

fault

What I wish to say to you I've already said to myself, in private, under my breath, spoken with blood in my mouth, an admonition for wiser language. I want you to love me for my words, my panorama of expression, the intricacy of my scrawl. You'll love me, if you ever love me, for what I fail to accomplish, for what I reach for as I fall. To grasp something new I must let go of what I already hold. Falling to one's death always feels fresh, even in one's dreams.

What you remember of me leaks into your lungs as tubercular regret, as if memory could drown you in your sleep, as if one can recollect one's death. You remember me as the one who thought of you as the one who got away, the desire absolute. There are no shadows if there are no objects. I've brought you to these woods of contrast so that you might witness me as a monster riddled with light, the source of my own shadow from the light of my one fervor. I'm at ease with your memory of my output. I'm comfortable with what you know of me, the viscosity of my secretions, the timbre of my thoughts. I won't hoard my sperm and I won't drop it into the river from my wobbly tower. I'll use it to coat my pillow.

What we seek beyond our daydreams eludes even the brightest of us, as lures of sanctioned ambition, as ways of being in this life but out of the moment, ways of blocking sunlight with lamp light, the lifelong noon of delusion. I can't outlast your light with my little shine. I'm a cupcake candle to your solar wind. I'll forgive your strength if you'll let me flicker until the song is sung. I'll clap for the enchantment of my dissipating smoke. I'll clad myself in the ribbons from my unwanted gifts. What we seek beyond our daydreams is an understanding of the fuss, the correlative fuse.

When I ran my thumb along your achilles tendon, when I ran my finger along the hills and hollows of your spine, your textures fostered me, built my confidence. If I could touch you with facts of intimacy, if I could collect dust from your path, I might claim your heart. Intimate truth, I've been told, eludes the senses. Intimate truth, I've also been told, exudes from the senses. If I fail to caress your cerebellum with my imagination, I'll settle for your epidermis. Every follicle and wrinkle and bump and mar. I'll survey with no intent to develop.

When you drink from the brook in the depths of these woods, cupped hands tightened by cold water, watch the fish watching you and wonder what you are to them. You won't eat them as you can't catch them. You aren't hungry for fish anyway, their cold blood and fatal oxygen. You're afraid of flesh and you're hungry for tomato philosophy disguised as onion logic. You want stronger water. I won't tempt you with the saliva that swirls for you in my mouth. I won't tempt you with the semen from the maelstrom down below.

So I ask your forgiveness, for what I've imagined you to be and for what this will ask of you, this tasking of your patience and your trust in my intentions. I want the actual you to know I won't harm the fantasized you; my morals extend far into the imaginary realm. I won't leave you lonely. Everything you do in these woods will be under my scrutiny but I won't know what you're thinking. I can't observe your dreams. I can't rummage through your ditch.

If I'm ill, I'm ill for you. If I suffer from scurvy of being, it's because I've tarried too long in the sunless territory of the self. Now I need a shaft of light and soon I'll leave these woods to you, these woods I've created for solitude, and throughout which I've left you gifts, less than two score and less than three dozen, but enough to fill a human skull, one for every year of our savior, who will not save me now. You won't save me, whoever you are, or shine upon me, whoever I think you are. I must save myself, if I know who I am, and shine my light against the day.

If you're nervous for your safety, if you fear the unknown beasts you might conjure, pay attention to what is real, what registers in your senses. If you smell smoke, there is a fire. If you feel rain, there is a storm. If you imagine breath upon your neck, make it mine. You're a catalyst and a receptacle. This earth's thralldom, this troublous world, is yours to distress and absorb. Don't fail its fleeting heart and don't fear the extent of your intellectual desires or the intricacy of your physical patterns, your flourished reach. You were born to partake and fail and totter and fall. And if you fall on me I'll cushion you, I'll register your weight.

