

Hearts are wild creatures, that's why our ribs are cages.

I liked this quote so much, and
whenever I see a quote I really like
I can't help but want to write about it,
even though everything I would want to say
is already right there.

I used to think love was this burning thing,
this uncontrollable forest fire that consumed everything,
like Paris and Helen or Romeo and Juliet.
Not that it was destructive, necessarily,
but then again, maybe it was.
Maybe you had to destroy the person you used to be,
you had to shed your old skin and
take on a new identity with your new other half.

We're inundated with images of love,
with stories of proposals
and engagements
and beautiful fairy tale weddings.
We have romantic comedies
and romantic dramas
and just romances
that tell us what love is supposed to be,
this wonderful fireworks display that
changes your life.
This groundbreaking,
earth-shattering
force of nature that
completely transforms everything you've ever known.

And then I started dating and
actually having relationships
that weren't imaginary,
and I realized that
it just isn't feasible to have an earthquake
every single day,
and that romantic movies
only show the major plot points,
and that the real story runs
beneath all that ice on the river,
a cold and fast current that
will carry you away before you know it.
Finding someone's face in a crowd
will only take your breath away for a moment,
and after the curtains fall and the credits roll,
you are still there,
sitting side by side in that darkened theater,

wondering what will happen next.

After all that struggle to keep things together,
to separate out the parts of me that
were acceptable for other people to see and
the parts that weren't,
after everything I did
to make my affections known,
all that carving of my own heart
so that I would fit in his hand,
it was all for nothing,
because sooner or later
everyone leaves you,
and what do you have left?
Just yourself,
just this new, uncomfortable skin
you've tried to squeeze yourself into.

It's so pointless, really.
It's a fool's mission,
this notion that love transforms,
that if you really love someone,
they will change for you,
and for the better.
We are who we are, regardless,
and perhaps in spite of
who loves us and who we love.
It's useless to try to change that,
as if we are more lovable in
a mask
than we are at night,
without makeup,
dressed in shorts and an old t shirt,
curled up under your covers and
dreaming of something better.

I've said this before and I'll say it again.
The only person whose love and acceptance you need
is yourself.
Everything else can come after.

And so, as a new year begins,
and I am now officially a twenty-something,
I guess this is what I think love is.
It's not a series of vows
or kisses
or acts of passion.
It's not roses
or chocolates

or Hallmark cards.
I think it's there,
in the spaces
between your fingers
where the other person fits
perfectly.
In the silences you share
along with your secrets,
the way you can absently
run your fingers through their hair,
the way you laugh in harmony with them,
the way their heart thrums
under your ear
like the beating wings of
some impossibly colored bird.
It's in telling jokes that aren't really funny,
but make you laugh anyway.
It's seeing their name
light up on your phone and
getting that funny feeling in your stomach,
like you've got the flu or something.
I think love is self sacrifice, sure,
but it's also knowing when to put yourself first,
when to trust that the other person
knows what's best for them,
and that you know what's best for you.
It's knowing when to hold on,
and when to let go,
and not look back.
It's closing your eyes and
taking that leap of faith,
but it's also having the foresight to
take a parachute with you when you jump.

It's so strange to think that,
of all the people on earth,
our custom is to find
just one other person to
share all of this weirdness with.
It's so strange that,
of all the suns in this star-studded universe,
we live on a rock that happens
to be orbiting this one.
The chance of being alive is so minuscule,
so impossible,
and the fact that we are conscious,
that we are surrounded by
other conscious beings,
is almost overwhelming.

Can anyone blame us if
we cling on to another as
we hurtle across time and space?

Icarus is flying too close to the sun.

We should all envy Icarus, really.

I heard the story of Daedalus and Icarus
when I was in grade school,
and it was sort of a warning story.
Pride comes before a fall,
don't rise above your station,
that sort of thing. It was like how
Eve was punished for eating the fruit
of the knowledge of good
and evil, and how
Pandora was punished for opening her box.

Keep your head down, our elders say.
Don't rock the boat.
Focus on your work,
and you'll live a good life.
It won't be the most exciting thing,
but at least you'll stay alive.

