h a

t t

e r s

and I'm left with lungs full of **strawberry** and space dust

when you want to go home, we'll step outside

and watch our skin to

as h.

I'll apologize for breathing.

after you, letting go is the only thing

left.

**your hands drawing my
outlines like i was a
dying star—holy and
broken—chaotic and
capable
i would have destroyed the
cosmos if you
stayed**

give me novacaine & okay, my roommate K chooses every song / that sounds through
our room, & they all reverberate / into our beds & bend the bunks to shake / & okay,
tonight she plays so much green day / i nearly fall into the floor & become every half-
purple tile / with a pattern i said i hated & so she knows she can sing / off-key & keeping
loud like she owns this space / because this is after she kissed me, or i kissed her / (for
the first time) / & she sees me watching her with dry-chapped lips like this watching /
could ever be enough, like i'm not waiting / for her to lift her arms into dance, to kiss me
again / even though the first time she tried to tighten her whole / mouth around mine,
& i had to say, or said, stop swallowing me / & she said, or had to say, i think we just kiss
differently / & hesitated half-bent around her own words like she meant, you kiss badly
/ & maybe everything turns bad & bruised if you imagine it long enough / & maybe
every concept album loses its actual characters somewhere near the middle track / & i
wonder if this is how she imagines me / trying to bite her neck like she told / me to,
even though i'm too tender & tendon to offer any sacrifice she wants / & i say, you
know my thing about necks— / mine never works, nerves & snaps & splits / in pain
when pressed too hard / & every pressing is too hard— / you know someone once told
me the knots felt like porcelain you couldn't crack / like ceiling tiles that double for floor
/ & she says, i still don't understand why you hate hickeys / i still can't understand / &
okay, K only kisses me to reconfirm / what she already knows, that she doesn't want / to
date me & is not even / attracted to me, but only the me / who wants to date her, the
idea of someone / close as the bed above her & half-purple at the thought / of her even
when they know her so well / & i am only letting her tell me / what i already know &
want to reconfirm / that i don't even like kissing her / not the reality of kissing her that
makes my neck feel bad & bruised / & if anyone asked i would say she kissed / badly
before i imagined it again / the anticipation & hesitation / & how everything can turn
dry-chapped for her / for even a second, & maybe it could feel right this time, maybe i
could feel / some kind of swallowing forever as she strip-teases to green day / as she
snakes her belt around her back & behind her head / how my hands could never bend &
this is an exercise / of the sick watching the singer who can move / around the stage
with such grace i can almost forget / i can't lift my arms into dance / i am asking her to
become the idea / of someone, & i am asking / her to offer a sacrifice & i am asking her /
to reverberate me until i am only snaps & splits watching / her & i can think / about
nothing else but her / nothing but a body / so beyond my own / body that i can barely /
feel myself at all / & maybe everything turns bad & bruised if you imagine it long enough
/ or play it loud enough / & play it louder /



self-portrait as my broken dorm building

when my best friend says we should live together she promises me / a home. i lose the keys to my door & in looking i find hers sitting on the lounge / floor. swap. return. someone on facebook says our building looks like nine floors / of basement. she finds my keys & we laugh during dinner like nothing can hurt us. we promise each other / family. we say we should bunk our beds into one mattress & snuggle / for warmth. for the first ten years of my life, i thought *mattress* ended in *rest*. we say when we kiss / girls we can change the sheets so the other doesn't have to touch someone else's spit / on the pillowcase. i wonder how kissing her would feel, how friendship elides to love. i tell her i want / to build a water-slide from our window & splash down through the construction that never seems / to end. someone on facebook says all nine floors of our building have ghosts & ours has / the most. i think of them when she flies home early for thanksgiving & i sleep alone, trying to keep / company, trying to keep warmth. the night after i admit my crush on her, our door falls from its hinges & lodges / uneven in the frame. i have already lost my keys again, & as much as i beg her, she can't find them / this time, not even after i find hers wedged into the side of my passenger seat. as she sleeps, i wash / my hair & the shower whines without pressure behind it. she promises me she still loves me *but not like that*, & i wonder / how to remove *rush* from this feeling. swap. return.

