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### Love, a Friend

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# Love, a Friend

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of the Requirements for

Departmental Honors

in the Department of English

The School of Arts and Sciences

Rhode Island College

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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

Birthered from Mothers who sought  
to smoke the flames of ideals birthered  
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.

