

## THE NEXT FEW MONTHS

January through April go by in a haze, as people begin to trickle back to work, disappear, disappoint, discover bigger and better things for themselves. The city begins to warm up, and on my daily walks, I start to notice little things growing in the park and throughout my mind, some inspiring, some loud and concerning. At a certain point, I decide I should get a job, so I walk up and down the streets in the 80s, stopping in at all storefronts I'd be happy to spend a few hours in, but daily, my standards lower and lower, and by the end I'm practically whoring myself out to anyone and everyone with a buck to give me, a place for me to spend my time in, eager to find *something* to devote my misguided energy into.

I end up working at a Japanese restaurant, serving sushi and overly greasy fried rice, calamari, matcha flavored anything to drunk Chinese businessmen, or college students with something to celebrate. The money is fine, minimum wage or something like it, but the hours are awful, I feel I'm wasting away into my black dress shirt and apron, and pretty soon my dreams are completely saturated by visions of waiting tables, delivering sushi and fried rice and calamari and sake to tables, customers talking to me without realizing I'm a person. I dream about my manager, a short old lady, yelling at me, mopping the floor for hours on end before she tells me to mop it again and again and again and again and again and... matcha flavored cake, matcha flavored tuna, matcha water, matcha chicken, matcha everywhere except in matcha – much like myself, matcha has been overemployed and overextended – and then I'll wake up, sweating, anxious and eager to soak up the 3 hours left in the day until my shift starts and I'm consumed by life in that dim restaurant.

So a month and a half into my job, I quit, much to the disapproval of my father, but I need to feel free, and I've got enough money to sustain me through whatever I need to be sustained through, as I've been working overtime, double shifts, triple shifts, spending weeks at a time doing anything the management wants, when I should be tending to my own garden, mopping my own floors and feeding myself. I throw my shirt and apron in the garbage as soon as I leave with my last paycheck. Smoke a joint and listen to Radiohead and smile, a free agent again.

Jay and Davis and I do end up making our movie. The script goes through hundreds of iterations on the way to where it ends up. Gina something-or-other, hot off shooting a film with Martin Scorsese in which she played a cashier that gets roped into a mobster's shindigs for one night, plays my girlfriend, and I a shady drug dealer, who'll do anything and everything to get ahead, stomping on people's heads with no regard until it catches up to me in the end and I get shot in the head. In one scene where we're yelling at each other, Gina and I get a good rhythm going, and maybe I'm insane but I feel some sort of *energy* between us, and although I'm trying to stay away from girls right now, she's a *movie star* (albeit a pretty unknown one, D-list if not E-list) so I take her to a club, we do some coke in the bathroom, and the music is insane, I've never heard of it before but when we dance, we disappear, the entire dance floor becomes a living, breathing organism, people start moshing and it's like we think and breathe as one, move as one, and I still feel them with me even as

I lie in Gina's bed. She plays some music that makes me sick, something bubblegum and pop and pink and tying up everything I hate in the 21st century music industry and makes me feel like art is dying, but then I remind myself I'm currently in the present moment fucking *sleeping with a movie star* (or someone close enough), so I exit from my brain and try to get back in my body, I wrap my hands around her hair,

hair that's been on the silver screen, but the coke is in my dick and in my brain too much and I'm fucking thinking about Melody again, goddamn it, for the first time in weeks, and at the worst possible moment her silk-screen silverfox iridescent hair is making Gina's fake blond locks look almost revolting, so I excuse myself to the bathroom, and look in the mirror, examine my wrinkles, some old, some new, look at the shirt I borrowed from Davis to wear out tonight, and the blue glitter on my eyes Gina insisted on putting on me in an artificially flirtatious voice, and it doesn't look half bad, in fact it actually looks pretty good, and then I look myself in the eyes and take a deep breath.

I go back outside and make some excuse to leave, somewhat embarrassed by my sexual incompetence, but Gina doesn't seem to mind, in fact she actually asks me to cuddle, so I do, in utter disbelief about the current situation, but then as I hollowly spoon her perfect Hollywood body with absolutely no heart behind the action, I realize she's just a person too, just a girl who wants affection, attention, but nobody can see her behind her persona. With this realization of our simple needs and humanity, we end up talking for a while, into the night, and it feels nice, real and connected, but it's a mirage that fades away, the sun erasing this, it's just a fluke, and as I walk home from the subway, I'm unsure if it really happened at all, or if it did, wondering if all it takes to connect with someone in a real way is dancing, drugs, sex, loneliness, one borrowed night and some blue glitter eyeshadow?

The vegan thing ends up being a bust. It turns out the edibles I've been taking the whole goddamned time have had gelatin in them, a gummy substance made from animal skin and bones, and because it's the only animal product I've been eating and perhaps the conscious vegan thing *has*, in fact, made an imprint on me, as soon as I realize this fact I feel sick to my stomach, thinking about the bones and skin, tendons and ligaments of cows and pigs that were boiled into something unrecognizable, now swimming around in my stomach with CBD and THC, and I wonder how you can truly be vegan if everything is interconnected, if spinach and potatoes couldn't exist without the worm it took to make the dirt, if figs are made by wasps crawling into them and dying in one majestic, final figgy purple breath. I decide it's ridiculous to try to attempt to clean your karma in a world where negative karma is rewarded in fake shiny attractive rewards and power, so I start eating fish again, then dairy, and soon I'm scarfing down cheeseburgers and milkshakes with wild abandon.

