

## A Tale Of Then: Of Lynne and Jane

I typed in her name and pressed return. “Where should I go from here?” I thought to myself. There were so many things I could say. “You would never guess how many pages I’ve begun with your name.” “How are you?” “It’s been a while.” “I remember how warm your breath felt against my neck that time you whispered you loved me.”

I tore the page from the typewriter and left the apartment. I didn’t know where to go. I only knew at that moment, I need to get as far from the typewriter as I could get. As far from the page lying on the kitchen floor with her name on it as I could travel. Far from the shoe box growing heavier every year as it collected more and more letters that have never been written. Her name grew heavier as the memories changed, evolved.

“I wish we could have fallen asleep together that night that I saw you for the first time.”

No.

How could I continue to be haunted by her? Who would ever think that “Jane” would grow so heavy over time? It appears so light. A mere four letters, the largest of which is just an open swoop.

“Jane.”

“I loved you then. I love you.”

Suddenly I found myself in the library. I was surrounded by words. Consumed by how many times I could find her name in this building. How many J’s swooped on these pages.

I changed my hair. An attempt to trick my eyes into thinking I was someone else. Someone who didn’t know her, was unaffected by the very existence of her. My mind disregarded these wishes to embody a stranger as I thought of her curls. I feared that if the wild locks of her hair exited my mind it would be blank. There would be nothing to think about and I would cease to be. My brain would forget to tell my lungs to pump, my kidneys to filter and my heart to beat.

What else is there to think about? Do thoughts matter? Is she forever standing in a meadow wearing that flower pattern summer dress that she had only for one night before it tore on a raspberry bush regardless if I remember her there? Smiling. Her belly filled with red berries, hummus and white wine. The sun absorbing into her black hair and glowing on her skin. A firefly of the day.

Is she standing in front of a screen watching me think my thoughts? Remembering me in places we’ve been and re-living things we’ve done? Creating new scenarios and placing an image of me there, holding our place for one day when we will travel to these spots and say those lines she had so thoughtfully crafted for us in her head?

The screen is a mirror, with never-ending images of her. Every angle just as I remembered it, only better now. I wash my hands in the wet sink. The spirals of her disjunct body simultaneously reflected by light, imprinting on my watery eyes. I dry my hands with the rough brown paper but leave the salty water I have made for her to remain.

I ask the book return if it has loved. So many covers it has seen, but never fully known a novel. It has never loved. I envy it.

I ask the old aluminum shelves if they have loved. Holding so many stories and yet, never having one of their own. Only standing there stoically, oblivious, efficient. I envy them.

I look down at the tattered wooden tables in the reading area. Scratched into the wood there is a stick figure holding a bleeding heart with a name etched underneath that is illegible.

Stick-figure people have no room in their linear bodies for a heart. I envy them.

Take away my heart. I welcome the rational-minded being of the automaton. Of the book return. A shelf. A table. An ant having no need for love to carry out orders and drag morsels of a life back to its nest. Love has no purpose, no necessity. "It is inefficient," the ant would say. "So much focus and attention it steals selfishly from projects undone." Only when the love stops returning do you realize that love isn't worth it. But the addict lives on.

"What good is temporary happiness that relies so heavily on another singular life force?" the ant questions the heartbroken of the world. Addressing me earnestly as I watch it crawl across the worn table surrounded by book shelves holding back answers. "It is a volley of vulnerability where no one possesses proficient coordination to carry out the task without losing often, or if they are lucky or sheltered enough, only occasionally. The heart is susceptible to the whimsy of the ever-changing mind."

I ball up my fist and smash the insect onto the table top. An old man and a young woman look up from their books startled by the nuisance I created. An end to an inanimate object, void of the ability to create love. The ant will not be missed.

I touch the red-inked heart on the table and mouth the words, "good bye". I've told her a hundred times, but this one I think she understands. I have taken a life. Our life together has ended. The nest has been kicked over and pounded by an unknown force. As strong as it is inexplicable. Impossible to pinpoint for now the case has gone cold and the victims and investigators have fallen below its mighty blow. No one left to search for clues. A single box filled with drawings and letters, a flower made of yarn, a handmade notebook with a goldfish with human feet and a snorkel on the cover and all laminated with clear tape. No one left to care.

