

With Single de Mayo alive and flourishing in 2024, I take some intentional time to celebrate the new creature I sit with daily.

What's it like to love yourself after the fire? To fully know the smell of soot on your new, smoking skin? I sit with my therapist who just asked how I feel now that the hardest parts are over. He tells me he doesn't recognize me from the shrunken person I was when we first met. I share that no, I don't recognize me. And that's a good thing. Up to this point, I'd only known the shells of me - who I wanted to be and who I was currently existing as. Just existing, whistling through each day not remembering the feel of it, just that it was here for that moment. I lived in both the past and the future, too scared to meet myself where I was because I hated the circumstances that got me here. He asked me how it feels to draw the strings of my broken self back together tightly, having been pulled apart fully this time. How exposing my threads allowed them to discover their strength. I told him it's like the ancient Japanese art of fusing broken things with gold, that simultaneously mending the wounds also creates a new masterpiece. 2023 came to kill me and it did; my mind and spirit took beatings that they didn't survive. My ways of existing were stopped cold, held at figurative gunpoint while I contemplated running away or launching myself toward my demise. Old me, scared me, small me had to die for the blooming of me to commence.

Love is only an action you take when you really mean it. It's something to prepare for, like the cold brisk wind meeting your face on a winter morning. You take precautions to ensure you're insulated from the elements that are there because you're in its domain, and love will see to it that it is felt in its entirety. Love of self comes from the understanding that the terrain we play in is ours only if we allow it to be. The hard-won lessons self-love brings are decided without known rules, just actions and follow-through. Loving myself meant subscribing to a new normal; turning around the wigs and stories to write away what was no longer true to share a different yet truer tale. The storyteller spins something potent from lived experiences, no longer forcing narratives hoping one day they will come true. She now speaks from ash, heat and glamour, sitting with new warriors at her feet hanging on her every word. She knows herself now, her strength, her weakness, her appetite, her way back to herself. And that is true love.