If we chew our ideas into pudding, all grit masticated out of them, substance smoothed surface to center, we won't need our teeth; intellectual sustenance through a paper straw. I don't need my fingernails or my eyelashes to tell you what I think of you. I don't need my tongue to thrill your soul. I suck erudition and adventure from the caverns behind your eyes. I wander across your body as if on holiday in the moors. All of my ideas are stumbling stones to twist careless ankles, petrified bones to crack jaws. I'll rabbit you under a bush. There, in the movable shade, your heart quickening to match its dapple, I'll succumb.

If time claims us before our next swallows, instant death and transubstantiation, flesh into language, blood into ink, we need not worry about the scope of our fears. All is undone the instant before the instant of its creation. We were spared immortality before we began. We are spared immortality before we begin. Let it be believed that death yields no lasting sting, its effects as temporary as those of life. We might yet portage ourselves to our origin of origins, there to rest or be wrecked. If not, the pace of our lives will persist until the waterway goes dry. The ink becomes water, the bloodstream sputters, our wills evaporate.

So you request clemency, an erasing of your responsibility marks, tight clothing into skin, the genuine luster of a nudist's tan. We are lovely when we are innocent and we are lovelier when we are exonerated and we are loveliest when we are released into daylight after serving time for something we didn't do. The dust of discarded indignation rises to choke the righteous. I'll admit my flaws until you become my sole accuser. As geologic plates, if you shift, I shift, and the tension is released along our flanks. The buildings on our backbones come tumbling down. My flesh within your flesh, the beginnings of sediment.

When I think across the sorrow of the limitations of my life, the haunting mistakes and the fool's stubbornness, I feel worthy of sentiment. Nobody, or next to nobody, longs to be pitied. Everybody, or most everybody, yearns for sympathy. Give me yours. When I tried to reach beyond myself I burnt my fingerprints away. I've become more an echo than a tracing. In my toothless voice lurks my yen for you, the crawlspace reverb of my lust. I want compassion from the you who gazes at your reflection and feels woozy. I'll return the favor. I'll attend to your murmur and I'll subscribe to your shout.

I'm just a child with a quivering lip. I wouldn't intentionally hurt the smallest of creatures, but I'm as prone to committing accidental horrors as any sad boy. The stone comes down upon the flutter. The heel comes down upon the tremble. The heart can't reverse these actions, nor can the imagination, try as they might. As necessity is the mother of invention, accident fathers discovery. When I hurt you, it's a fluke. I've learned not to apologize for what I can't control. I don't wish to hurt you even when you wish me to hurt you or you hurt yourself seeking my hurt.

What I do with pliers would scare children and the weak of heart. Extraction of the living is the power of murderers and gods. What I remove cannot be put back into place, falling out eventually, every one of them. I simply hasten their departure from my head, as I would any obsolete idea. Their roots taste air as martyrs taste afterlife. I yank all caution from my mouth. I leave my reckless tongue for your pleasure. If you feel my words in your loins then I'm satisfied. If you feel my words in your marrow then I'll never disappear, not even after your marrow has gone to sea. Your consignment is my posterity.

What began with laughter will end in tears, the reversal of fortune and the damp underbelly of heaven. Our emotions rule. What I feel for you stirs and agitates my limbs more than what I think of you. Our local comedy will end in immovable sorrow. This is the trajectory of some almighty intent. We weren't created for permanent levity. Come close my eyes. I'll see you in a better light. Then, in the darkness of our frolic, we'll bruise ourselves to beauty. You'll laugh the pain from purple to yellow to your salty beige, your bruises tattooed for remembrance, your body a history of clumsiness and joy.

What upper wisdom steals our breath, now that we ascend toward clouds, there for a fraction until we cascade, the structured tumble of lovers wronged, the magnetism of the lowest place. I wrong you because I can't be you and you'll love me for my endeavors not to wrong you, my clumsy efforts to defang myself. It won't be I who punctures your lungs, though I might feel your life released upon my skin. Your breath across the humblest hairs on my belly reels me into fake memory.