She didn't need me. I was inefficient. Always changing jobs. Changing directions. Shifting in bed at night while she slept peacefully. Always wanting to take the long way home. I should have just taken the known route. Wore pantsuits. Guaranteed my happiness with her. I should have aspired for "normal", boring. Eggs for breakfast, masturbate for lunch and stale

conversation for dinner. At least I will always need me. I will always have a purpose in my own survival.

“Do you think this will hurt” I ask myself as my toes curl the ledge of the rooftop of our apartment building. “What a mess I would make”. But it would be honest. Efficient. Gravity is efficient. It has remained unchanging since even before the dynasties in China or the pyramids in Mesoamerica. Even it began at some point. Some inexplicable spark suggested it can have a task, a purpose, a focus. A love. To bring things down.

I hold the typewriter out from my body. Each inching away from my chest, its weight grows five pounds heavier. My shoulders begin to burn and my biceps start to tremble.

I let go.

The paper tail waves at me as it approaches the sidewalk below. The “J” holds tightly onto the starch whiteness as the paper becomes infuriated by the wind, as if it were a bull and the sky were red.

She can’t be shaken from the paper, the prized bull-rider. She is inked on it, onto my heart. It was easy for her to erase me from her story. But alas, it isn’t me I have to get over, it is her. Jane. Do you remember the time we were animal pen-pals? Waiting weeks before ravenously devouring each other’s words? Each other’s clever essences?

Just thinking her name makes the tattoo on my heart pulse, retracing the tiny punctures of the thousand “I love you’s” that so permanently collected there and retraced her name over the past five years. Thousands of needle points, entering and exiting with the speed of a jack hammer, each with tiny bits of ink with her aura, changing me forever. Will I ever be hungry again?

I touch my lips as the typewriter crashes against the pavement, keys first. A smashing of freshly inked letters strike the page before the mechanical part separates from itself and into many pieces. A smattering of gibberish at the end of it all. Indiscernible on its own and strange compared with the other respectable letters, ones more understandable given the circumstances in which they were being used.

The messy letters, from their bleach white cellblock, push and shove to experience the paper one last time. To say their final peace before leaving their meaning forever. A changed mind will certainly read them differently than it had before. All the words had tried to come out at the same time, like panicked orphans running from a house fire searching for home. There is so much that needs to be said but so little space, so little time. It’s already too late and those words won’t hold as much weight as they did when Jane’s love was reciprocated.

So much weight put on those last words as if they can morph into a grapple and attach themselves to the memories and pull us back there. Bringing along Jane’s heart if only the proper sequence of these words were engaged. The emotional weight of it all crashed down and the

doubt that surfaced lashed at the page. How she once looked at me was tattered. As layers of new words dry on the page, I miss her heart.

The crash must've been loud but from ten stories up it was a dull thud. Washed out by car horns and people making happy endings and beginnings, and emitting playing noises from the nearby park.

Life goes on.

It didn't matter.

My last defying act to keep our love alive mattered so little in the grand scheme of things. Am I part of this grand scheme? Am I white noise that distracts from the gravity pulling at others' love stories? From carrying out its inevitable force of entropy? Am I the laughter from a child in the park, swooshing down a curved slide. Swooshing like a "J".

At least I think there was a "J". Janice? Jacky? Jean? There were five letters in it I recall. It doesn't matter. Each letter holding but a brief place for a love, for a focus inside where such things dwell, confused. There is no map. This place we are unable to find no matter how hard we try. We can only be brought there unexpectedly. Wake from a nap and suddenly the world is different. The roses in the pot by the window aren't dying, they are morphing into a delicate work of art. The sun isn't blinding, it is only waiting for a chance to set, showing off its range of colors. The pillow case that smells like her has hardened and I hadn't slept for three days. Or has it been weeks? Months? I had missed her birthday, I am certain. The first one since she left. The gift is still wrapped and waiting on the kitchen table.

The pictures are nice.

I don't recall her face. Only the love that I felt. That I created in me. That grew larger inside. Now with that love aborted, the hole is gaping.

She only guided me to the site of that now-crater, but I was the traveler.

The paper with her name fluttered along the sidewalk below, catching itself here and there on various objects of the city, some shiny, some blunt, some stickier than others, but on all only briefly. Never settling permanently on one. Moving so inefficiently along but one path through the city, taking the long way to nowhere in particular.