But Icarus had wings,
and he did not want to stay low to the sea,
like his father.
He was not content with skimming above the waves,
tasting the salt on his lips,
safe near the earth.
He had wings, and he wanted to fly.

Who among us has not looked at the sky and
wondered if it was warmer up there,
near the clouds?
Who among us has not longed
to take refuge somewhere far away from here,
far away from the mundanities,
the trivialities,
all the nonsense we fill our days with?
Who among us can truly say that
they have never dreamed?

Icarus flew,
and he flew unapologetically,
without compromise.
He flew high in the sky,

high above the clouds
and the birds
and his grieving father.
He flew for a short time before
he must have felt the hot wax
melting upon his shoulders.
He must have known he was going to die.
He must have known he would fall.

And still, who can say that he regretted his actions?
Who can say that Icarus did not relish the heights,
seeing the world from a whole new perspective?
How do we know what his last thoughts were,
as he plummeted to the sea,
the feathers falling from his arms?
Who are we to say that he regretted his death,
those few short moments of bliss
and freedom?

After all, what is the point of having wings
if we cannot fly too high?
What is the point of having hearts
if we do not love too fiercely?
What is the point of these strange naked bodies,
if we do not fuse them together,
tangled like the roots of a great and ageless tree?

Here without you

The world is so loud, sometimes.
I am sitting here, in this noisy bar,
surrounded by people
who are talking and laughing and texting.
And I am alone at my table, writing this.
It is a little cold because I am sitting across from the door,
and every time someone walks in
a bell rings and I shiver in my seat.

There is an empty seat across from me,
and I was hoping you would join me.
I tried texting you earlier,
but the text didn't go through,
and then when it did
there was only silence from you.
And so I imagine you are
somewhere else, at your home, perhaps,
with your family that you love so much.
I wish I could stand to stay at home with my family,
but whenever I'm in my house

I feel like I just want to scream.
So I've been spending all my time
at the library or at my old high school.

It's weird how lonely it can be,
even when you are surrounded by other people.
Maybe even especially when
you are surrounded by other people.
Everyone is so caught up in their individual lives,
their joys and tragedies,
and they are just words to me.
Over the course of a lifetime,
how many people do we really get to know?

I wish you were here with me right now,
talking with me,
laughing with me,
making me laugh too.
I really like your eyes,
your smile,
your stubble on your cheeks.
I like the way you lean in when you talk,
the way there is a certain intensity in your voice
when you are being serious,
how easy it is to make you laugh.

No, I am not in love with you,
but maybe I could be,
if you wanted me to.

Sometimes I think I am a secondary character,
one of the people sitting in the coffee shop,
when the protagonist is waiting for his love interest.
I am one of the spectators who gapes in awe
as superman swoops down and rescues
another damsel in distress.
I saw the twin towers fall on television,
and I wondered if I would watch
all of history like that,
on a screen,
as though it were some movie.

But then again,
even secondary characters have their own stories,
especially if the writer is careful enough
to sculpt three dimensional personalities
for even the most minor of passerby.
And so I will wait for the painter
to shade in my olive skin,

darken my hair, and
draw me a pair of lips,
parted in words I am about to say.
I will sit there quietly,
as the writer finds
the words to describe my demeanor,
as she mentions offhandedly a detail
that will be crucial later.
I am patient.
I will wait to become the person who I am.

The world is so loud at times.
I cannot hear myself think.
I have my headphones in, and
I am listening to Handel's Messiah,
hoping to drown out all this noisy chatter.
I wonder if things would be different if
I were born in another era.
Maybe a hundred years ago
life would have been different.
Things would be simpler.
My path would have already been
carved out for me, and
I would not be forced to fall victim to
impossible dreams, and watch them fall like
rotten fruit,
one by one,
onto a wintery ground.

When I was younger,
I used to have conversations with myself.
I would divide my personality into pieces,
and make them talk to each other,
trying to sort out what it was I wanted to do,
what ideas I wanted to stand for,
who exactly it was I wanted to become.
I was a demanding therapist,
much more difficult than any real counselors I've had since.
I ripped into my own psyche with
a viciousness similar to that of a hungry bear.
I wanted to lay my flaws out,
one by one.
I tore off the masks I wore during the day and
cast them furiously into the fire.
I attacked my weak points the way
an angry lover plunges a knife
into the soft parts of his beloved.

