

## Strange

### I.

Is it strange that I still think of you sometimes?

For the sake of transparency, allow me to clarify.

I don't mean, "On rare occasion, when the moon eclipses the sun and the universe deems it acceptable to place in my path something that could remind me of only you."

I mean constantly.

### II.

*"Hey, here's your rough draft! Sorry it took so long for me to get back to you."*

*"Don't worry about it, thanks for remembering."*

*Wrinkled sheets of paper detailing your thoughts on Britomart's plight in The Faerie Queen pass from my hands to yours.*

*Our eyes meet, spheres of brown and blue alight with caution and curiosity.*

*A brief pause ensues- a moment of expectation.*

*It's now or never.*

*"Do... do you have a minute? I was hoping we could talk more about some of the things you wrote."*

*Before I've even finished the question, my mind has overflowed with all the reasons you must have to say no.*

*I've already planned my retreat by the time I hear you reply:*

*"Sure. Walk with me."*

### III.

Soon the amount of time I've spent thinking of you will outweigh the amount of time we actually spent together.

Sometimes it feels like remembering you is all I do.

As I lie in bed at night, too troubled to give in to sleep,

I remember you.

As I struggle to stay awake in all my classes,

I remember you.

When I'm sitting aboard the train on my way home, as I am now,

I remember you.

I used to tell myself that I remember because it's better than forgetting.

That's only partially true, though.

I also remember because forgetting is hard.

#### IV.

*“Is this the place?”*

*Your fingers dance around the circumference of the wheel as we halt near the gate to my apartment.*

*“Yeah, you can let me off here. Thanks for the ride.”*

*“No problem.”*

*I pause before opening the passenger door.*

*Pauses seem to be a defining trait of our relationship.*

*“You never finished telling me about why you didn’t like that play.”*

*We saw a production of Caesar last night.*

*It was for school, but we sat beside each other.*

*“I didn’t, did I?” You flash a mischievous smirk that sends my heartrate skyrocketing.*

*I play it cool.*

*At least, I try to.*

*“Nope. Maybe now I’ll never know.”*

*“I mean... we’ll talk again. Next week, after class.”*

*“Well maybe I won’t feel like finding you this time.” Wait... did I just-?!!!*

*“Guess I’ll have to find you, instead.” Did he just-?!!!*

*I only nod and grin in response.*

*Words would betray either my exhilaration or shock, and I have no desire to reveal either.*

*In the moments that follow, an awkward handshake transforms into a fist bump, and then into a fleeting embrace that generates the heat of a supernova.*

*Long after you’ve gone, your warmth remains.*

*I wish I could still feel it.*

V.

The train pulls off, and the suddenness of the initial motion briefly releases me from my trance.

Intent to make good use of my time, I pull a history textbook from my bag.

My efforts prove fruitless, as they so often do.

Each bump and jolt of the car further removes me from the issues of pre-Civil War America, encouraging my mind to wander as it pleases.

Naturally, it wanders to you.

Piece by piece, I re-imagine you:

The low hum of your voice, your infectious smile, your eyes.

God, those eyes.

I always start there and build outward.

I see them now-

Clear as the summer sky,

Bright as sapphires beneath starlight,

Mysterious as ocean depths I would dive into a thousand times if I could.

Your eyes saved my life.

They forced me to look at the one thing I never had the courage to look at on my own:

Myself.

## VI.

*I begin finding myself on the day that I lose you.*

*We seek shelter from light rainfall within the doors of a rundown diner.*

*I'm not hungry (a frequent occurrence), but I don't dare let you in on the farce.*

*That might mean having to say goodbye before I'm ready.*

*We talk about the places we grew up.*

*You lived in the same small town for most of your life, but the environment hadn't been too bad. You had a pretty average school experience.*

*We couldn't be any more different. I moved around a lot when I was younger. I never felt bound to any one place, really, probably because I hated every place I ever lived.*

*My favorite thing about you is that you're the first person I've met in a long time that I can talk to about anything.*

*When I tell you how much I hated my high school, you ask why.*

*There are a thousand reasons (I could write a book!), but the one that catches your attention is when I mention racism.*

*You frown. "People were racist where you lived?"*

*My first impulse is to laugh, but instead I study your face.*

*There isn't a trace of doubt or defensiveness there- just genuine surprise.*

*I think that's the moment I realize I might be falling in love.*

*We talk about how we "figured ourselves out" (it feels like an obligatory topic for our kind).*