does thinking
about kissing your
best friend mean
you're gay



as we stand or stumble in shame

I want to sleep under skin

my friend says *dress* is the gayest taylor swift song,

but that doesn't mean it's gay

i still remember the dress: blue with white seeds
blown from dandelions by invisible mouths, swaying
& dipping around her ankles when she laughed. & oh,
how she laughed. like the blue raspberry vodka she brought
from virginia, drinking & floating like paper cranes,
pushed into flight by invisible hands. like the grace of her
fairy lights, like the folk music she played in the evenings,
like stripping to her underwear and dancing, lifting her arms
above her head as if in prayer. we lofted our beds & she
left herself no room to climb into hers, had to crawl over
mine & when i fell asleep first, over me, too. *i don't want
you like a best friend*, i told her, head spinning-drunk after
a night swaying & dipping, my tongue swollen with vodka.
not all my jokes about dating you are jokes, i see you
shifting your hair aside when i unclasp your necklaces
in the evenings & think about how easily i could push
myself into flight & kiss you. play songs that remind me
of you walking home. watch the weeds grow & see your
dress. tell myself i love raspberry & blue rhapsody but
really it's just you, always you. & oh, how she laughed.
like the class readings we said we would finish but never
did, watching films in her bed, draped in blankets & waiting
for the petals from the flowers i bought for the dresser to fall,
palms pressed tightly together. like pinning cardstock hearts to
our bulletin boards, leaving notes on the mirror & above the door.
like pulling our command hooks sideways & splitting cracks
in the drywall. she told me to crawl into her bed & i did, holding
my own want against the edge of my chest, begging it to speak
but the vodka stopped buzzing. *kiss me*, she said, & i kissed only
her forehead. i don't want to date you, is that bad? i imagined
becoming an invisible mouth & never again asking what she wanted,

knowing *i want you like a best friend* & *i want you like a roommate* isn't the same as *i want you*. i imagined dropping paper cranes from our window and watching them fall, her own fingers unclasping her necklaces, the fairy lights unplugged & tangled in knots on the floor, playing my own music, pop & not folk like her, taylor swift on loop in my headphones when she wasn't looking. we unlofted her bed & bunked it under mine, creating a corner all her own where she no longer crawled over me. we finished all the raspberry vodka. i imagined everything stopping, no swaying & dipping in my stomach when she moved, no laughing in our underwear atop her bed. i forgot the pattern of her dress & imagined the seeds were paper cranes floating & setting to take flight, but i didn't forget exactly how the fabric draped around her. when she wore it again, every invisible hand pushed me into remembering & in the mornings, she reached for my hand with her eyes half-open, & i bought flowers & lied *these are for me*, & she called me her *best friend*.



Clavicles & Vices

I write this:

shivering ungracefully
like glossy fine china
on display // pressing
you between the pages
of my books for
safe-keeping // the restless
name on my tongue tastes
like cough-syrup // lemon
and honey and bitter
and waiting // at the mouth
of a comfortless winter //
wine-sick with thoughts
of your freckled clavicles
and vices // White Russians,
being right, and dozy
clichés // your scent lingers
on my skin for nights
ongoing // Chantilly lace
draped over the household
mirrors // limerence
becomes obsession— your
whole being carved
into me.







self-portrait as 17 / too late

i am always the one

forgetting / to love both of

us / my

zombie desire is green and plush and

full / (of) bullet holes

thrown away cotton balls anatomy / (of) a teddy bear

covered in wet marks / summer crucifies another

cicada on her spine every time she takes it on her

back talk behind my

back tell my dad i'm in love with a

white girl / summer / grows a pair (of)

