

Before you read, PSA from the author herself: *I wanted to experiment writing stories that focused heavily on melancholy. I was inspired by the albums American Football, and Best Buds, which both focus on cathartic reflection and gloomy chord progression. What I see in these albums is an exploration of humanity and youth. I adore both albums and listening to them makes me very happy. I thought it would be interesting to try my hand at writing a sort of emulation of what I see in these songs. I wanted to write about childhood, traumas, mistakes, love, and most importantly, self reflection and coming to terms with sadness. I don't want any of this to be simple shock value writing. I tried my best to keep it raw and honest without moving into any kind of cliches or sadness for sadness sake. I also would like to say before anybody gets worried about me I am fine. None of these stories or poems reflect my mental state in any way. Also trigger warning as these get into some potentially triggering topics.*

Deliver to: 704 W. High St IL

The Family Business

If we're lucky we could talk for a few minutes before the rooster crows. It never mattered to me what we spoke about, rarely anything worth mentioning. Then it was off to work. Chickens needed feeding, cows needed milking. My favorite part was riding out into the pastures with the sheep. From up on my horse I could see every single one of them. If I strained my eyes, far across the fields I could see your silhouette amongst crops. Sometimes I'd ride up to the fence and scream something out, it only took a few seconds for you to respond. The fence ran along the entire property save for our tree hill and the house. The hill was difficult to build around and the house would also stop any animals from getting out. Do you remember when I turned thirteen and begged my dad to let me go to school?

"We need the hands around here," he said. "Your mother is always off in the city and your brother isn't nearly old enough to ride a horse."

He was right, but at the time it was the biggest injustice I'd ever seen. All the other kids got to go to school. They'd have friends by now, school books, and those bright blue uniforms.

"That's not fair! Everybody else gets to you just hate me"

Whenever I said that he would crumple and give in, but not this time. That night I rode out to the evergreen. You were there as I arrived, somehow you knew.

"It's ok, you tried, you can ask again next year, I won't go until you do, I promise."

I rode back slowly that night, following the fence and wiping my tears. At some point I began to hear the cries. Up ahead a lamb had gotten itself stuck on the fence, desperately calling out across the blank expanse. I lept off my horse and detangled the poor thing. It laid in my arms, which were now scratched and bleeding, and looked me in my eyes.

"It's safer in here anyways" I told it through my own tears. "Out there wolves will get you"

The irony didn't find me then, but it didn't matter. Because the next day that lamb was eaten as chops by a very important man from the city.

Piles of shit

Are rather common on a farm. Somebody has to clean them up. The pastures had the most brown spotted amongst the grass. It was all collected on the back of a truck and taken over to other farms to be used as fertilizer. The farthest farm out was the Zabrowski farm. I guess it was liberal to call it a farm, it consisted of an old house falling apart and a shabby unkempt garden. Every time I delivered to that farm Sawyer would come out and greet me. He was a weird boy, blind in one eye. You told me he was nice, if not a little tone deaf or insensitive. He was a year younger than me, so 14 at the time. We'd been talking whenever I came around, but it was nothing more than a greeting. I found him a little annoying actually. That day he asked me about the rings I was wearing. He said they didn't exactly look like something I'd want to stuff into a pile of poops. He was right. I don't know what came over me then, but as we unloaded the remaining shit I grew more and more interested in our conversation. In some way I guess he was handsome. And funny. And smart too. You'd laughed at me when I told you, saying that Sawyer was basically as smart as the shit he was shoveling.

The next day I insisted my dad do the chickens and I would get the shit again. He was coming down with something at the time, so he didn't complain, "Ellise.." you said knowingly when I came by. "Good luck, but he's not worth it." You know how it went from here, you were there. Sawyer was the nicest person I'd ever met. And it was obvious he was obsessed with me. You told me as much after the fourth month straight of me on shit duty. Whatever dad had was getting worse, but it didn't matter. Sawyer was all that mattered. It started happening after our sixth month anniversary, sometimes he'd get angry.

"I don't care, Ellise! can't you see I'm upset? We're talking about me right now" Sometimes his depression would drag him into dark places. The scars across his legs multiplied each time I saw him.

"If you ever leave me, I'd kill myself" he joked.

That winter he wrapped us up in a blanket, sipping hot cocoa and watching an old film on his shitty TV. His hand crept around my thigh and into my inner leg. I didn't care because it was him, nothing else mattered then.

The next day he swore never to talk to me again.

"You're just like the rest of them!" he shouted. "Selfish and abusive! If you let me do it then why not again? Do you not love me? Do you want me dead?"

You saved me from him. Pulling me away and cursing him. You never knew what we argued about though.

