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Closure.

“Nothing ever ends poetically. It ends and we turn it into poetry. All that blood was never once beautiful. It was just red.” —[Kait Rokowski](http://t.umblr.com/redirect?z=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.amazon.com%2FLearning-Lick-Bear-Trap-Clean%2Fdp%2F1463686994%2Fref%3Das_li_ss_tl%3Fie%3DUTF8%26linkCode%3Dll1%26tag%3Dquoteswagga-20%26linkId%3Da1bf4612e70d8dd7957bfa9ed594347f&t=OTNiZmIxOTRiN2Y4MjNlYWY3NDU0NDVmM2RlZWNlNTQxMTY1MGJlYyxRZXpWQnJqag%3D%3D&b=t%3AJllHR2V36bX9ajMZYYNP0A&p=http%3A%2F%2Fquoteswag.ga%2Fpost%2F128605166529%2Fnothing-ever-ends-poetically-it-ends-and-we-turn&m=0" \t "_blank)

When I was around 5 or 6 I went through the phase of asking abstract question and demanding answers. On one occasion I asked my grandma if I could be a pig when I grew up, because they are pink and pretty. She laughed and it made me cry. I didn’t think my question was embarrassing and I felt very undervalued. I remember her asking my mom,

“Dia, Whats wrong? Why is she crying?”,

“Oh she’s embarrassed.” My mom said quietly, trying to brush it off and knowing more attention would set me off. My grandma said something along the lines of my being cute and that I shouldn’t be embarrassed and I interjected in a grumpy snotty teary voice.

“I don’t wanna be *cute*, I wanna be *beautiful*”, Stamped my feet as I often did coughed cries into my pout as I marched away, hearing their laughter behind me searing my childish wounds.

When I rode home in the car one day from a visit at my dad’s father’s house I asked another on of those trap-like questions, but a little older now I usually didn’t cry when I couldn’t get an answer. I asked my mom what it meant to have all of the people that you love in your heart. She didn’t really understand and as I recall I didn’t explain. I know where it came from though. One of my favorite cousins on my dad’s side of the family used to always tell me that I was in her heart before we said goodbye. It was a sweet and sympathetic thing to say considering flimsy family ties. I only ever saw her once a year at most. Now I can’t remember the last time I saw her but it’s been years. She told me this and it was always comforting. In my head I pictured little figurines of everyone I loved. Every friend from school, neighbor and relative… I thought I had to love them all and they all had to fit in my heart somewhere. I held up my fist, knowing from school that it was almost the size of my heart.

“That’s not enough room!” I said. And my poor mother attempted to explain the existential crisis I was facing in simple terms.

“You just have to think of them B, they don’t all have to fit in there, just picture them in your heart.” I wish I had the social cues I do now to clearly remember the way she said it. I remember what she said but in hindsight I’m surprised she fielded the question so smoothly without causing me to tantrum.

Old scars like that came back when I left my home for the first time. I grew up in the same house my whole life, and going away to college was the first time I ever left. By now my webs of friendship were small but strong. I became selective of who fit in my heart and those that were there now had wire fencing around them so they couldn’t get out. Sometimes though, they did.

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On September 11, 2012 I woke up sweating and facing the sun in my dorm room at 9 am., exactly. I had a new sort of numbness making it hard to fall asleep at night and forcing me awake with the sun every morning . I got to class early, sitting groggily with my iced coffee when my phone lit up. Ordinarily I would ignore it until my 15-minute break halfway through class, but since class hadn’t quite started yet I checked it. It was Leah *call me.* My phone buzzed again *Celia, I have to tell you something.* Leah had a tendency for dramatics over text. On any other day I wouldn’t have been surprised if this *thing* she had to tell me was that she had just eaten the best sandwich she ever had, or that she ran into someone from high school at one of her classes.

Leah and I met our first year of high school. Our commiseration over first period algebra and some other magic allowing me to make a friend brought us together. I was an antisocial cliché with a chip on my shoulder who dressed in hand-me-downs and tried not to make conversation, hiding behind brunette bangs. She was just the opposite, with a huge mop of blonde hair and a big mouth. We became like sisters.

Something about the urgency in the text, or maybe the coffee or the terrible feeling when I woke up gave me a sinking feeling before I answered. I’ll never forget it, my fingertips went cold.

*Ashley was in an accident last night.* The next message to popped up before I could answer. *She’s unresponsive.*

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On the morning of our high school grad rehearsal Leah and I met up with Ashley outside. We could pick her out of the crowd easily; she was surrounded by friends and her banana yellow streak in a mess of jet-black hair shined in the sun from yards away.