*For me, it was a disturbing dream I don't like talking about.*

*For you, it was love.*

*You tell me about falling for your best friend- a straight guy you grew up with.*

*You performed in a band together, him on drums and you on guitar.*

*The joy you feel when you talk about him permeates the air.*

*I'm entranced.*

*"Was it... hard?" I eventually ask. "Having feelings for someone who couldn't reciprocate?"*

*You smile sadly. "Yeah, but not because of him. It didn't bother him at all. It was just something I had to deal with on my own."*

*"That makes sense. It's really great that he didn't let it change things between you though. That means he really loves you."*

*"Yeah. I miss him."*

*My mind travels to my own best friend, who I've barely spoken to in two years.*

*I grimace. "Why, did he move far away?"*

*"He's dead. He killed himself three years ago."*

*Your voice breaks.*

*My heart follows suit.*

*For an instant, I see you as you are. I see the anguish beneath every smile, the melancholy tugging at your soul, the missing parts of you that haven't been replaced.*

*How odd, I think, that it has taken me so long to notice how different your eyes look when we're alone together.*

*When they light up, they shine twice as bright as anything I've ever seen.*

*When they hurt, they look just like mine.*

*"I'm sorry that happened," I whisper.*

*"Yeah. Me, too."*

*We keep each other company beneath the somber cloud that has drifted over our island.*

*Then, he asks a question of his own.*

*“So... are your parents... supportive?”*

*I don't understand what you mean at first.*

*To be fair, I'm not trying to.*

*I'm still focused on your face, which has somehow grown more beautiful in the course of only two hours.*

*The smile I wear when I ask what you mean is genuine.*

*“I mean... do they care that you're gay?”*

*It's then that I start to recognize what is about to happen.*

*“Do they care?” I echo.*

*Each syllable, each millisecond of feigned confusion, is merely a delay of the inevitable. “Oh. They...”*

*What can I say?*

*They must know. There have been so many signs.*

*I've never cared about sports or cars or any of the things that seem so central to the lives of normal boys.*

*I've never brought a girl home or even really talked about girls.*

*I challenge my mom whenever she claims that homosexuality is a choice.*

*How could they not know?*

*I wonder for a moment if it would be such a crime to lie to him.*

*We're so far from my parents, an entire world away.*

*I've waited so long, swallowed back so many tears, had so many opportunities pass me by just to earn my spot at this table with a guy I've started to fall in love with.*

*We could be happy, I think. Staring at you, it feels true.*

*We could care for each other and be together and love each other until we help each other recover from the kinds of scars most people are too afraid to discuss.*

*Don't I deserve a moment of happiness? Just one?*

*What does it matter if everything begins with a white lie?*

*No matter what angle I approach from, this logic crumbles in my head.*

*Looking at you now, I remember how sad your eyes were a few moments earlier.*

*I never want to be the reason they look that way.*

*And somehow, as tired as I am of loneliness, I'm even more tired of lying.*

*An answer to your question leaves my mouth eventually, but I can't hear myself.*

*At the front of the store, I notice, someone has left the door hanging open on their way out.*

*To your credit, you mask your reaction to the truth rather well. I think deep down, you're grateful for it.*

*Only the edge of reproach in your voice hints at the wound I've just inflicted. "That must make it really hard for you to bring a boy home, huh?"*

*The front door slams shut. I use the distraction as an excuse to look away.*

*Outside, the rain has become a downpour.*

*Odd, I think.*

*The sky turned dark so fast.*



## VII.

I still think about our old conversations-

About Shakespeare and Spenser;

About how we became who we are;

About the shadows that creep up on us when no one is watching, and how we keep our heads above water when we fear we might drown.

Some days, seeing you is all that kept me afloat.

A lot has changed since the last time we spoke

My parents know now.

They don't understand, but they know.

I've broken hearts and had mine broken more times than I can count

Each time, I'm reminded of you, and of the way you refused to let me break yours

For that gift, I will always be grateful.

I'm not sure where you are now, but I always picture you the same way:

Unreachable; thinking, breathing, living, as if we never met,

While I sit alone on this train, writing about you.

One day, I hope, I won't have to ride trains alone anymore.

The conductor announces that we have arrived at our destination.

I stretch my limbs and prepare to brave another day.

So, now that everything's been put into perspective, I have to ask again:

Is it strange that I still think of you sometimes?