He apologized the next day. His mom had gotten drunk again that day and hit him, his dad was on pills again, he was really really sorry. I fell into his arms again while you dealt with the consequences of your public outburst. I spent more time at his shack than at my farm. My days started in his arms and ended with tears. But we'd wake up again and start over.

Was I happy? Yes. He held me up high above everything else, nothing would come between our love. His hand would grip mine and we'd stare into each other's eyes for hours.

"Tomorrow we can go down to the fields and and make a pie with whatever we can find"

We'd only find rotten berries and apples with bites in them. I smiled at the thought of it. I used to bake pies with you from that same orchard, when we were too young to work the fields and couldn't ride a horse. The memory pulled me deeper into it, and I found myself drifting to sleep. Sawyer smiled and kissed my forehead.

I woke up to Sawyer above me. Sweat dripped from his brow and his shirt was strewn over a chair in the corner.

"Sorry I didn't ask, I knew you'd say yes though"

I lay there paralyzed until he finished. Hating every inch of myself as he lusted over it. Then I lay there a few minutes longer watching the movie play on his rusted old TV. It felt like a few minutes but by the time I got up the sun had already tucked itself behind the hills. He came back, but nothing he said could convince me to stay. My feet hurt walking across the road. And by the time I got home a few pebbles had lodged themselves into me. I walked to the evergreen and told you he'd broken up with me. That's all that happened anyway. You'd understand that. Through all the tears you told me he was an asshole and I was perfect no matter what he said. I knew I missed him though. I wouldn't have to. Sometimes I wake up early in the morning glued to my bed, living that day again. Sometimes I see his face and break down in tears. And sometimes his voice creeps into my head, and I hear him calling out to me as I drifted away.

"I'm sorry Ellise! I won't do it again I promise! Without you I have nothing baby please.. Please! Don't leave me! PLEASE!"

Flesh

Work slows down during the winter. Most fields freeze over and animals are less eager to spend every waking hour outside. The coldest winters can freeze the spit in your mouth. Winter is the only time we can meet anywhere other than the evergreen. The fifth stair up to your room creaks when you step on it, and the railing will break if I touch it. It's not fair. Why are you and all the other kids allowed to school but not me? This is our last year together now.

"It's not all that great. The people are cruel and it smells"

Why can't Sawyer just die? What's stopping me from killing him?

"He's a shit person. You're better than that Ellise, a killer you are not"

You reached out to hug me but I recoiled from you. Sawyer's face appears in my mind and I break down in tears. I sit a few feet away from you as his hands run me up and down. He whispers how much he loves me and how much he loves my body. Suddenly I want to tear my skin off. These pieces of me that he adored that he defiled I want to rip them off. I fell into your arms, and it's gone. I forget Sawyer and my flesh is mine again. You hold me close and let the tears fall.

"I won't leave you Ellise, even though I'm in the city I'll spend every second of my breaks with you and we'll talk every day when I walk home" it's the first bit that meant the world to me. You wouldn't leave. No matter what earth shattering event tore us apart you wouldn't leave.

Later that night I cried again in the shower. Sawyer stood next to me, naked and smiling at my chest. His hands reached out for me and I broke down into tears. My hands flailed around for anything to grab. Sawyer leaned down and put his hand on my mouth coaxing me to him.

"You're really the most beautiful girl I've ever seen"

The razor in my hand came down before I could think twice. A stream of blood dripped down my breast from the cut I'd just made. Sawyer stopped briefly. Then kept pulling me in. Again. Now my thigh burned and blood raced down the drain. Again. The knife kissed my stomach and the warm comfort of blood came. Again. Rip Sawyer's hands away from me. Again. Why didn't I stop him? Again. Why did it feel good? Again. I sat there in my own blood, watching it create a whirlpool beneath me. My body was on fire, it hurt but I deserved it. Never let him touch me again, this would remind me. Eventually the water ran cold and shocked me back into the world. I stood up tentatively, wincing. The blood was coated on me from head to toe. I felt better.

Retrospective

I know my anecdotes won't change how you see me. I often wonder what could. I wanted to fill in the background you never knew about. Maybe I manipulate slightly, drawing sympathy out of you,, that's not my intention.

How I disappear

You never did believe he raped me. There wasn't enough evidence, he seemed like a nice kid, you could see it happening but wanted to reserve judgment. At the time I didn't know what could possibly make you believe him over me, but the gift of hindsight graces me now with the answer. You'd loved him.

I withered away, shying away from peoples eyes, covering myself more and more. You treated it like a breakup, saying it would all be okay after a while and you'd be here by my side the whole time. They were nice lies.

