

A Note on Love

Mom always told me to love deeply, to give your heart away even when it meant it might be given back a little bruised. I've always thought that was the most romantic thing I've ever heard. I've followed those words through my life like a compass.

I've loved many boys over the years. Boys who took my heart and drowned it. Boys who took it and crushed it beneath their feet. But at the end of all those relationships I took my heart back, battered and wounded, and knew that it would be okay. Even when it took months for my heart to stop sputtering at the thought of the last boy who hurt me, I took comfort in knowing that my heart was always mine. I recovered it so I could love again. Because that's what life is about; how many times and how many ways we love people.

It never occurred to me that my heart may never be returned. That when that happened, it wouldn't be from a boy, but from my best friend.

I've known Maeve since I was eleven years old and we were thrown into the battlefields of middle school. I had curled myself into a dark hallway corner to eat away from the hordes of yelling students, and Maeve found me there. She extended the first of many small acts of kindness, by sitting with me and offering me half of her cookie. We ate lunches there for the rest of the year.

Our pre-teen years were spent with sleepovers starting on Friday and extending through the entire weekend, giggling about the boy who worked at the frozen yogurt shop, and feeling like adults when we left crumpled bills on the table next to our melted milkshakes.

In high school she came to every speech and debate event, and I went to every one of her tennis matches. She came along on my first date, sitting two booths away to save me if something went wrong, and I held her sophomore year when the senior on the basketball team broke her heart. We applied to colleges together, and wouldn't open our decision letters until we were sitting in the back of her car counting down before tearing open the envelopes we'd received that morning. Then after both committing to the University of Washington, we walked across our graduation stage together.

Over the summers we took road trips, spent entire days at the lake, and agonized for hours over the same things. We were both content to listen over and over, happy for every way we got to be included in each other's lives.

During college Maeve was the one who reminded me that I didn't make the wrong decision to pursue law. She brought me coffee on countless all-nighters, and listened to hundreds of anxious rants. When Maeve was diagnosed with epilepsy, we cried in her room, expelling sighs of relief that she wouldn't have to continue suffocating from the weight of not knowing why she'd been losing pockets of time throughout her day. I spent the following days reading as much as I could to help take care of her.

When we parted ways for graduate school we made sure to facetime every night as we washed our faces, catching each other up on our days, and providing support in the only way we could. I cried for weeks knowing that our paths were taking us separate ways and that we may never share the same intimacy we once did.

Maeve knew me in a way no one else has bothered to know. She knew me better than I knew myself, always knowing how I felt before I could process it. She was my best support system, confidante, and keeper of stories. It never once occurred to me that she might one day become a stranger to me.

When she called me in tears, saying "he's gone, he's gone," I took the next flight to Arizona to sit in a home of grief with her family. I stayed there as long as I could, trying to fill the missing gap of her brother, until the law firm threatened to lay me off and I had to leave. Mourning the loss of life turned out to be easier than mourning the loss of the living.

For the first time in six years, she began to miss our scheduled calls. Every time I would text her saying *it's okay, take your time*. I couldn't bear to burden her further with the loneliness I was feeling without her. She was grieving something much bigger than I was, so of course I gave her space.

And then the texts became shorter and shorter, until I was staring at a text I sent a week and a half ago, staring at the little four letter word: read. Even then I tried to give her space, to give her the same forgiveness she's given me throughout our entire life.

It won't be like this forever. I reminded myself over and over again, holding onto the saying like a locket over my heart.

But two weeks stretched into a month, a month into four, until it had been half a year and I wondered if maybe I lost my best friend.

I wanted to hate her, but how could I?

I came home from work every day and collapsed into my bed in heaven. She is everywhere. She's in the two girls giggling in front of me in the coffee shop, in the dented pillow on my couch I haven't touched since she was last here, in every notification I receive on my phone, elated for one moment that it might be her.

When my mom told me to love deeply, I thought it meant to give my heart away to every man that stumbled in and out of my life. But as it turns out, I never did. I extended the act of love to them, but Maeve always had my heart, and she took care of it like her own. It's why when boyfriends left me, I always mended, knowing that the truest love in my life came from my female friendships. It's why I can't function now without Maeve. And some days I wish I could call her and ask for my heart back, if only to hear her voice again. But I don't want it back. Because if it showed up on my doorstep, wrapped in bubble wrap, her last act of kindness toward me, I think I would forever mourn the last seventeen years of my life. Never looking forward, never trying to love so deeply again.

So instead, I do what I've done for the entirety of my life. I text her and say *I love you* even when I know I won't get a response back.