teeth / between / her legs

and with every warm act / (of) love / the blood

dries faster than it spills

kissing her neck / wringing my hands / dry

swallowing my lunch in the bathroom / lying beneath

the summer / a sleeping animal

i don't want to move because i don't want it to leave

but i am always forgetting that i am the only one / i am

always

the

one i am always the only

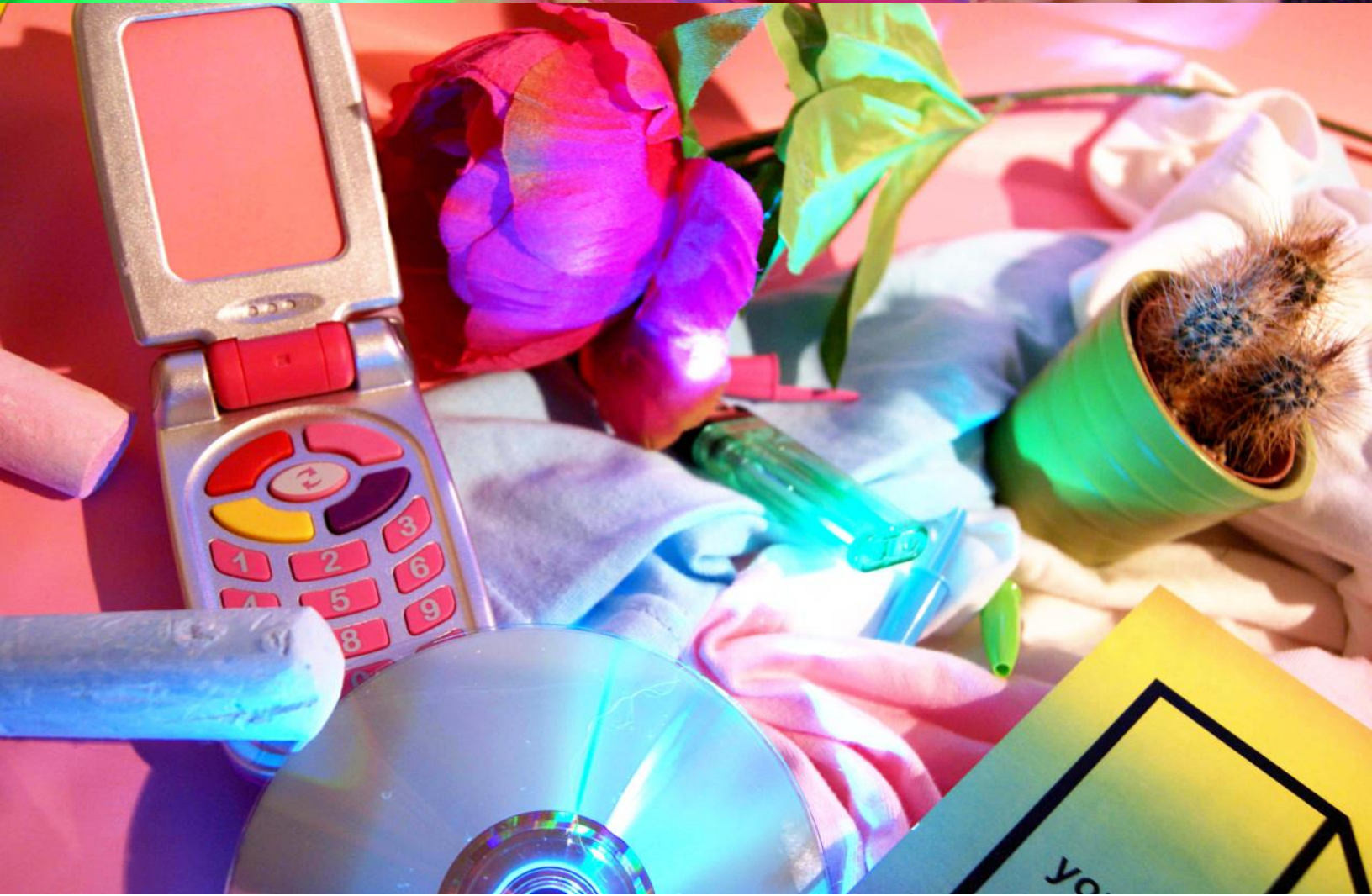
one the only

one is the only









so I don't know you anymore.

I like fake tattoos cause their
bright and sugar sticky and
don't hurt a bit. And when
you're in preschool and
clumsy with your rattle toy
heart when you trip and
scrape like a baby deer,
somebody with warm hands
helps you stick them on with
a sponge that makes squish
sounds. But they're fake, and
they wash off easy with time.
Maybe that adds some insight
to the situation.

I'm the somebody now. Even
if my warm somebody hands
are shaking cold.

It's alright alright alright. And
the sun is shining somewhere,
but maybe not with me. And
it's alright alright alright. And
it's gonna be.

now i
new
not



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now i think it
we will make
want to, i'd



from: jua
to: @web
re: relationships

somewhere in my adolescence
i split into two people:
online and offline.
i'm not sure which of us is the real
one.

you were welcoming, you freed me
of the boundaries set by my
regular life.

you look cold and angular but warmth
unexpectedly emanates from your
surface.

i can have you with me wherever i go.



isn't that true intimacy?

or am i just kidding myself? did you let me
explore too much too soon, was i exposed to
evils beyond my understanding?

did you break me?