*“*Yo *bitch”* Leah called to her as soon as she could grab her from her crowd of friends.

“*Bitch”* She yelled back. We laughed and clustered into a group and moseyed off past the courtyards and right on the edge of a neighbor’s lawn, plopped down under a shady tree and took long exaggerated drags.

“Wanna longhouse after this shits over?” I asked. *Longhouse* was our code for building a small fort on Leah’s porch and hot boxing it in a scene akin to *That 70’s Show*. We were that annoying.

“Yeah dude, we gotta celebrate!” Ashley chuckled the way she always does, open mouth baring all teeth.

After the rehearsal we piled into Ashley’s car and gossiped about all of our classmates. We always cackled like hyenas when we were together, our parents hated us. We blared our favorite Sublime songs and took loops around the neighborhood before going back to avoid missing our favorites, singing with the windows down. It was the start of a trend that continued all summer, taking night drives like this one after we all got out from our restaurant shifts. It was all of us against the world.

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I remember a photo Ashley took in one of our art classes with a pinhole camera. It was a feather outlined by sun beams that cast a pure black shadow of its silhouette. I stayed after school the day she was developing it in the dark room. I’ll bet she hardly remembers this, it was just one of those small moments that just get forgotten.

I only remember it because of what happened a few days after I begged at the sky for her to wake up from her stupor. She was unresponsive, almost no brain activity, so doctors said to wait. And so we waited. I was getting so lost every day pleading. But one day I sat in almost-shade under a tree that was losing its leaves as October approached. A feather dropped onto the picnic bench, I couldn’t tell from where but it was pretty big to just fall out of the blue. It reminded me of the photo she took.

I brought the feather to my room and placed it next to a small potted plant that I bought two nights before moving into my dorm. The window got a lot of sunlight. I watched it cast a deep shadow against the windowpane when the moon was full some nights; the crisp edges were sharp, but settling. I watched the feather, unmoving until my eyes shut on a lot of nights, feeling the stillness of wherever she was, and hoping that by the time I woke up maybe she would too.

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Ashley and her brother sat on one end of the square table, alternating sharing a stool while puffs of smoke evaporated over us. Leah sat dealing cards in a never-ending game of rummy (no one’s even still counting) 500. On my third Molson I lit up a cigarette and muttered *lets just play kings.* Sort of quietly so that someone would ask what I said, and then the second time more people would be listening.

“Kings! Word good call lets play kings, this is getting dry!” Leah almost interrupts before whoever asked could say *what*. While she reshuffled a couple more people poured in that I only half remember meeting at Ashley’s grad party.

“They come bearing gifts!” Ashley yells and cackles while the thirty slams on the table.

“So you guys are staying over right?” Ashley’s mom asked, opening the refrigerator door for either a beer or a snack, I didn’t check.

“Yeah word, you guys cool with that?” Ashley addressed all of us at once. Over a sea of *I don’t give a fucks* and *whatevers ,* Ashleys mom coo’d *alright, just making sure*, leaving us to our tomfoolery. The night grew with momentum as the 30-rack depleted, complete with jokes in poor taste and really frequent pee breaks for us lightweights. In reality I was probably only about 5 beers deep when I went to bed worried about a hangover. Killing a 30 with a bunch of guys made it easy to disguise my very low tolerance.

“Yo what about how intense Miss Farrell’s class got this semester dude” Ashley says speaking to the ceiling because the lights are completely off and its pitch black. I was arranging myself on the futon while she laughed.

“Haha dude that shit got heavy quick, I didn’t realize so many people had so much shit happen to them!” I was tipsy laughing the whole time.

“I was so nervous to read mine dude”

“Oh I know, but oh my god your essay was so good, shut up!” I said in retort, insecure about my own work. We were in the same non fiction creative writing course and Ashley knew full well people were basically weeping at her story, which she told with a shaking hands but a steady voice.

“Really? I was so nervous dude!” She repeated her sentiments and cackled.

“ Man, you are gonna end up being a writer though Ashley, seriously I just like believe it…” I told her, half knowing that its always been what she wanted to do and half knowing that she never quits at anything. I was sure of it. She got quiet for a minute and laughed a little.

“Oh my god, like not even because I’m drunk right now, that’s the best thing anyone’s ever said to me” She was laughing still, and I laughed with her,

“I’m serious man, don’t ever let it go.”