I spend a lot of time stoned, folding origami roses, lilies, tulips, lotus flowers, and finding it really pleasant and meditative. I spend a lot of time thinking about Melody, and all the other girls in the past, trying to examine the patterns and habits involved, wondering why Melody took so much larger of a chunk out of me, or else gave me something much larger and harder to purge from my system, or maybe the situation in which it all occurred, the *foul play* just left me feeling guilty, unable to shake the guilt from me, and maybe in fact she didn't mean all that much, not as much as the girl whose mother revived her dog, who I'm now thinking about. Walking in the park with her that one pretty day, our hands brushing together in carelessness and confusion, and I start to feel jaded about her, too, and then about another girl who I skinny-dipped with, lying on the beach letting the waves lap our toes, making love in a fancy hotel room. I think about the way I felt carried in the night as she drove and I nodded off to sleep to find she was there in my dreams, holding me in crooked, warm arms, and then I feel jaded about Gina too, for some reason. So I go back to my origami roses, folding with purpose, letting each sharp, decisive crease infuse me with finality and simplicity, something I've been lacking. Sometimes Melody pops back into my brain, or those other girls, sometimes my mother even, but mainly it's Melody, and that silly,

haunted man she was with, my old best friend who disappeared off to Hollywood (or something like it) without a trace, who I miss dearly. Arlo. Arlo the Rock Star. Arlo Walker. I decide to fold my origami roses for him, infusing each with missing him and those days we would hang out, all three of us, or just me and him – folding each flower as an apology, as a prayer, as wishes for him to succeed and be happy, his beautiful voice and shaggy, scratchy hair and face. Folding a rose for each soul I've loved and lost, each soul I've lost and won.

My morning walks carry me through my days, devouring albums as therapy, and my afternoons are spent reading, until it feels like all my days are only music and words, music and words, footsteps on increasingly sunny pavement and grass, books stacking up on my nightstand until there's two days left until I leave for Paris, with no return plan, no sense of timing, a few thousand dollars in my bank account, and no clue which books to pack, which clothes to pack. So I get stoned, chewing on animal bones and THC and let myself flow, throwing things into a singular backpack, I'm packing light, ready to move, staying on the go, deciding to spend however long I want in Europe, maybe live a whole life there, let all my money run out, find some more, end up in places I've never even heard of, can't pronounce, maybe the moon or some foreign planet, that's my plan since I've got no others. Before I know it I'm boarding a plane, entering the cabin, sitting down, and falling asleep as my ears fill with music blaring that I'm not even processing. The plane lifts off, up, up, and away.

Leaving NYC and all that doesn't matter behind. It all becomes clearer in moments like this. I smile as these wheels lift off the ground, feeling that all that is down there disappears, has no bearing on me. Flying high, above it all, seeing it pass by in inches, ants crawling along a forest floor. Trivial people and their trivial problems. And knowing the vastness of it all, it looks real pretty. I feel like the sun, understanding my duty to shine, love like a mother. I remember what matters in moments like this. And the music comes in strong, the bass, violin, lyrical questions and answers scoring my new chapter. Each note contributing to the melody of the universe.

---

## **INTERLUDE: MELODY'S THEME (SIDE ONE)**

### **THE PERSISTENCE OF MEMORY**

The whole thing with Andrew and I happened years ago, right before I graduated school, before summer came shining through the windows and everything hiding in the shadows faded away into dust – until Arlo briefly evolved to live and die as a rock star exploding silently into the dark night. It was an event, like any other, arising and then passing away. It blew over as quickly as it started, and nobody ended up as hurt as Andrew always feared they did, except for maybe Andrew himself. Months later, it had been merely a few weeks on the calendar, a fluke, if anything; the world kept on turning, and Andrew, Arlo, and I all went our separate ways, some paths more radical and dangerous than others. But for a brief time before all that, the three of us lived a sweet life together (this was before Andrew was with Willow, while Arlo and I were deep in love, before he was swept away by the rapids of success). We would talk about nothing and everything, smile and laugh and grow deeper souls, deeper minds, deeper purposes in life, and teach each other everything, learn about it all from each other – tapping the infinite wells of life and

friendship, love and humanity with each passing day. Andrew and I ended up together for a mere few weeks, when Arlo was swept away by that crazy planet called “fame and fortune,” after Willow had broken Andrew’s little heart. It was a product of the time – one of loss and loneliness – and I think we’d both admit it was a mistake. The real love story in my life was with Arlo, and Arlo alone is where my heart still lies.

We met on the first day of school, and, despite my qualms with this corny phrase, it *was*, in fact, love at first sight. We were pulled together like magnets, joined at the hip. For a while, we were best friends, though Arlo stated he always knew we would end up together, and was simply waiting for “divine timing” to play the last chord in the song before our love song faded in. The first thing I fell in love with was his musicality. We were both singers, studying music composition, but while I simply sang (although he would probably kill me for saying so), he lived and breathed music. His world was one of music alone. And while I was his girl, I soon came to realize that his real muse, his one true love was Music. She was his first love, his only love, and I (being named Melody), temporarily swooped into his vision as a brief distraction for him to hold – a physical body to root him in the real world, a place he never ended up staying for long.

I instantly fell in love with the way Arlo could sniff out good music from miles away like a hunter. One late night, it was quiet and warm as we walked downtown after seeing a film, and he began to run, breaking into what resembled a horse’s gallop, following, chasing something I couldn’t hear, much less fathom the grasp it had on him. I thought he was crazy as he ran through alleys and streets, up an elevator and down an abandoned hallway, but I followed (of course I did), breathless, as he searched for the origin of that particular physical incarnation of his lover, calling out to him from somewhere far off. We ended up in an abandoned basement watching two scrappy looking kids play hardcore punk transitioning seamlessly to R&B ballads, swaying into slow meditations in C Major, G Major, E flat Minor, swelling into cries for God to intervene in their suffering, impatiently beating on drums with a fire. That night had a haunting effect on me that I’ve never tried to explain to anyone, knowing my words could never do it justice. Those wistful-faced young kids created the most beautiful sounds I’ve heard, and I don’t know why, but I’ve got a gut feeling they didn’t last long in this world (I believe you can always feel the loss of someone who still lives inside of you somewhere). That night, I remember, as the kids stroked the chords to a Tim Buckley song and wailed along, looking over at Arlo to see him with tears streaming down his pretty face, his long hair matted with sweat. I have a feeling that night haunted him in the same way, possibly even deeper down in his bones.