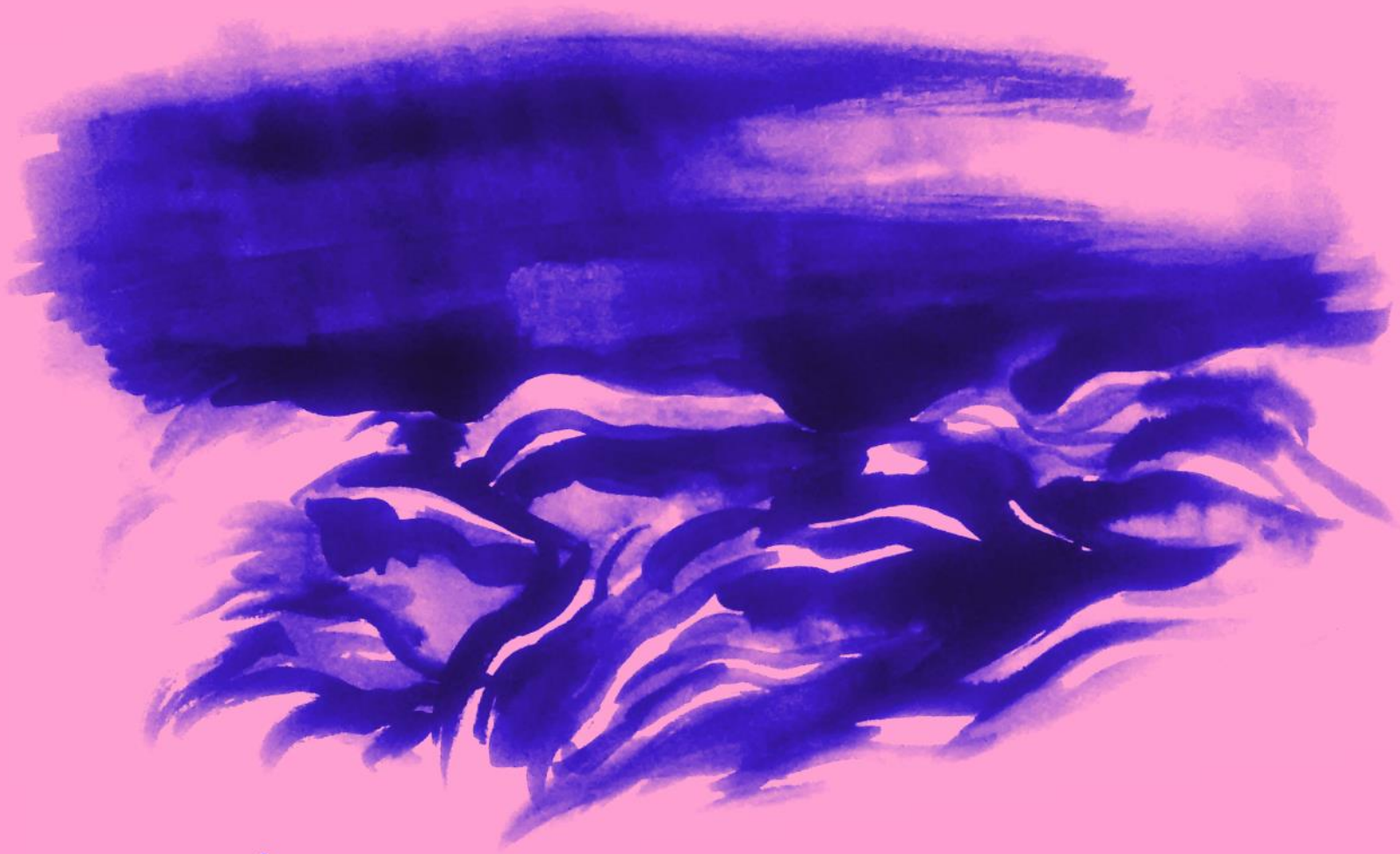


this isn't the end. i still love you.

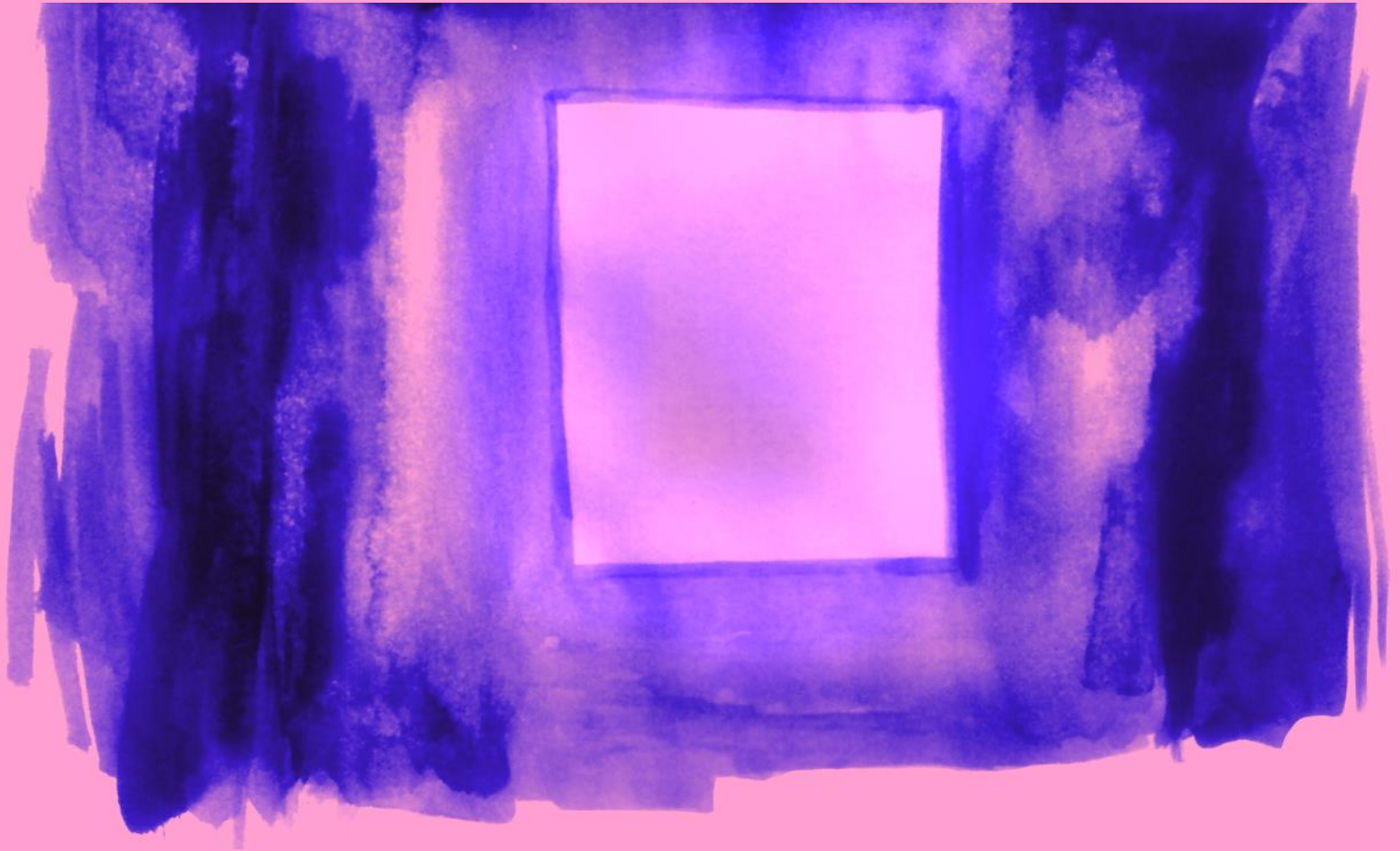
i think we might just need some time
apart.







the first time i knew you were the most
beautiful piece of art in the universe



and i'd never be able to replicate you

Oil Spill

I, the ocean, will open

my glistening arms to you

hold as much of you as I can

for a few forevers

then slip back into my body.

you, the shore, will

welcome the change

embrace it.

neither of

us know how many

forevers

we have left

until I become oil,

and you become

a wasteland.

you will die quickly,

and I will become untouchable.



Jinxed

I haven't written,

newspaper clippings

decorate my crooked white walls

and I shake; waiting for the milky pink quartz

birth control

to hit me
like a sparrow

on glass.

does it start with Salem?

or with blood;

tell your preacher it wasn't mine

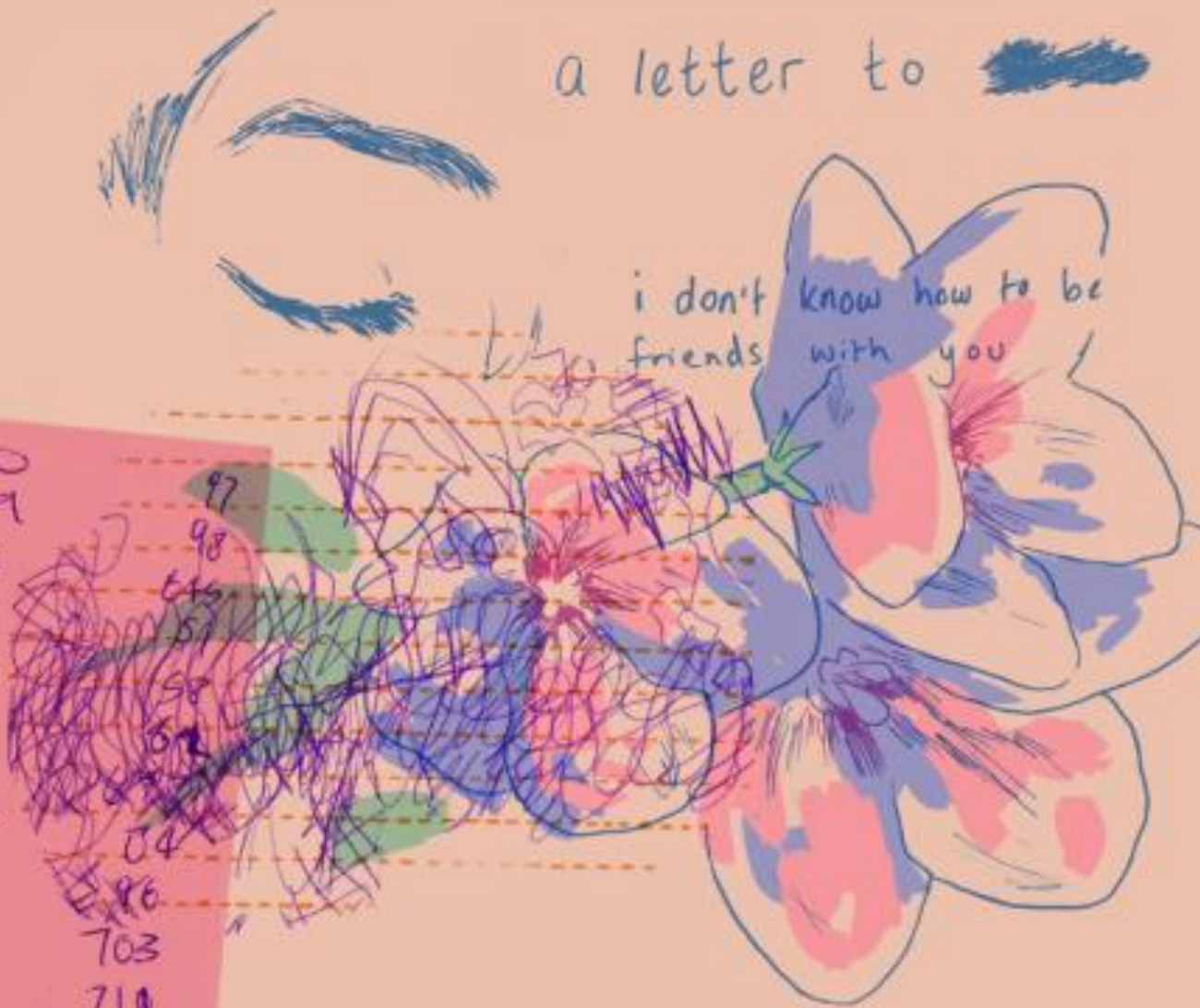
& I washed it away like Christ.



a letter to ~~_____~~

i don't know how to be
friends with you

448	520	97
449/50	529	98
452	533	645
457	541	57
464	563	58
469	568	59
05	575	04
09	581	86
15	585	703
17	590	710
	591	728





am i being
predatory? am i coming off too
strong?




i've never had a chance
with a girl before



and somehow
it seems you might like
me too





but how do i get over this fear
that i'll scare you away,
that you're not like that,
that i misread you?



i can own my gayness in theory
but not in practise

so even if i can only ever
experience your presence platonically
i'll take that



because i don't deserve you in the first place

At a house party, before either of us even applied to college, we decided we wanted to feel young & carefree, for once. Too many mothers keeping us in separate rooms at sleepovers even when we tried to defy them, too many rules defining where we could drive, & when, & with whom - &, in the middle of the night, we always ended alone, apart. Your sister told you her favorite part of relationships past high school involved sleeping: together, inseparable, in the same bed, just sleeping. The dawn brushing across both your cheeks & you brushing a strand of someone's hair behind their ear, someone you love, right there, always right there. We wanted that. We wanted everything. In the kitchen, you drank dessert wine, too sweet for anyone else to touch. I dragged you outside & kissed you against the house, then in pauses running across the lawn, then near the neighbor's house, leaning on their radiator, the metal cold beneath my bare skin as you pulled my shirt over my head, my pants down. Everything buzzed, the world dense & full & so full. A car skid into the spot in front of us, & in the lights, I felt like a moth sucked into a flame, seduced into its own burning, caught & combusting. Run, I said, & did. I ran through "valleys, groves, hills, & fields," all caked with mud & spilt beer. I ran through curves steeper than the road leading to your college. I ran through a ditch littered with broken bottles & fell - the problem is falling, always falling - into a thick, glass shard, which sliced into my left ring finger like a gemstone, or a promise, or a threat, & left a wound like a canyon to fall into.

By the end of our first year apart, I changed my major twice, first to political science, then to American Studies. English seemed to grant me only limited power - reading & writing the same clichés, recreating the same sentimentality I wanted to analyze rather than moving beyond it. My classes on public policy had more methodology & methodicalness, systems & ideas that could actually implement change. We coexisted sloppily - you as hard science & me as soft emotion, you as concerned with what is & me as concerned with what should be.

The letters you sent became fewer & less frequent. I pretended not to notice - you still told me you loved me, you still sent messages between your classes, you still called each night before you fell asleep, though each call was becoming shorter, you crashing earlier & earlier. In high school, I had a fantasy of channeling my insomnia into drives across the city, the state, the nation, if I could. My junior license confined me to an early curfew - 9 pm - & so I attempted to harass you into coming with me until dawn hovered over us & we could stay there, exactly there in that moment of potential & promise, forever. You never bit. "My mother would be mad," you said. "Your mother would be mad." Sitting alone in my dorm room, I finally had the full, adult status to drive - drive away from here, drive anywhere, drive to you - but no car to complete the journey, an irony I hated. I memorized the miles between us, 435, & thought: I could walk that. I could walk. I imagined the flat roads I would traverse, the steep hills I would climb, & calculated their derivatives, numbers the one thing I could know for sure, until my eyes closed into darkness.

At the party, when you saw the sharp split the glass shard left in my finger, flecks of muscle & fat peeking through the skin, you rinsed it with water & said “clench” until you knew the ligaments & nerves could still bend. This, I think, is why our class voted you “Best Companion on a Desert Island” in our yearbook. You wrapped the cut in gauze that kept it warm & together; I tried to clean the bathroom sink where blood had streaked across the porcelain, & then we drove home with a boy who played soft, lonely music, both sitting in the backseat. “I think I want to break up with my girlfriend,” the boy said, or you remember him saying, when I ask you, or I remember him saying, when I ask myself & reconstruct your voice, so unsure where my memories stop & yours begin. None of us knew what to say - the sheer honesty of darkness made us bold in our understanding but tentative in our communication - & yet that felt like enough, in itself, without any response or even regard to the couple listening. Later, lying in your dorm bed, breaking up with you, I said, “I think a relationship always ends the second someone says, ‘I don’t want to be with you anymore,’ no matter the reason, no matter if there’s a reason. Isn’t that enough?” That little voice of doubt, even if it comes from distance or imposed structure - isn’t it enough to bring the end?

I needed a reason. Though I wanted to love you, to keep loving you, it had begun to fade, like a fleeting fantasy. If I could latch onto some explanation why - if I could blame anyone, the world, myself - maybe I could understand & reverse it before too late. Our mothers & their rules. The 435 miles. Your propensity to fall asleep before I wanted to end the call, my propensity to never end the call, thinking that maybe this time, if I willed it hard enough, you would wake, even though you never did.

In the weeks before our relationship finally ended, you played “Cocoon” by Milky Chance on repeat during every drive, singing along even though you never sang to anything - I was the loud one, choosing playlists, shouting & smiling & opening to you. “I wish you would communicate,” I said, “or at least try.” Whenever I asked you a question about emotion, you retreated, unsure. I wanted your half-developed thoughts, the ideas you didn’t feel confident enough to share with anyone but me; instead, you highlighted facts over notions, reality over fiction, the truth over the guise of fantasy. I gave you books & you never read them; I gave you hints & you didn’t read them either.

After I told myself I didn’t want to be with you anymore but before I told you, I drank so much beer, the room spun, called your phone five times until you answered, & tried to convince you to marry me. To hell with college - I already knew about seductions, about science, about the world’s injustices. To hell with letting college & our separate lives, in our separate states, come between us. I told you I loved you & that meant showing it, making a grand gesture, proving to you or perhaps myself that this mattered, had always mattered.

No, you said. No, you kept saying, as I repeated my proposal, short-term memory gone, forgetting I had already asked. My voice became softer - please marry me? are you acting this way because you don't love me, anymore? - until I fell asleep. You stayed awake for another hour, until you were sure I wouldn't call again. In the morning, I didn't remember. You did.

When I watched "To All The Boys I've Loved Before" with my roommate, she said, "I swear so many schools have a ski trip just like this. They all look exactly the same." I didn't tell her about us in the back of the ski bus. Amidst so many other high school relationships, amidst so many other long distance breakups, what did ours matter? We were in love once, then we weren't. We were in love once. Now, we weren't. But it mattered to me. In my room, under the bed where I watched the movie, sat a box filled with memories, reminders of who we used to be. The corsage your mother bought me for our first prom, dried & pressed. The letters you sent. Notes from our physics class. Everything I meticulously organized, packed into my car, & drove five hours to college with me, everything I could compartmentalize but not leave behind. Sometimes, late at night, after my roommate fell asleep, I still imagined looking through everything, thinking it could make me love you again. I could call you & say I had lied, I had changed my mind, I missed you, I still loved you. I could stop feeling so guilty, so lonely, about your absence. Maybe it could be that simple.

The winter after we broke up, your classes ended a week before mine & you drove around the city with friends while I sat in the library for hours, every moment the same as the next, writing a paper on potential healthcare policies for Americans with disabilities. I thought about asking you for advice, given your knowledge of biometry, but no amount of data could explain to me why the world existed like this, let alone where to move from here. I didn't call. A song shuffled onto my phone, familiar: "Cocoon" by Milky Chance. Listening to the lyrics, for the first time, I finally understood - you had been trying to communicate with me, the only way you knew how, or, even if you weren't, I should've thought you were, should've tried harder to see you as you were & not as I thought you should or wanted you to be. You may not have sent elaborate letters, but you kept care of me in small moments, wrapping my finger in gauze, staying on the phone until I stopped proposing & fell asleep. The mundane, daily interactions between us. The facts. Everything I should have wanted.

After I lacerated my left ring finger, after you taped the skin together, after we drove back to our friend's house, I chose to spend the night alone with you instead of letting you drive me to the ER. I knew the skin would scar, or scar more, & I knew it could become infected, but I trusted you, & I trusted us. The darkness hung heavy around our frames & I could tell from your breathing that you were perfectly awake, aware of me pressing my cheek into your chest & letting my eyelashes flutter across the fabric of your shirt. Everything felt still, preserved. You were there with me, I was there with you, & nothing could ever convince me this wasn't enough, wasn't so much more than enough. But, of course, the moment ended. I drove to Urgent Care the next day & the nurse stitched my finger, saying, "You're lucky that whoever took care of it did a damn good job." I became lost in college applications, then rejections, then acceptances I rejected in favor of a state I had never visited, a future grand & noble precisely because I couldn't predict it. I lost the letters I didn't send to you. I forgot what I wrote in the letters I did send. I forgot why I made certain promises to you & what it felt like to mean them, to mean "I love you." What your sister said about relationships past high school was both a promise & a threat: though you can sleep together, inseparable, always right there, it doesn't mean you will. The dawn must come. You must wake, climb out of bed, walk away from each other. You don't always walk back.

After our breakup, I stumbled across a story I wrote about you, "Somewhere, I am still the person I was in that bed; somewhere, I still am in that bed. I want to think I never left the next morning; I never fell asleep the next night alone, or every night, empty. Under layers of day-to-day, if I squeeze my eyes closed tightly enough, we never left that room; under the stretched skin on my finger, under the gauze wrapping it to hold it closed, the wound is still wide open."

The skin on my finger still sticks out, white & lifted. Everyone I've ever held hands with asks about the scar, its source: you. Someday, when I get married, an unlucky jeweler will be asked to resize a ring, to make it fit. "You know, you ruined me," I joked to you on our drive home that night, the detail too perfect to pass documenting. But this isn't quite true: I made a choice. I wanted, & I did, everything. Even though our relationship ended, it wasn't a fleeting fantasy; it was real, and it was always enough.

3 hours later

lost between cement walls

and squares of light

I wait for you -

the one who taped down the stars

for me

my teeth are sticky

but I don't open my mouth

I think after all this time

there was a string tying us together

slowly tightening

the distance between us

closing until you found me

but you're far away

and flashing lights don't help

I can't focus

on anything except

the sound the wind makes