I didn't bathe out of fear Sawyer would reappear. My clothes enveloped me and I spent more and more of my time sitting under our evergreen. You stopped showing up after a month of this. I wondered if you'd grown tired of my incessant depression. Each day I would climb up a branch higher into that tree, searching as far as I could see for you. Cows and crops blocked my view for the first week, forcing me further up. Finally I clung to a branch, higher up than I had ever been. Your shape was just visible against the sunset, beside you stood Sawyer.

I considered falling, the wind picked up and my support branch seemed to be failing by the second. I couldn't cry during the walk home. Instead a mounting anger fought against my better judgment. I could kill you if I tried, couldn't I?

The fair

You know how important the fair is. A once a year celebration, the only time we really all gather together as a community. Prize winning animals and vegetables are the biggest attraction. No pun intended. I had crawled my way into the bath in order to make myself presentable, now I hid a new layer of scars under an old gray cardigan. I'd helped you make the food you were to bring to the fair. You'd explained away your absence from our tree with the bustle of the fair.

Bright lights and dying stars

Bright lights and loud sounds,
My eyes burn, a warm rain falls
All that winter brings

Bird, left from a nest
Its wet eyes fixed on the sky
Now I spread my wings

The sky is farther
Below, a black endless pool
Does death smile to me?

Bright lights, dying stars
Sink into the void of space
I plead: take my back

The summer ends

The summer ends and I gather my thoughts.

A year of school looms ahead, a tidal wave of despair ready to hit me. So I look backwards. Fear grips my mind but I turn away, instead sinking into your arms, on a cool May night. A small fire burns beside us, you are keeping me warm. A soft hum from the forest around us, cicadas. The moon looks down on us, keeping watch. I fade into you, forgetting it all. You speak to me, but the words unravel before I can hear them.

I open my eyes to the light of the sun through the window of my room. The sun lights my face and thoughts of you warm my heart. The day finds us swimming in a small natural pool. A waterfall causes tiny waves to lap at us while we laugh. I don't know how to swim. You keep me afloat, testing the waters before I step deeper in. Despite your best efforts, I tumble down gasping for air.

A hand pulls me out of the pool, and onto a city street. A slight rain falls around us, under the umbrella you bought a few minutes ago. We shiver, waiting for the bus to wind its way up the hill and bring us down to our seaside homes. The rain comes down harder, creating puddles all around us. The umbrella sags slightly under the weight. I shudder at the thought of being stuck out here much longer, but you begin to sing. A song your mother taught you. Before alcoholism, she was the ideal parent. Now you sing me a soft melody, filled with yearning and unrequited love.

"Je te laisserai des mots En d'ssous de ta porte."

"I will leave you notes, underneath your door"

I blink and I am watching a storm from out my window. A sodden piece of paper in my hand.

"I love you"

It declares.

My heart's aflame inside my chest, now desperately trying to salvage this note as it falls apart from my touch. I scramble to put the pieces of it together, but the water claims them. No amount of heat can revive these papers from their watery grave. I look out the window, up the mountain and to the forest atop it.

I turn around. Leaving my memories behind. Instead I stare at the rock in front of me. Flowers adorn it. The wave builds up in my ears, rushing towards me. Ready to consume. I'm not afraid. I turn to embrace it, arms open wide. You taught me how to swim.

Whatever, forever

I have a headache. My eyes fight against me trying to close. *Sleep you idiot, sleep.* Says my brain. The computer on my lap tells me that it's 1am and time to sleep. Once again I ignore my past self and dismiss the alarm. I flick through the four open tabs before settling on the finance report I need to write an hour ago. I type a few words, then delete them. I type a few words, then delete them. Repeat.

Why the fuck do I have to write this? The budget hasn't changed, the sales haven't changed nothing is different.

But I'm paid to pretend things are different each time and that I'm excited to share these changes. I switch to a new tab. "Top 10 fun things to do in New York!" it declares loudly. Force of habit has me scroll down the list just to make sure a new one hasn't snuck its way in since I last checked.

Go out to a bar with your friends! Remember to have a designated driver!

The group of people in the image all smile and laugh, clinking glasses and remembering to have a designated driver. I remember college. Friends. Once it was over we all went off to jobs. Nobody wanted to live in New York, so we drifted apart. I had nobody to drink with even if I could.

See a movie! Check out our top 10 movies to see list for ideas!

Another photo shows people jam packed together eagerly awaiting the film to begin. People don't sit that close anymore. Covid-19, a constant thought in our heads, makes it so. Nobody wanted to live in a big city during a worldwide pandemic.

Start a YouTube channel!

I move to the next tab.

I have no new emails. The draft I wrote years ago is still open on my desktop

Love story: