

Frozen in Folly

By St. Alia, The Writer's Knife

Dear you,

I'd never loved someone before you. I was only twenty when we met. Men had always been suspicious beasts that rarely filled me with anything but quiet contemplation. Amy, a coworker at my job, introduced us. She was also your girlfriend. Remember the first time we got stoned together? Amy watched from inside while we smoked on the porch.

Amy was a beauty from a small town. You dated her even though she was noticeably pregnant. We had all hung out many evenings, us smoking weed and getting drunk. Amy always pushed herself into our conversations, even though she rarely understood what we were talking about or even how to relate to us. I knew you were looking at me differently the last few times we all three hung out.

As time slides by, I see you more one on one. You were on probation and got locked up for a dirty UA. Amy bailed you out, and I picked you up in my white Bonneville.

"Do you love her?" I asked you. We were on our way to my one-bedroom apartment with all your belongings stuffed into two garbage bags, like a sad clown. You smelled like stale sweat and weariness. You looked at me, our eyes connecting for a few moments. The glint of life and feeling sparkled in your blue eyes.

"No. I don't think I ever loved her." You admit. My heart falls and flutters. Why were you with her if you didn't love her? But also, maybe you had room for me where love for Amy should have resided. I had offered you my couch until you could get your shit together

financially. Your mother lived with her on again off again boyfriend, Brian, in a richy rich house near the lake. But that house wasn't an option for you because Brian had already kicked you out for not working.

The next few months, we spent all our time together. Amy had gotten you a job at our call center, before you got locked up. We sat near each other during work, our cubicles hiding us from the world. Amy would try to talk to you, but you would thoroughly ignore her. I would just shrug when she would look at me, her eyes asking, 'What happened? He loved me once.' I wasn't overly concerned about Amy; she was pretty even seven months pregnant. She had a survivor's mentality. And I hadn't stolen you, just freed you. You used to look at me with this goofy smile, that made me blush warm in my core. I hadn't kissed anyone or fucked anyone. I was afraid of being vulnerable or not in control. Watching my parents love, had made me lean toward fear of love instead of tender embraces.

We had many good days and some bad evenings. The night when we got high and walked to the lake in the early days of March was both. You were trying to convince me to walk out on the ice in the inlet by the docks. I didn't like walking on the lake's frozen water, especially at night when it was dark and so cold.

"Come on, I'll go first." You said, and stepped off the dock, the other foot falling through as it touched the splintered ice. The water was only waist deep, but it was so cold outside. You spluttered, grabbed my outstretched hand, and I pulled you back to the safety of the rickety dock.

"Shit J! I'll run home and get the car and towels." I said, your teeth were chattering, but you nodded. I wasn't athletic, so by the time my short legs brought me to the apartment, six blocks away, I was out of breath and anxious. I flew up the long staircase, grabbed keys and a

few towels. When I got back to you, I wrapped the fluffy blue towel around your shoulders. It was the most I had ever touched you, and it made me feel happy. You were sick for a few days after your dip in the bay. Our job fired you for missing too many shifts. I didn't mind, because most of the days you missed before the lake, had been to hang out with me on my days off.

You fell into depression. I was gone a lot now, picking up extra shifts to help keep us in pot, food, and gas. My girlfriend, Lora, would stop by after work, her baby sitting in the car seat as we smoked weed. She and I had grown up together. She knew I had feelings other than 'just a friend' toward you. But it didn't stop her from flirting, it was her default response to men, she even flirted with my dad.

"Do you like Lora?" I asked you after a smoke session with her and baby Felix.

"She's ok. Do you like her?" You asked me. I thought this was an odd question because I introduced her to you as my friend. But after thinking about your question,

"I don't know. We have been friends for a long time. She and I are very different though. And since she has had little Felix, I feel bad about partying with her." I said honestly. You nodded, seeming to understand me.

I had wanted you to have friends. Your mom's boyfriend was your fishing buddy, and also like fifteen years older than you. You were married to a woman in Iowa, she had your three-year-old daughter with her. You told me that she had kicked you out of the house when you lost your last job. You moved here with your mom because it was your only option. It made you sad to talk about your daughter and wife. I tried not to ask about it, but I was so curious. You liked to tell me things. You trusted me, which I thought was silly of you. I was a tactical person. Always

lining up my shots before taking them. But you weren't something I wanted to shoot down, not yet at least.

Amy had a shitty car, and you told me she kept her check book in the glove box. I had spent my last \$50 on weed and gas. I hinted that we should steal her checkbook and get food and maybe some cash if we were lucky. You agreed without hesitation. I drove you to the parking ramp of the call center. Her car was unlocked, you grabbed the checkbook, and that was that. We spent you ex's money with no remorse. At least I didn't. I had been a thief for a long time. And your morals seemed flexible. This should have been a red flag for both of us, but I wasn't on my head meds and manically happy with you.

