

fraying.

My gaze drifts out of focus, faintly registering the shape of her form curled on my bed, her foot hanging off the edge in her typical carefree way. An entire toe is slipping out of her sock, but she doesn't seem to have noticed. There's a slight brown tint surrounding the holes of frayed fabric, interrupted by glimpses of her tanned skin. I collapse next to her, watching as the sun rests across her body in gentle streaks.

“I wish I could
wrap my heart around you
to make you feel
how I feel about
you.”¹

She scoops up her shoes and sock in one hand, using the other to pull me in.

“See you later. I love you.”

I respond with a kiss, watching as she skips barefoot down the sidewalk, the moonlight casting a gentle shadow beneath her. I smile softly, still wrapped in her youthful joy as I wander back into my room. I glance around the mess, my eyes catching on a small dot of white in the corner of my vision. She left a sock. Just one, the one with the hole in the toe. I can't help but laugh a little.

I leave it in its place on the floor. She'll be back to get it.

“Thank you
for stumbling
across the universe
with your confident swagger
and tripping right into my lap.”²

She touches me in such a way that it often feels as though she is scared he might shatter me, as if the pieces she has spent so long helping me heal just might break in her hands. My fragility battles her autonomy, but her emotions rest in her palm the same way my heart does.

We have learned to live in such a way we are rarely apart for more than a second, because we have both discovered the impermanence of life and beauty far too young. We have watched life and love slip through the cold fingers of others, drawing the fragments of our souls to cling together.

¹ Najwa Zebian, *The Nectar of Pain*

² Halsey, *I would leave me if I could*

She speaks in such a way everyone listens, never tripping over her words, covered in a mist of perfection. She is so drowned in the love of others that she no longer truly feels it. Her pain seeps out of her in ways only I can see, replaced by jokes and optimistic stunts.

She runs circles around my head the way I trace circles on her tattoos. Her fingers cross mine; mine cross my heart.

We lose ourselves in the moment, drowning in the love we continue to deny, unraveling our souls in the process of trying to unattach the strings.

I'll remember the sun reflecting in her deep eyes, the way her hand brushes my cheek, the sweat cascading down her bare chest as she dances. Her arms draped around me as I try not to stumble over her feet, the water blurring my eyes as she splashes me from the pool. A gentle thumb tracing circles through the hole in my jeans underneath the dinner table, and tea parties with her sisters. I'll remember her in the way everyone else will: undaunted, optimistic, inimitable.

I'll remember all of the things we have been brave enough to say to each other, and all of these things that cross my mind that will never cross my lips.

“To love someone

Is firstly to confess:

I'm prepared to be devastated by you.”³

The slightly off-white of the cotton fabric has begun to blend in perfectly with the floor. I hardly notice it anymore, or try not to. To be completely honest, I forgot it was there. I can barely even remember how it ended up there in the first place.

But that's a lie. I do remember.

It was complete at one time, inseparable and entwined.

It's covered in dust now, fading more day by day, fighting desperately to reclaim the purpose it once had. It has been months since it experienced the warmth of the sun while poolside, or collected dirt from the barn floor while waltzing through a wedding celebration. Its world slowly transformed to the four walls surrounding it, more beautiful realities seeming too distant to reach. It looks out of place now that it is by itself.

“Time makes us sentimental.

Perhaps, in the end, it is because of time that we suffer.”⁴

I can barely recognize if it is right or left. Do socks have a designated side? But I do remember there is a faint Nike swoosh stitched onto one side—or maybe both—distorted by years of fading in the laundry. Dirt lingers where the ball and heel of the foot would be, somehow collected and preserved despite the layer of protection offered by a shoe. There's two holes in the bottom; one is near the heel, small and hardly noticeable. The other—

³ Billy-Ray Belcourt, *A History of My Brief Body*

⁴ André Aciman, *Call me by your name*

The other is big enough that an entire toe—his toe—would poke out of. It bronzed under bright sunbeams by the edge of a pool, was crushed beneath uncoordinated feet, skipped through countless parks and cafés; a wistful and haunting collection of flashbacks and nostalgia woven into the very fabric of its discarded existence.

“And it’s sad, because
I remember you now that you’re
gone
more than I remembered you
when you were
still here.”⁵

I’ve tried to wash it. More accurately, I’ve thought about washing it, as if my sheer imagination could remove the endless layers of dust and disappointment. Every corner of my room and my life has been cleaned and dusted and changed, except for the sock. I’m too afraid to wash it. I’m afraid the strings would fray, become so worn they might snap. I don’t think I’m ready for them to unattach entirely. I don’t want to lose it. There’s proof that it existed, even if it is now long forgotten.

“When something breaks, if the pieces are large enough, you can fix it. Unfortunately sometimes things don’t break, they shatter. But when you let the light in, shattered glass will glitter. And in those moments when the pieces of what we were catch the sun, I’ll remember just how beautiful it was.”⁶

I saw her today, walking on the opposite side of the street. I couldn’t bring myself to say hi, wave, or even send a little smile in her direction. Instead, I looked down, watching my sandals fall one in front of the other against the cracked cement. Breath caught in my throat, eyes clouded—not with tears, but memories. Her ghost danced around the strangers weaving past me, silently urging me to keep moving. The glimpses of her eventually morphed into one—reality—wearing her signature beat up sneakers and infectious confidence; her hands full of bags, keys, and someone else.

“the sad truth is, we couldn’t keep each other
forever, but I think it’s because we both knew
there were other people who needed us more
in this lifetime.”⁷

My phone slips out of my hand as I fumble through my drawer.

⁵ Najwa Zebian, *The Nectar of Pain*

⁶ *Someone Great*

⁷ Nelle Starling, *To Be Honest*

“I’ll be there in a minute!” I yell, hoping the speakers will register the sound of my voice from the ground. I smile at the incoherent response, resuming my search.

I pull out a fraying sock with a faded Nike swoosh stitched on the side, placing it on top of my dresser while I rummage mercilessly for its partner. My gaze drifts to the two holes, surrounded by smudges of brown despite its encounter with the laundry.

My hand finally rests on another solitary sock, a slightly more vibrant shade of white than the other. I rush to put them on, my toe slipping out of the larger hole in the sock.

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