What lower wisdom floods our chests, now that we descend into trenches, our fall into sudden transcendence, the chaotic updraft of everything banal. You banish me because I'm not you and I imprison you from my place of dismissal, my self-exile beyond your banishment. It won't be I who tucks you into your final sleep, but I might read your last bedtime story. Your breathing may imperceptibly slow, the rise and fall of your paper breast going soundless and unwatchable. If I were to lay my head upon your chest, I could crumple your breasts, I could hear the flutter of your heart.

What began with tears will end in laughter, the sublime to the ridiculous and the sudden side-splitting yowl. Our emotions roil. What renders me helpless isn't the tragic but the ridiculous. Our messy tangle will cat's cradle into exquisite mirth. This is the raveling nature of involvement. We were created for one another's amusement. Come open my eyes. I'll meet you at the oldest tree. There, in the woods of our making, we'll wonder ourselves to exhaustion. I'll dismantle your conception, what you perceive as your beginnings and what always floats beyond your little boat of nostalgia.

What I do with prayers would scare priests and the weak of heart. Exhortation of the absent is the power of conjurers and widows. What I recover cannot be lost again. Wandering sheep are eventually found, black or frightened or dead and half-eaten, as are all countable creatures. Their spirits find heaven as weeds become mulch. I pray that you'll lay yourself to rest upon the charms of my grassy fold. If you shine upon my every blade I'll swoon under your breeze. If you blaze upon my patch, I'll wither into chaff. You're a shining animal and I'll go blind; I've gone blind.

When I feel cruel I slump into my shoes and search for asylum and a smidgen of humility. I'm just a thug with a restless fist. I could willfully damage my every loved one, but I'd just as soon hold them close and shower them with gifts chosen especially for them. I bestow upon you the enamel of my mature living, to string and wear around your neck as a trophy of this animal you slew. It will gleam in the moonlight like a smile of great sweetness. When I please you, it's sheer happenstance. I've learned not to claim what I didn't invent.

When I consider the joy of my mortality, the hasty withdrawals and the severed threads, I feel justified in my white-knuckled cling. Someone, not my special someone, clutches my wrist. Of anyone who might save me, I choose you, you who are strong enough to lift me to safety. From the tension of the fault you restore me to stable ground. From the grind of plates to the open plane, you show me stress. One moment we are sitting at our table and the next, the whole building shakes and rattles.

So we solicit pardon, somewhat shy of redemption and far short of salvation, enough to stall the blade, the gift of another sunrise. Our gratitude won't guarantee a renewal of appreciative behavior. We will trespass our way back to the wooden blocks and plead once more upon our knees. In this we are alike. To be forgiven is more fulfilling than to be granted permission. To be given unconditional freedom by one with the power to give it eliminates fault. There is no seismic guilt in a wholly loving world. And yet—and this is exposed—we chose our transgressions out of fascination with our flaws, an affection for what ails us.

If space allows us to timber as trees, to lay down our lives full-length, to be logged and pulped and milled into the paper for our tellings, we will gladly do so. All will be shredded for party confetti in the grand ballroom at the final hoopla. We won't be expected to sweep ourselves into dustpans. We aren't expected to vacuum ourselves into absence. Let it be believed there is no loss of self; its hangover from the party proves its pulse. We might yet recognize ourselves as celebrities and become fans of our specific talents, lovers of our images. We will coat the trees of these woods with our glossy posters of volition.

If we grind our bones into powder, if we make chalk to scrawl our equations onto tombstones, the perfected code, we won't require cremation; corporeal scattershot by the indifferent winds. I would offer my marrow and my genetic stain to attract your affections. I would give my singular double eternal strand. If you shift your gaze my way I'll blossom into a meadow of recognition. You can drop your body into my wildflowers. There, nectar and pollen will be savored, delivered love to love. Or it will be spilled into the soil and our lives will suffer.

If you're satisfied with your knowledge, if you polish the known marbles in your jar daily with your father's handkerchief, ignore my sphere of influence, you don't need my gravity. If, however, you wobble in your course and you wish relief from some sun, hide behind me. You'll romanticize my tides. You'll traipse my hollows, you'll navigate my dead seas; all of me lies in your hands. I would scrub and scour your body, brow to heel, before you deem it prudent to leave me. I'll cleanse your body, lion to lioness. Or I'll leave you soiled beyond all sanitation. And I'll graffiti you out of this landscape, erasing you with scribble.

If I'm pure, I'm pure for you. If I gleam with the sanctity of a spotless spirit it's because I've long avoided the filth of community. Then I craved the dim hollows of these thickening woods, these woods I've nurtured for our affair, and throughout which I've strewn memories, uncountable because they propagate, multitudes of generations of recollections, one for every sinning self, selves bound for flames, for bird beaks where bird beaks don't belong. Our union is possible because our mothers didn't drown us and our fathers didn't smother us in our sleep and our gods have yet to pluck us from the world.

So they strive to pacify us, nearer to acquiescence than catatonia, enough to dull our wills, to breed apathy into our couplings. Children ought to arise from carnal greed. Normal lust perpetuates the species. Any of us true to ourselves would give our eye teeth to tear the tender meat. We eye the choicest cuts with our sights upon the horizon. We want the best of today and the better of tomorrow. Our human ladder of ambition and entitlement and despair. Duration gets the better of us over time. Cinders there are. Place there is. We can't stay in this place of not-becoming, of not ending, of all burn indefinite.

When you eat the bloody fruit of my labor, pulpy juice all down your chin, study the vultures looping above your feast and ponder what they consider you. They aren't fooled by your vibrant facade. They're patient and they'll wait. They crave the corpses of the savant and the advantaged. They want sharper meat. Don't tease them by taking motionless naps on the boulders in the clearing. Don't tease me by sunning yourself dry in the open after bathing in the waters of my youth. The waters of my death will flood your attic. I'll recede when you give me the gift of your view.

When I rubbed your sore shoulders, when I rubbed against your childhood with my twilight, your sinewed strength bolstered me, shored up my beliefs. If I could massage away the stiffness of your solitude, if I could wipe away the grime from your stare, you might witness my heart. Clean and loose emotions, I've been told, promote health. Tight and dirty feelings, I've also been told, clog one's path. But I suspect jesting wisdom is gentler than unbridled sanctity.

What they discern beyond our aspirations congeals all but kindness, our good-natured politics, ways of shaping every world, outer and inner, ways of counting populations of anomalies, the momentary midnight of illusion. I'll align my odd behavior with your strange agenda. I'm an unpredictable mouse in your unsolvable maze. I'll excuse your cruelty if you'll invite me to stay. You've blunted my faculty of indifference, and now that I swell toward your influence, now that I seek your secret gaze, I'm content to be caught. They, whomever we enlist them to be, will excuse our amorous incursions, will watch us stalk one another across our woodsy stage.

What I forget about you sticks in my throat as bird bone, as if loss of memory could choke self, as if one could forget one's birth. I disremember you as the one who thought of me as the one who thought of you as the one who got away, the palpable jilt. The id clothes the ego in paper and the superego removes to make origami trees. The coveted one holds the only flammable match and the woods are dry today. You eluded my memory but you won't escape your own inferno. Then, in the ashes where you fled your flames, where you fed your flicker, I'll sift for clues of renewable lift, of future flight.

What you need to tell me you've already told yourself, in your diary, written in menstrual blood, a judgment of the younger self, an allocation of wise punishment. You want me to love you for your deeds, your compassionate impulses, the generosity of your flow. I'll love you, if I ever love you, for what you choose not to say, for what you choose not to enliven. You already have something in your belly. To fear something new you must feel it in your gut. The power to create can't have meaning without the power to destroy. What lurks below your ribs is fueled by my vigor, was funded by my trust, will be fouled by our struggle.

Now I have given all I have to give, four times four doubled, top and bottom, all but this last gift, thirty-three, one more than the allotted set. I've an extra tooth. Now I pass all this along to you; you can rattle my gifts in your fists or your pockets or keep one as a worry pebble between your cheek and gum. You can place them to mark your way through the woods as no birds or rodents will disturb them. I'll not need them. I'll take my sustenance from within, until I'm a sack of stale air.

—*Tim Ramick*