It was on record one of the cheesiest moments me and Ashley ever shared. We were new friends. Her and Leah went way back, but when our friendships merged we started to spend countless nights like this together, all three of us at the core and whoever else swept in and out of our lives.

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I went to see Corey first; my boyfriend at the time, who I’d been infatuated with all summer. I counted my days around when I would see him next and then weekends home became a pit stop, where I would dump my dirty laundry and then shoot to his house for the weekend. Of the many distractions from what really should have mattered that year, he was the biggest. I allowed him to eclipse everything for comfort.

My reason for being home was to visit Ashley. Since we weren’t really friends for long before her accident I wasn’t sure when it was appropriate to visit. I knew I needed to though. I had to at least write her a letter to open when she woke up, to let her know that I was thinking of her the whole time. I hated being at school. I was very needed at home, for my friend, and I couldn’t be there except for the Sunday visit that I had to plan in advance. I asked Corey to take me to get a card. He paid for it.

“Are you gonna sign my name on that?” he asked. I laughed a little-- sure he wasn’t serious.

“I mean,” he shrugged, “I paid for it” he said with a glance. I fake chuckled again and didn’t answer. I sat at a bench and started scrawling whatever I could think to say and realized how jumbled it sounded. *How do you write a letter to someone in a coma? I* had to think of her as having woken up. *What could I even say?* I managed as much encouragement as I could into my words, and finished with *I love you*.

The car ride to the hospital was silent. Corey dropped me off and I met up with Leah in the café downstairs from Ashley’s room. I felt stupid being there with her family, her mother, people that were a type of distraught I couldn’t even conceive, and then have the audacity to cry in front of them. I was supposed to be there for support, but seeing the crowd upstairs, with flowers and signs and all of the things that loved ones sent and my pathetic red envelope in my hand. I couldn’t sit at home waiting for Ashley, but now I felt like an intruder.

“So, I’m really sorry dude but you can’t go in the room.” Leah said with a hand on my shoulder and her voice shaking. We hadn’t seen each other in person since the accident and only talked about it over the phone. Seeing the equal fear and distress mirrored in each other’s eyes made me break down and begin to cry.

“I’m really sorry, they said she was having visitors yesterday but they don’t wanna have too many people in and out.” She fumbled with her words to keep me from crying but it had nothing to do with that. I was just finally able to cry with my best friend about it and be scared and be there.

“No, no that’s okay… I feel weird even being here, can we go out for a smoke first?” I cleared my voice and held tears.

“Don’t feel weird dude, its weird, I don’t even know, yeah lets go… out this door, this ones fastest.” Leah had been bussing to Mercy hospital every chance she could between school and work so her presence wasn’t unordinary and she knew the in and outs. We shuffled outside and I finally cried. I hugged Leah and cried like a little baby and she cried too.

“I’m just scared man, this is too real” I sort of whispered but none of my words even sounded right. It was all too movie like. It was all too tragic and I was not nearly as brave as I thought I could be.

Leah just said, “I know” and took the card that I brought. “Hey if you want me to run this in there, its okay I can just say you came by… now’s not a really good time anyway, Ashley’s mom is really not feeling up to it.”

I gave her the card, half wondering if she was just protecting me. We smoked rather silently and I went home. That was the only visit I paid and I’ll never stop regretting it.

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When we went on “rez runs” we always went to the falls. Ironically, the nearest reservation to Orchard Park was the complete opposite direction of Niagara Falls. The main event was basically the drive as we ran out of homes to wreck with our beer filled nights, and also money for the beer. On one of the last dwindling nights before we all went away to school Ashley insisted on one last round. We all needed cartons anyway, and Ashley loved to drive. She chain-smoked and blared Avenged Sevenfold for the remainder of the drive to her favorite place. She would talk a mile a minute watching the water roar over the immense edge—about anything. We discussed three-way calls and fun road trips to visit each other while we toked together one last time, giggling about things that weren’t funny to avoid the uncertainty we all felt.

“I mean fuck, *YOU* better visit!” Leah exclaimed at me, gesturing broadly.

“You’re the one leaving us!” She laughed and Ashley interrupted

“ Yeah dude that’s gonna be shitty, for real.” She huffed.

“Guys, I *will* “ I fake laughed and felt the pit of my stomach turn wondering how I would literally even survive without them. Probably sensing my sadness they fought to lighten up the mood.

“Its all good dude though, I’m mad excited to visit Oswego.” Ashley said, passing me the lit joint sparkling and crumbling to ash.