I thought I was a sociopath sometimes, and maybe one or two psychiatrists agreed. But the feeling of a successful dirty deed, done together, kept us from feeling guilt. You seemed good at subverting remorse or appearing to. Until you couldn't push it down anymore.

I had been picking up hours at work after a few months of you on my couch. I still liked having you around, for the most part, but you were there a lot. You would drop me off at work, then do who knows what. One evening I had to walk home. When I arrived, the back window of my car was busted out.

"Some assholes must have busted the window. I didn't hear anything upstairs, because I was asleep." You told me. My kind wrinkly land lady who lived on the first floor said,

"No, he was out there when I heard the window break. I think he locked the keys in there." Even her rheumy eyes could read you for who you were. The car window being broken pushed me away from you. It was such a dumb thing to lie about, and I started leaving you out of

partying and bar hopping. I didn't want to have feelings for you anymore. I was waking up from my obsession with you, bored and distrustful.

"I'm gonna go out tonight. A guy from work asked me to go to this live performance of DJ Strek. I'll be late." I told you my plans, because I was mean and angry at you.

"Ok." Was all you said in response. I didn't have fun, and the guy was an idiot, with no depth. I stayed out well past bar time though. I was high and a little drunk when I trudged up the stairs. Entering the back of the apartment I could smell something burnt and see a light on in the front room.

"Hey J, you awake?" I asked, walking through the apartment, my head weightless. You didn't respond. When I stepped into the living room, you were laying on the couch, face toward the back. My head landed firmly back on my shoulders. There was a notebook open on the ottoman. An almost empty bottle of aspirin was on the floor beside it. I had bought the aspirin yesterday. The notebook had words on a mostly blank page,

"I just....FUCK IT!" The words were simple, and the framed photo of your little girl was laying on top of them. I knew I had made you feel lonely, and you were longing for a home and family. I was upset, scared, and mad. I didn't have a phone at the time. My dad lived across town, but he was the only one I wanted here. Your pulse was slow but steady. I drove stoned to my parents' house. I woke my dad asking him to come help me. He was a chaplain for the police department and dealt with these kind of situations often enough to remain calm. I was crying and panicky, a marked change from my normal pragmatic stoicism.

"Are you high?" My mom asked, still half asleep. I just hugged her and raced outside with dad driving behind me. When we entered the back of the apartment, you were throwing up

in the bathroom. I confronted you, but you were embarrassed and denied trying to OD. My dad sat you down,

“Son, I don’t know what’s going on now, but you don’t seem ok. Can I pray for you?” My dad asked him quietly. You nodded an agreement. I was standing at the window smoking a cigarette, and dad didn’t even chastise me. Dad prayed, you cried, and I felt like the worse type of human.

After you had recovered for a few days, my dad and I decided you needed some guidance, that I couldn’t provide. And now I was afraid to leave you alone. But also, I was tired of you and still in love. All these emotions rumbled up inside of me, not given air to breath and float away.

My dad let you move into the small apartment in their house. Lora lived in the basement with Felix, because my parents were decent people, who believed in being Christ like. Mostly dad let Lora and you move in because I asked him. You were ok there for a while. Working a temp job and trying to get your shit together. But I didn’t want to hang out with you much, especially alone. I was too afraid of telling you how I really felt, and that vulnerability seemed untenable.

Do you remember *that* evening? The one that shifted us from friends to not friends? I wanted to go out to the bar with coworkers. You and Lora were at my place wanting to party too. I wasn’t willing to pay for your drinks, and Lora was always broke.

“Hey, Brian is out for the weekend, and asked me to check up on the place. He has a hot tub. Sounds better than the bar. A six pack and hot tub fun for three?” He asked. I was leery about being at Brian’s. Your mom and him had broken up, and we were messy when we partied.

“Fuck yes! I could use a good soak. And I’ve got a jug of wine in my purse.” Lora says pulling out said wine. I was frustrated with this already. Lora was drinking all the time, neglecting Felix, and being a shit friend. You looked at me expectantly.

“I’m gonna go out. I need a break from you two crazies.” I said with a laugh. But the undertone of disdain in my voice registered on your face.

“I can drop you over there before I head out.” I said quickly, to be genial and prove I wasn’t a bit jealous and worried about you and Lora hanging out. You nodded and Lora clapped. I drove us to Brian’s, came in and we all smoked one of my pre-rolled joints, before I left you two alone.

“I guess I’ll just catch a ride with you after bars close?” You said, trying to get a commitment on seeing me later. I shrugged.

“I dunno. I mean the whole house is empty here. Can’t you just stay? I don’t want to do that much drunk driving.” I spoke. You turned away from me, heading out toward the hot tub. Lora was already in her panties and bra, sloshing the sangria into the bubbling froth.

“Ok, see ya whenever.” You said without emotion and shut the patio door behind you. I left. My heart heavy despite almost 100% green lighting this romantic evening between you two. Why had I just left my best friend and you, the first man I had loved, alone with booze and a hot tub? I told myself I didn’t care. I told myself that if you two fucked it would give me the push to stop knowing you. This is rough to read, but it was my thinking at the time.

I had a weird evening and coming home to a dark apartment made me sad. The next few weeks I did much the same with my free time. Drinking, dancing, drugs, and less and less of you. My dad had to kick you out because you stopped working. My sweet doughy land lady allowed

you to move into the efficiency apartment in the basement of the house. It was barely an apartment, but rent was cheap. You said you could handle the \$200 a month, no problem.

You started coming upstairs again or trying to. Sometimes I wouldn't answer the door, even though you knew I was inside. I was trying hard to ignore my own desires for some stupid reason. I do regret this, not being honest with you, or even myself. I've played out this scenario in my life with two other men. Allowing 'unrequited love' to be my mantra, when it should have been 'COWARD COWARD COWARD!'

At some point, instead of knocking on my door you would sit on the top step just outside it. I would sit in the uncomfortable kitchen chairs, with you on the other side. Sometimes I pretended to talk on the phone. Other times I just sat there reading, liking the idea of being close without you seeing me. It was demented. Did you know how I felt? Did you know I was sitting just a doors width away?

Eventually, Aggie, the landlord had to kick you out. You had been in the basement apartment for three months and hadn't paid any rent.

"I'm sorry dear. I know he is your friend, but I could use the extra income." Aggie said. I reassured her that it was best for everyone if you left. I had been getting fucked up a lot, work wasn't going well, and in general I was mentally on a decline. On the day you moved out, I saw you in the back of your mom's vehicle as you pulled away with your few meager possessions. I hadn't even said goodbye.

"You were a good friend, Lyra. I appreciate all you did for him. I'm sending him to his uncles in Colorado. My brother is good at getting people motivated!" Cindy said to me the day

you moved out. She hugged me at the top of the stairs, where I could hide from you. I went back inside, crawled in bed and sobbed until I fell asleep.

Lora showed up later and convinced me to go out. We got day drunk, and when we were out of money we headed back to my place. There was a white envelop on my third step, my name printed evenly on the front. I knew it was from you right away. I grabbed it, giving Lora the keys to run upstairs and pee. I sat on the step, opened it and read,

“Dear Lyra,

Blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah. Lora and I fucked. Blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah....” Your letter went on for six pages, front and back. I didn’t read anything besides those four words, or at least I don’t remember anything else. I regretted this later, after I had let a friend read your words.

“You should read this, Lyra. He really opened up in this letter. You don’t even want to know what he says? Your being ridiculous. He says you aren’t an open person, and...” Caty said trying to paraphrase, I cut her off.

“Stop. I don’t give a fuck.” I said, taking the letter, grabbing my lighter and burning each page with deep intention. I stuck a finger in my mouth because the last page burned me. The ashes at me feet, my heart drunk on grief, and hoping to go anywhere I could lose myself, I headed to a party. I didn’t want to be me for a while.

After a two-day drug fueled binge. I resurfaced. Lora had adamantly denied any sex between you and her. I knew she was lying or was black out drunk and couldn’t fully remember. When we confronted you, her over dramatic screaming and slapping you in the face, revealed her

guilt. I couldn't hate her. Even though I wanted to, because it would have made me feel invincible instead of broken.

"Please. Hear me out. Did you read the rest of the letter? Can't we talk?" You called me every day after you left the letter. I actually picked up a few times, in a haze of a high.

"It doesn't matter, J. What's done is done. Move on. You have a wife and daughter. Maybe its time to figure that out." I said quietly and hung up. You called me for a few years, every time you came into town for a fishing trip with Brian or to see your mom. You'd call asking if I could get you weed. I wouldn't meet up with you. Couldn't. I stopped taking your calls, they made me violently ill afterwards. You seemed happy, and that made me angry. Because I was definitely not happy, most of the time.

I write my reminiscing to you, as a way to release myself. I want to heal, and its only taken me twenty years to want that for myself. I hope you are well. I hope you've had a happy life. I wish that I could say that my self-imposed loneliness fell away with the years. I wish I could say that my trauma was just from you. It wasn't. I was traumatized by life. Perhaps I wasn't meant for this world. I'm such a tender fuck head. All nails and teeth to others, and inside a pot of seething despair and self-loathing.

I won't leave this letter on your doorstep, or even send in the mail. I write this letter to release the held breath I've kept tight in my lungs over these twenty years. I'm allowing these words to capture my sorrow and loneliness in hopes of replacing them with happiness and hope. What a fool love has made me. But what is life without feeling love? First love is folly, but so is all the world.