And in the end,

it didn't really matter.
I don't know if I am a better person,
for all my self loathing and criticism.
I don't know if the tears I squeezed
out of my heart watered any self development.
For all I know, I was destroying my own self esteem
and calling it therapeutic.

Camus wrote, "In the depth of winter
I finally learned that
there was in me an invincible summer."

An invincible summer.
Can you imagine that?
There you are,
freezing down to your bones on some nameless corner,
watching the snow fall in the light of the streetlamp.
There you are,
waiting for someone to come and take you far away,
waiting for a car that will pull up and
drive you to the place you've been dreaming of all along.
And, in the midst of that snow globe of a night,
in the middle of that bitter cold,
you realize there is within you a fierceness,
a passion that burns with
the light of a hundred streetlamps.
You realize that the place you've been dreaming of
was inside of you all along,
and that your own acceptance of yourself is
all you really need to be happy.

There it is,
the invincible summer.
A piercing joy that cannot be communicated through words.
You must sing it to the stars.
You must shout and dance and wave your arms
like a madman,
even though the rest of the world will not listen.
You are a prophet,
a Cassandra,
and you see the future with an intense clarity
beyond your daily nearsightedness,
the thick glasses you wear
as you go outside to fetch the mail.

Only in the depth of winter
can you discover the fire that burns inside you.
Only when you are frozen,
when there is ice in your veins,

can you shatter that glass cage
you have erected around yourself,
and it has stood there,
invisible,
ever since the first time
you told yourself that you couldn't.
Passion is a fire, perhaps,
but more than that,
it is the melting of the ice around your heart,
the crystals that have built up
rejection after rejection,
one betrayal after another.
As the cold water drips
to the ground at your feet,
as you lift your eyes
to a star-studded sky,
it's then that you realize
you are the god
you were praying to all along.
And you are the answer
to the questions you have been asking.

sometimes people ask me why i am so angry all the time

and the truth is
i didn't choose to be angry.
i chose not to be blind.
i cannot sit for hours in a desert and not be hot and thirsty.
i cannot see all this bigotry and ignorance and not be furious.
i cannot shrug my shoulders and say, "That's just the way things are. Hopefully things will change, but why bother getting all riled up about it?"
i cannot live surrounded by institutional and systematic discrimination and then stay silent.
i cannot listen to people ask me if Asians have slanted vaginas or make fun of my parents for having an accent, and then somehow console myself that not EVERYONE is like that.
Anger fuels me. Anger is my raison d'etre.
i am not supposed to be angry.
i am supposed to be a quiet little Asian girl who studies hard and gets through life under the radar and doesn't really rock the boat.
i'm supposed to be flattered when white guys are like, "Asian women are so hot! Me ruv you long time. ni hao ma?"
i'm supposed to be content with fretting about upcoming tests and getting good grades and maybe getting into med school or grad school.

well
fuck that.
I am going to burn things to the ground.

things I will teach my daughter:

1. never let anyone mispronounce your name.
2. boys who hurt you and tease you don't act that way just because they like you. they act that way because society tells them they can get away with it. but they can't. don't let them get away with it.
3. don't trust people whose idea of a good compliment is, "You're so pretty!"
4. be angry. be furious. be proud. be jealous. be ambitious. be hungry. be ruthless. be cunning. be daring. be shameless.
5. never start sentences with, "This is just what i think, but..." or "This is probably going to sound really dumb..."
6. don't let anyone tell you how to feel about yourself. don't let anyone tell you what to hate about your body or who you are. don't let anyone tell you you aren't enough or that you are too much.
7. never apologize for speaking your mind. never let anyone else make you feel like you should apologize for speaking your mind.
8. how to throw a punch and land a kick and how to buck an unwanted body off your hips even when you are on the ground.
9. how to laugh loud and clear and from the gut
10. how to love yourself entirely, fully, completely.