“Word, I’ll be home though…”

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One day I was on the phone with Leah and she hadn’t brought anything up regarding Ashley. It was strange and I was afraid to ask. It was now October and Ashley had been in a coma for two months. Everyone I talked to for those days, which became weeks, which became months ended each conversation with *have you heard anything about Ashley* When It came to Leah that was how we’d start conversations. My whole existence had become conversations. In my dreams, I’d be talking to my friends and family and their voices sounded muffled like phone calls. I was homesick. We chatted about random things, and It made me fear that our lives without Ashley were becoming normal. Then, Right before hanging up, she said it “Oh yea, Ashley’s awake.”

*Where was the celebration?* *Weren’t we supposed to celebrate? Cry for fucks sake? Why couldn’t I cry?* I wondered so many things and Leah wondered them too. We both had a similar response of relief and then a wave of complete uncertainty on how to proceed.

“Can I like *call* her? Is she… well how awake is she?” I didn’t know the right way to ask, but Leah and I had discussed our fears, which were really the doctor’s fears. That she might not be able to walk, talk, remember… there were too many things that could be huge hurtles, and the way that Leah was sounding, Ashley was facing them.

“Look man, I don’t know. Her mom just called me and I didn’t ask many questions. I’m going to the hospital tomorrow, I’ll give you updates then” The fatigue in her voice was masking fear. We were two dumb 18 year olds and we just realized that after all this talk we didn’t have a clue how to help our friend. We never figured it out, we just spent so much time hoping she would wake up. It was selfish, and up until now, we were sheltered.

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Four months after her recovery, there was a benefit held for Ashley. This was the first time I’d seen her. When I saw her she had braces on her legs, and used crutches to get out of the car and into a wheel chair. Her hair was freshly cut and her makeup was done as flawlessly as ever. She smiled so wide, but she was quiet. I’d been texting her during recovery but in spurts. Our conversations would be lengthy paragraphs, sometimes enraged about her mom or Leah or ex’s that were still bothering her. She explained briefly about some of the meds she was on and how they might be messing with her mood but I didn’t really research it as much as I should have. The way she described it to me, she was very depressed. She had nightmares of headlights. She was very afraid, but above all else she always reminded me how happy she was to hear from me. She would say things like *you are so beautiful* and *it is so beautiful to hear from you*. She still had that bright optimism but it was tangled together with anger and fear. I’ve never been the one that was good at comforting, especially in experiences that are foreign to me. I’ll admit it was hard for me to keep up and understand. I didn’t know if this was the medication or the affects of the brain injury itself, or if this was anger that she would hold forever.

When I got to finally see Ashley again I ran up to hug her and stopped short, realizing that I was afraid to touch her. I was afraid to break her, she moved so slowly and carefully and all of the words we’d exchanged over angry texts hovered between me and her smile. She looked so happy, but I knew she was faking. All of these layers of what I saw and the ground level one was the wild friend that I knew in her soul, I could see it too somewhere. We chatted the whole night, but about not very much. That was the scariest part of the whole thing. After all these months passed, we didn’t actually have much to say to each other anymore, and I couldn’t get that time back.

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Since the day of her accident, so much has changed. Neither Leah nor I talk to Ashley much. We ask sometimes how she is, if she is well but after the accident our friendship was never the same. She went through emotions that we weren’t capable of understanding at first. Then as time went on, a sort of purge occurred of all of her old friends. Some people she had confrontations swirled with scenarios that didn’t quite make sense, and some of us were cut off by associating still people that we didn’t even know she had written off. I won’t say any of us were perfect. We would all admit to not knowing how to be there for her in the way that she needed. That was the reason that we needed each other, and it made us all feel sick. The most important thing to me was that she was walking, talking, breathing and moving forward with her life, even if it wasn’t with us. Even if leaving us behind was the best way to let her grow. There was her recovery and there was also all of ours, all of her friends, and as sad as it may be, we went through it separately, all in different ways and all in different places.

On the anniversary of her accident one year, she posted a picture to Facebook of a tattoo she got a few weeks before the accident. On one foot *I will never falter* on the other *I’ll stand my ground.* Across the words on her right foot she has a deep scar distorting the word “Falter” that she got from the accident. Leave it to her to have such poetry on her skin. In flashes I remember the good times, when we were just 17 and the lyrics scrawled on her feet were mostly just badass evidence that she withstood the pain of foot tattoos and was a fan of A Day To Remember. Things get so much heavier with scars, but I’ll never forget those days together, when we all felt real cool. I have to hold on to that more than my mistakes. The people in my heart are no longer fenced in. I let each experience form its own place, wherever it wants to stay, grateful but untied.