I was flattered by the status he gave me in the world, the way he acted as though I was the most beautiful and sweetest thing in the whole wide universe. I melted at the way he sang (as most folks did, still do), his voice beaming down from heaven above for anyone lucky enough to witness it. I loved his hair, especially when it was long, his scratchy stubble, and the way he would join me if I was dancing alone, twirl me around, beaming sunlight through his eyes when I turned back to meet them. I found myself tortured by the way he would sometimes disappear, zoning out for what felt like lifetimes. I grew to accept it. I loved the way he often said the phrase “rock and roll” unironically, letting the words drip from his tongue like candy in response to invitations, questions, admissions of my love for him, knowing he felt those words (stupid as they may have seemed to me) deep down in his bones.

In the mornings, my eyes still filled with sleepy tears, my mouth gaped in yawns, my mind split between two worlds, he would whisper things to me:

“You remind me of chamomile and calendula, rosemary and thyme, all ground up in a wooden bowl by a crazy old lady.”

“Uh huh, what kind of crazy old lady?” I’d ask.

“She’s humming along an ancient song as she grinds the plants into medicine. I can see her right now, singing quietly, passionately, patiently.”

Or sometimes he’d sit up, recapping the prior night’s jazz concert, and the way I behaved during it.

“You’re the only person in the world who could talk during a concert and I wouldn’t be pissed at them. Most people sound like an interruption to the song. When you whisper in my ear, it sounds like you’re contributing your own harmony to the music, crafting your own solo as you speak.”

He was obsessed with those flowy pants I wore, always asking to borrow them. He loved the smell of my figgy perfume, and when I wore it, he wore it. We shared everything – wore the same clothes, ate out of the same bowls. When I went vegan, he went vegan. When I switched to a flip phone, so did he, and as time went on we became less two people, but rather two extensions of one larger whole.

“You’re like a soothing balm on my sore, wounded soul,” I think he once whispered to me, though I was caught between two worlds at that moment, and still am; some days, I find myself unable to distinguish my ideas about who Arlo could’ve been from the real events, and wonder if I’m conflating my memories of him with my dreams – the version that I created in his absence – creating a hodge-podge of a whole person, adding my own new pieces to an everchanging puzzle.

### **TRIO IN C MAJOR**

Arlo and Andrew could’ve been brothers. The two were often mistaken for each other, depending on their hair lengths and whether or not they had facial hair. They were friendly from the start, but being closed off humans with rich inner lives, both found it hard to connect with people in general. They were known to occasionally bump into each other at a school party, drunk or stoned, and utter something like *we have to hang out, dude*, or *you’re so fucking cool*, or *man, why aren’t we closer?* But when Andrew’s mother passed and he left school for a semester, Arlo felt his loss, too, and expressed his guilt to me often when Andrew was gone, despite them not being all that familiar. When he came back, though, the two began to heal in the time they spent together. I watched them glow brighter and brighter each day.

Arlo’s father died when Arlo was seven. He abandoned Arlo and his mom a few years earlier, and went off to become a rock star, with big dreams of wicked crowds, fires and sleepless visions in deserts and heaven, fame and fortune, ecstasy in a flowery field alone as the earth crumbles in on itself, drugs and wild parties while touring the world in a bus, rocky road trips to smooth out the devilish caverns of his brain. And here’s the thing about big dreams: if you chase them without a care in the world, with wild abandon, you just might catch them. And he did, gleaming with a bright fire on stages throughout the country, full of fame and fortune, sleepless nights and sleepless visions, before dying of a heroin

overdose, falling into those same devilish caverns, leaving Arlo with big shoes, memories, a guitar and a damned good voice.

And Arlo stepped into those shoes and he ran for his goddamned life, singing like a siren, and though I tried to slow him down, get him to breathe and look around for one second, there was always Music looming, their tumultuous relationship forcing him further ahead, running faster and faster, struggling to catch his breath.

But Andrew took him out of this for a brief stint. The two would spend every waking hour they could together, and I had no qualms with this, enjoying seeing Arlo with a friend, enjoyed seeing what they did for each other, how they lifted each other up. I also liked Andrew – he was interesting, well-humoured, fashionable, amusing, well-liked. He kept to himself, not talking to many people at school, and everybody wanted to know him; though I don't like to admit it, I felt I was in an exclusive club at times, my status raised by being friends with such a mysterious figure. He was attractive, looked like Arlo, and as time went on, the two resembled each other more and more, the two forming more shared opinions and ideas, speech and thought patterns – this eventually confused me, but I recognize now it was nothing more than this which led to the events that occurred.

Some mornings after a party, Andrew would wake up on Arlo's sofa as Arlo and I walked out of his room, and we'd recap the night's events. I recall, one time, Arlo poking fun at Andrew for never sleeping in his own home. "You're such a bum. Crashing on our couch every night."

"I cannot *stand* my roommate, dude. Pissing me off all the time. I've been avoiding him. Haven't been home in days."

"Man, when was the last time you even showered?"

"I showered last night when you guys went to sleep. I used all your body wash. I'll buy you a new one."

"You might as well start paying rent," Arlo teased.

Andrew's birthday was a couple weeks after that, and as his gift, Arlo gave him a key to his place, which was really *our* place. I decorated the place, left temporary marks of myself in the kitchen, the walls painted by the shades of my own personage, baring my soul in paintings on the kitchen walls. I brought all the furniture from my place into Arlo's room, leaving my own home barren and dark, neglected. I never went back there much at that time, anyway.

I stopped singing, mostly because for me, it was an expression of myself I turned to at my own schedule, and being in school – receiving arbitrary numbers and assignments and letters slapped onto my voice's body – sapped the joy from it fast. I didn't miss it, and I sang when Arlo sang, helped him with his songs, finding the notes, the harmonies, occasionally recording a duet. I turned, instead, to painting, inspired by the vivid worlds I would visit on acid, usually with Arlo, or Arlo and Andrew together. I bore my soul in these paintings, and hung my soul up on Arlo's walls again and again, leaving it there forever. I wonder if it's still there, or if not, where else it could've gone, who or what it would've latched onto. Maybe my

soul was left floating between Arlo and Andrew and I, choosing between us like divorced parents, ending up in custody of the wrong person.

But then again, maybe I'm just still sore about it all. Maybe my soul is still here, inside me, complete in all parts, just patched together with cheap bandages and decorated with scars.

Sometimes I would sit and watch Andrew and Arlo talk about nothing, or else everything, speaking in tongues, conspiracy theories I didn't understand, or truths I couldn't come to know yet. They knew they sounded crazy to the outside world, and didn't care.

"I stopped wearing my retainer a few weeks ago. I had braces twice. It's a complete scam. If my teeth want to go a specific way, who am I to stop them? To deny my true nature?" I remember Andrew saying to Arlo, with an intense look in his eyes.

Another time, Arlo went on a rant. This should've been the first sign I saw. "We truly live in a dystopian society."

"I know, I know--"

"But think about this. You're driving down the highway, not a car in sight, so you decide to have a little fun. Drive outside the lines. The lines imposed by our own unlined hands. Hands that have been conditioned to work in lines, in squares, cubes, four dimensional time-bound distinctions on a boundless being. So then I get pulled over. I try to explain to the officer I was just playing around, but he doesn't want to hear it, listening instead to the sound of his mind, listening instead to the sound of his badge, his uniform, his goofy looking police cap giving him false power that is no more real than a football game. He's busy listening to that, while I'm listening to the universe's song, hearing more beauty than this man could ever dream of seeing – if he came in contact with one pinky nail's worth of that beauty it would bring him to his knees – so I end up singing the song I'm letting guide me, and it starts off tentative, but it takes me over, more powerful than this guy's boss's boss. Screw that, more powerful than the King of the Roman Empire. So he starts to think I'm drunk, which I'm not, really, I had a few beers but that was hours ago, and he starts to yell at me. Picture that, I'm singing a song and he's yelling. So I ask him to calm down, and he pulls me out the car, and makes me take a breathalyzer test." Then he would get distracted by my presence, listening to him without judgement, and kiss me on the forehead.

"Anyways... where was I going with this? Oh shit, right – how insane is it that we've lived in a world where we not only consume poison on the regular (I myself am guilty of this, clearly)," he said with a beer in his hand, "but we also used our mathematical scientific powers not to, I don't know, cure cancer, or something noble like that, but to create a machine that measures how much poison you've had, to decide whether or not to throw you into a prison where rapists and stoners and children and innocent people of color and killers and dreamers all sit together locked away from the world we've created by the world we've created in a world we've created! You know what I'm saying?!"

I didn't know what he was saying. I rarely did. But despite my tone about the things the boys would speak about, I know there was a lot of truth in what they said.

“I think it’s insane that we’ve created a world so wearying to our inherent nature that we need to drink poison to feel alright!” Andrew exclaimed one night.

“But that’s not where the issue lies– the issue lies in that there are real things out there that transport you to worlds where Gods will enter your mind to tell you to *stop* drinking, and you might listen. That there are plants you can eat that will give you nothing but harmony with all the peace, light, love and song in the world, that make you seek these things out in your daily life, and yet the world keeps trying to keep these things secret. The ayahuasca plant has a better success rate for curing addiction to alcohol and hard drugs than any other type of rehab–”

“No, but Arlo, what really matters is that you can feel true peace, true love, and then exit your meditative state, filled with sandalwood incense or whatever-the-hell and you step back into the street and your soul immediately gets burnt to a crisp by rules, unconscious people, people hell-bent on power and nothing else, running upside-down on a treadmill, seeing the Devil as God and love and peace and harmony as the Devil. And the treadmill isn’t goin nowhere. You know what is goin somewhere? The ocean of love. It’s gotta be flowing somewhere. I want to be carried along with it.”

Andrew always had a way with words. Though I would try to contribute to these conversations, I never felt like I was able to keep up, their hopped up brains running a mile a minute onto bigger ideas, mysteries, dreams.

“America has been around for the span of 45 presidents, all governing, for better or for worse, for four year stretches. Ancient Egypt had over 300 pharaohs, ruling for up to 94 years. We’re babies! We know nothing. And Egypt fell eventually, leaving behind a few pyramids and structures in the sand. It’s inevitable. We all get swept away, some faster than others, scrambling to leave a signature or a mark that squeaks and shouts from our speck of dust ‘I WAS HERE! I WAS HERE!’ But we don’t realize that we’ve always been here, always will be. We’re living such a farce.” I remember losing track near the end of that thought, Andrew speaking eloquently, Arlo staring intently into his eyes, his beautiful eyes flashing and glazing over into pearls I could no longer hold or read.

“Rock and Roll,” Arlo spoke slowly, those three words holding more weight than he could manage in that moment, soaking up his person like a sponge and dropping onto the floor, quiet as a pin, as Andrew went on:

“Look– I don’t know why we were gifted with the consciousness we have – consciousness different from that of a cat, or a tree, or a stone, or the air around us – which *must* be conscious too! How can we believe that we’re the only things with life like this? I mean, when I pray, I can feel the way the space around me holds my prayers and sends them to the stars! But anyway– I was saying we don’t know why all the accidents in the cosmic gumbo out there led us to be able to create, to destroy, to create political structures and empires that rise and fall and all of these things. But you’ve got to use it for good? Haven’t you? We’ve got to wake people up! I don’t know…”

This was the moment in the night where Andrew would trail off, gain self consciousness, aware that he was too stoned, ranting about nothing, nonsense, incomprehensible to all but Arlo, and he would go quiet. I truly understood him in these particular moments, seeing the way he could switch off whatever was moving in him so quickly. Typically at this point in the night, Arlo would bring out a guitar, and Andrew would fall asleep on the couch. And Arlo and I would craft melodies into the night to sail smoothly into the next morning.

Andrew often went on these inspired rants that would've scared any interested party away. But they only drew Arlo in further. The two would meditate together, but also began to take shrooms and acid and God knows what else more frequently. Looking back, I realize I should've been worried, cut them off before it got too late, but it seemed relatively harmless to my eyes, blurred by the lenses of presence and naivety, with too many other places to look; now I have the passage of time to clarify it all to those same eyes. The mist of events drifts away.

As time went on, knowing what the two of them would bring out of each other, I began to opt out of these secret meetings they had. I found peace in solitude – painting, walking, reading, singing again. But I began to see Arlo and Andrew less. Though Andrew spoke in facts, in poetry, in truths that *he* believed deep deep down, I believe he planted seeds in Arlo's brain that grew in his damaged soil (the only soil they could find), growing into misshapen fruits, who, while still beautiful (and sweet-sounding when they grew into songs), contained toxins and poisons of another kind, unknown to Andrew or Arlo, which when bitten into, spread across his tongue and brain like disease.

## **SPRING**

Spring came early that final year of school. I remember the flowers blooming in early February, and good things with it. Arlo and I found a wonderful peace, a calm before the storm, and crafted some beautiful duets that floated with real artistry, I thought. I haven't been able to bring myself to listen to those in a while, but I still believe in their power. Andrew and Willow were in full blown love (or at least it seemed so to outside eyes), and with Andrew preoccupied with his woman, I had Arlo all to myself. Willow brought a new practicality to Andrew that, while inconsistent with the guy I knew, was nice to see. He seemed to take better care of himself, become a kinder person, more giving, even if it was all for her. The four of us occasionally went on double dates, but something wouldn't click. Andrew and Willow seemed awkward in our company, and I began to wonder what they were like on their own. But I couldn't stay hung up on this for long, as I was happy with Arlo again, picnicking in the park every day for hours, singing, dancing, enjoying the company of the sun, filling us with love pouring between us like the mouths of two rivers.

This peace didn't last long. It never does. The sun always sets and the night will swallow us. Andrew seemed to become greatly unhappy with Willow, and he started spending his time with Arlo again. For a while, our trio was back together, and we would co-exist in shared company every night before I would go home, returning to the newfound peace in solitude, put on a record and paint, leaving the boys to their alone time. I assumed Andrew just needed his friend back, someone to talk to about his relationship problems, and I tried to give them the space for that. Little did I know that every night after I'd left, they would take acid and ketamine more and more, expending all their effort on escaping from the world they so desperately wanted to save, searching for answers in a smoke-filled void of numbness. Arlo seemed

more and more like a haze of nothing when I'd see him, and I didn't know how to intervene. The two would tell me stories of finding underground raves and concerts in cities hours away, doing coke and molly and drinking and driving to explore the darkest corners of the world they inhabited.

Arlo's music became darker, grittier, loaded with heaviness, but his soul remained pure, shining through it all with an untouched air of ethereality. The darkness struck me wrong, though. It terrified me. I had a gut feeling which I now know I shouldn't have cast aside so easily. I asked him to play me these new songs, as if to face a beast head-on in order to see it's nothing but another creature like us, to greet this darkness with light and find my fears about Arlo thrown out the door – but my bright eyes painted this picture, which reality destroyed. I soon came to realize that at that point, he would only play music when he was high, and I didn't want to know what he was using, preferring to live in ignorance. His near zombie-like state would look at me without a trace of our former oneness, and we'd sit in silence, eat from separate plates, he'd smoke weed, we'd zone out watching a TV screen play music, have ugly, tragic sex and fall asleep without a word, his love for me gobbled up by a parasite, rendered alive but unconscious; my love for him frozen by fear of who he had become. I'd wake up and leave him alone in his state, unable to even look in his eyes anymore. I'd go home and try to paint, cry instead, go for a walk, do anything but think about the situation. I felt guilty, and still do. I recognized he was falling into his father's groove, taking the road already paved with footsteps and trail markers clear as day. Obligation was overtaken by fear, who was overtaken by the world outside the two of us, which I learned to be full of more lively, jovial, worthwhile things to give my energy to, but not enough to kill that parasite of my own – *guilt*, who leads me to recount these events often, who sometimes stirs me in the night to wake in sweats, light a candle, and teach my breathless body how to live and breathe again.

There were two weeks where I didn't see either of them, Andrew or Arlo, and my days would consist of me waking up, painting, going to class, reading poems, baking foods I couldn't stomach to eat, walking through the park, the fields of flowers in full bloom, filled with life and love I blocked myself off from. Now, I yearn for days designed like those, slower, full of the simple pleasures available to us, widening my solitude to become a home, my own personal planet floating through space. But at the time I had never been more empty inside, living in total opposition to those beautiful dreamy days I crafted for myself, feeling such separation between the living and the lived.

And after a time, I filled this void with Andrew.

### **A SUCCESS STORY AND A GOODBYE AND THE BEGINNINGS OF SOMETHING NEW**

Willow and Andrew had split (or rather she had dumped him, moving onto more practical men), and Andrew needed a friend. Despite the fact that he and Arlo were spending lots of time together, I got the sense he needed someone more grounded, healthier, assuming the activities they would partake in, while probably cathartic for Andrew, would soon exercise their wrath on him as they did on Arlo. So we began to go for walks together. He told me all about Willow, the entire story from start to finish. He learned a lot from the loss. He was kind, soulful, and loving. His hair had grown unkempt since the split. The more I looked at him, the more I saw Arlo. His nature, quieter in his brokenness, gave him a gentleness that reminded me of what Arlo now lacked. I saw him and understood him in a way I never quite did with Arlo. I found myself enraptured by the way he used language, the way he saw the world, his off-beat jokes. Soon, we were spending all our waking hours together, in a strange world painted with the aura of

*absence*. I looked deep in his eyes and saw myself, knew what *trust* was, felt truly safe, and together, it felt like everything was alright. But those strange sensations, butterflies brewing in our stomachs, had other plans. Arlo, on an anchorless ship in the middle of the sea, realized that the world outside (large, mysterious, and new to his tired eyes), had other plans for him as well, and he heard it singing a song to him from the shore. He pointed his sails towards the song.

Arlo began to record demos of all his songs – cheery love songs written about me years ago, slow ballads, confessionals of shame or sadness, angry rock tunes with his own Arlo touch, all the way to his newer, drug-ridden, demon-infused heavy metal prayers. He recorded these in an altered state, being moved by the hand of God, bringing him closer to his destiny, and the same hand sent them off to the world. Arlo expected nothing from this act, ashamed of the fact that he did it all, telling nobody, returning to his sofa, his bed, his cigarettes and drugs to numb it all away.

Then – a phone call from Arlo. It happened one afternoon in April, a rainy Thursday where Andrew and I sat on my bed, watching some foreign film he swore was the pinnacle of artistic creation, sipping warm peppermint tea from Christmas mugs. I saw his name flash on my phone, immediately reached to pick it up, snapped back into the spine of the world outside this room, outside me and Andrew’s fog-filled friendship. I hesitated, plagued by shame and fear of what the call could be about, which was shadowed by my deep down love and care, moving the phone to my ear to hear his voice again, his *real* voice, lively, excited, gravelly, honey-coated. “I– Hi, Mel, How are you?” Tears almost immediately began to well in my eyes. I gave Andrew a sign that I needed to step out, and went into the hallway.

“Hi! I’m good– I’m fine. How are you? Are you okay?”

“Yeah, actually I’m, I’m great, really. I just got off the phone with someone from Columbia Records.”

“Columbia Records?”

“Yeah, he went here a few years back, for music production. Daniel something? You know. He graduated in the winter of our first year. We would run into him at the Metro. Um, anyway, he saw one of our concerts, and he said he still remembered me singing my dad’s song.”

Arlo made a point not to sing his father’s songs. He wanted to be his own artist. But one day, early in our friendship, I found him in his room, combing through his fathers records, deep in processing of his own broken past, probably wrestling with the beast of his hopeful future at the same time. The loss of his father left a ghost that never went away, but resurfaced occasionally, with the exploration of Arlo’s own person, with the resurfacing of the grass when the snow melted, with the conversations Andrew had with him about his own loss. In that moment, for whatever reason, he felt called to sing his father’s song, and clearly that calling had a life of its own. He went on: “He said he remembered me singing, remembered how moved he felt, and how he knew, in that moment, I was destined for something great.” He said those last words with yin and yang in his voice – half self-judgement for possibly being arrogant enough to talk that way about himself, him who had been lost for so long, who had treated me with such disdain those recent days, feeling unworthy of the greatness thrust upon him in that sentence, but coupled with a fire, an aching to run again, to run towards his ever-evasive true love, music, music who likes to hang around

with fame and money and death and dreams and nightmares and an elusive, vague possibility of escape, something he knew and loved and chased well in those recent days.

I don't know where I went during this conversation. I disappeared into happiness for his good fortune, his being dragged out of the hole he'd sunk into only to find he's on top of a mountain of luck.

"I don't know why, but I was recording some of my songs, lately, and I don't know why but I sent them off to a few record labels. Republic, Island, Atlantic, and, yeah... Columbia. I really didn't expect nothing from it, but... here we are. He heard my tapes and recognized my name and voice. He's a lower level employee at the company, when we spoke my mind was elsewhere, swimming laps around a pool or something, but I got the gist of what he was saying – he showed my tapes to some executive, and they want me to come out to New York for a meeting."

A long silence, in which I felt the world shift under me.

"When?"

"...Monday. I'm driving down Sunday night. I'm gonna stay with my uncle. Look– I want to see you guys before I leave. I want to see *you* before I leave. Please. I'm sorry for–"

There was no time for long winded apologies and arguments, we were joined together into our larger selves again – a brief glimmering three days, heavy with the scent of love and time running down, we were sand in an hourglass, helpless to the gravity of it all. The three of us spent Friday night and Saturday morning together, but Andrew knew he had no verse in the rest of that weekend. We seemed to say everything we needed in one look, our eyes locking for a millisecond as he walked out that door. Time paused, and we knew that while nothing had happened, not yet, that it was nothing, and there was nothing, and everything save Arlo was nothing. But time started up again, and mistakes and confusion came following, ready to bite like vipers.

But first, Arlo and I spent two days dreaming together. Envisioning our future – going on tour together, moving out to California, raising kids in the sun, or else moving to New York when the world falls apart, living like Joan Baez and Bob Dylan, singing into the atmosphere in the hopes of saving it.

I knew I wouldn't be seeing him for a while. He didn't believe me, but I convinced him things would be picking up for him, and fast, and that he had to believe it too. I told him he had to give it his all, because the world deserved him to. He cried, realizing the reality of it all, apologizing profusely for the way he treated me, and I forgave him for it all, knowing he was dealing with his own problems, knowing it would be pointless not to forgive. He became a scared little boy, and I loved him more, set my own sadness at losing him aside to help him prepare, his scrappy, unkempt self. I wondered how he'd take care of himself without me, and he voiced my thoughts out loud. "What am I going to do without you?" His voice cracked.

"You'll figure it out. If the world didn't want you to make it, you wouldn't have made it this far."

“But you’re my light. My muse.”

“You’ve got to be your own muse now, darling.” Then my own strength faltered. “I don’t know what I’ll do without you. I’ll miss you like hell.”

Hours later, right before we fell asleep, staring at the ceiling in silence, our bodies intertwined, he tentatively spoke. “Look. I’ve been lucid dreaming lately. Maybe that’s where all this good luck came from. I was searching for answers in my sleep... Have you been dreaming about me lately?”

I had, in fact, but my sleep was of poor quality, tortured by guilt, so the dreams were hazy, and I heard them not. “I think so, yes.”

“I’ve been searching for you, too, seeking you out and trying to tell you I’m sorry. Melody, are you hearing what I’m saying?” I was silent for a few seconds, before he said it. “We won’t be seeing each other for a while, my love. Please, listen to your dreams. I’ll see you there every night. And hold you until morning comes.”

### **A LOVE AFFAIR AND A TRAGEDY**

Andrew and I were to go to New York and visit Arlo. This was a few weeks after Arlo had left. We kept in close contact at first, and he told me all about his business meetings, his days in New York, exploring the city on his own. In contrast to his fears about living without me in the big, ruthless city, he thrived there, excited by the history; walking the streets he could feel the spirits of artists past. He was filled up by the infinite supply of music he would hear walking through the East Village, enthralled by the museums, the parks, everything.

Andrew and I went back to whatever our “normal” could be, with the added blurry context of whatever had happened before that phone call. We were friends, nothing more, with clear boundaries drawn, but everything was different without Arlo there. I often relayed to Andrew the things Arlo and I would speak about on the phone, trying to maintain whatever semblance of our trio could be maintained, but my tight grip on it seemed to crack the foundation further. Andrew seemed distant, confused, but I couldn’t worry about him much, focusing on trying to finish the school year, stay in contact with Arlo, and plan a trip to see him as soon as possible with the little money I had.

But Andrew came back, ready to solve my problems for me. I choose to believe he truly missed Arlo, and wanted the three of us to be whole again, just like I did. He lived in New York City, and as soon as our last class finished, he wanted to hop on a train and go right home to see Arlo. He had an extra bed where his brother had moved out, and told me I could stay there as long as I wanted. And of course, I said yes.

And, as promised, every night, Arlo would be in my dreams. I know how crazy this sounds, but Arlo was magic like that. He could make things happen you didn’t think possible. It was evident when he sang, when he spoke, in the way he lived his life. He had gifts. In these dreams he would hold my hand, and take me to see old music legends perform. Or we would picnic on the moon, or on the clouds, watching birds go by. We watched the pyramids get built; I remember his face, enthralled – he always had a strange

fascination with Ancient Egypt. Once, we had dinner with Alexander the Great, but I was woken up in the middle of it.

As those weeks passed by, Arlo began to pull away from me. He disappeared from my dreams, before my dreams disappeared entirely. I was unable to sleep. Arlo was distant in his text messages. He wouldn't pick up my phone calls, or when he would, he would sound rushed, give me some reason he couldn't talk for long – a meeting, a train coming, his phone dying, or just say “talk later”, leaving me to listen to a dial tone. I memorized the exact cadence of his voicemail's message. I knew he was overwhelmed with his new position in the world, stressed by the time ticking down on recording his *debut album*, daunted by the legacy he had to fulfill. The stakes were high. *The price of dreams coming true*. But by the time Andrew and I got on the train, I was a mess of anxiety, and neither of us knew if we'd ever end up seeing Arlo again.

Andrew was kind to me. He spent our first few days showing me around, distracting me from Arlo's cruelty. Arlo responded to Andrew's avalanche of texts asking when we could see him with congenial, chummy responses evading the questions. They sounded less and less like the Arlo I knew with each message. And the whole time, he wouldn't give me an ounce of acknowledgement. I didn't exist to him any more.

It happened one night at a bar. We had been in New York for about a week. It was a Saturday night, the sun had set, leaving behind a cool breeze that took with it any chill remaining. A premonition of summer, of warmth, of a new life. Andrew took me to one of his favorite bars, somewhere in the West Village. We sipped cocktails, talked about New York, about everything besides Arlo. I was putting him behind me. We watched a jazz band play. It was messy, raw, and charming. Andrew sat still and absorbed it, quiet and thoughtful, which surprised me; I was used to Arlo's uninhibited enthusiasm, throwing his hair around, letting his brain feel the sides of his skull as he tossed his head vigorously to any music he heard. I stared at Andrew's unmoving face, taking it all in with a peacefulness about him. I found myself staring at him for minutes, zoning out of the jazz band, hearing only his face, his beautiful face, his face which was there, *actually there*, not off somewhere else ignoring me. His face, stubbled with familiar stubble, his long, grown-out hair. I was entranced, drunk and sad. He felt me staring at him, turned and stared back. For a few seconds, we just stared at each other. No words. No sounds. This was a crossroads. We both knew it.

And then our faces met. The music swelled into messy trumpet screeches and low bass notes plunked out with an agenda. It felt different, new. Maybe this novelty was what made it exciting. Maybe feeling wanted again did. Or maybe it was just the loneliness, excited by the prospect of feeling someone else's body against my own again. He pulled away, smiled at me, and sat back, back into his calm disposition, enjoying the music again. Then he bought himself a drink, one for me, too, and we enjoyed the music as we slowly sipped our drinks. When we had both finished, he turned to me, and calmly said “let's go home,” and the implications were clear. When I woke up in his bed the next morning, I felt this was the beginning of my adult life. Nobody but me was here to judge me, tell me what to do or what not to do. I was my own north star, my own compass, my own parent and child, I was everything I needed. If I had made a mistake that night, I knew I would learn that in my own time. I was in charge of myself from now on, and no one else. Arlo was gone.

I spent two more weeks in New York after that. I spent it all with Andrew. He took me to his favorite spots, the parks, the museums. We were in the MoMA, staring at de Chirico's "Nostalgia of the Infinite," and he spoke to me sweetly, imagining us as the subjects of that painting. I remember, as he said that, I felt the romantic sentiment was forced. I was taken outside of our ignorant affair, and saw how deluded he was. I felt disgusted with myself for betraying Arlo. I felt disgusted with Arlo for leaving me without a word. I felt disgusted with Andrew and I didn't know why. I felt disgusted with myself for being confused, angry at my humanity for fulfilling its nature, being saturated with the full spectrum of emotion.

I left New York jaded and empty. I was tired – tired of the subway, tired of the smog, the crowds, the music everywhere, reminders of my lost boy. I was tired of Andrew's beautiful apartment, though grateful for the home he briefly gave me. I was tired of Andrew – his lips, his breath, the scent of his deodorant, the way his body felt on mine, almost familiar, yet falling short in ways he couldn't control. I felt wrong for having given myself to him, and I hope I didn't screw him up, his heart already fragile from Willow and the world. I took a train back to school for graduation, staring out the window, watching the landscape pass by in waves of shadow and light, trees and oceans, bridges and tunnels. I collected the few possessions I had in my room, including a box of Andrew's books he lent me once that I still don't know what to do with. I walked over to Arlo's house, and as I lifted the key to the door, I stopped myself, standing outside for hours, unable to open Pandora's box – the past I so desperately wanted to leave behind. Once inside, I couldn't leave, trapped in a maze of my own making. I soaked his clothes in my tears, leaving my DNA stains on his belongings. I slept in his bed that night, drenched in my own shame and sadness. I played his old guitar and sang, for the first time in ages, through my tears. I took my paintings off the wall and my favorite shirt of his and hopped on a train back home to Ohio, sleeping dreamlessly the entire way.

I don't know what happened to Arlo's old house. I know he must've gone back at some point to gather his belongings, but I like to imagine it still stands there, abandoned, untouched by anyone since my dark night there – a time capsule of our little trio and the hours we spent there – the history, the highs and lows, darks and lights. The absence.

---

## TRAVELS, PART 1

### MUSINGS FROM PARIS

Step off the plane into a brand new world, one I haven't been in since I was in my mother's womb. Nobody here knows me. I'm a blank slate here, a face without a name, without a history, rights or wrongs all null and void. An American in Paris. A foreign affair unfolds in front of me

With my big ass backpack, I'm sent on a wild goose chase through the airport terminal, trying to find the exit. Once outside, the grey sky strikes me with a diminished chord. I'm sent on another goose chase to try to find the correct bus into the city, stepping onto one, speaking to the driver in my stunted, high school level French, gathering, perhaps incorrectly, that it's the wrong bus, waiting for the right one which

never comes. *I'm off to a great start*, I think sarcastically, but it's summer and I'm in the city of love, learning to fall in love with myself, with the spirit of exploration, the spirit of creation. I find the train terminal, speak to a kind man in a striped shirt who directs me towards a photo booth to snap a shot of myself for a train pass, which I do, immortalizing my shaggy, stubbled, jet-lagged self on this journey I'm on. Another worker provides me with a weekly train pass, I slip the guy €32.40 in cash from the airport currency exchange, and I let go of all attachments as the train carries me through the outskirts of Parisian suburbs into the heart, where the city comes to twisted life, hectic and chaotic as New York at its worst, but worse for me who knows not where I am, with a heavy backpack weighing me down but nothing else, nothing else attached to me, I'm all alone.

My plans are to write and live. Drink wine and smoke cigarettes (I know my lungs are fucked but I'm in *Paris*, for fuck's sake, I've gotta). I've got 300 pages of lineless paper, to scrawl to my own satisfaction, up, down, left, right, across mountains and trains through cities and tunnels. I plan to dive into my soul and put whatever I find down on the page, documenting the depths of humanity and the collective consciousness, hoping it comes out in the form of a living work of art, however that may look.

On the train, a homeless man sleeps, and an old white dude approaches him, prods him, saying "excusez-moi?" while the man sleeps in peace, ignorant of the dude left to his blind, mis-aimed wanting, who kisses the sleeping man, and gets off at the next stop, wishing the dreamer a "bonne nuit." I witness all this like I'm invisible.

I have a friend who lives here in Paris, though she's back in NYC for the next few weeks. She's letting me sublet her place for a price of my choosing, so I sent her \$111.11, not knowing how long I'll be here. After I drop off my bags, I step outside and walk around, letting the new air wash over me and feel a camaraderie and familiarity here in the Asian Quarter, walking around these dirty streets filled with Vietnamese food and ramen shops. I buy myself a Bahn Mi sandwich for €3.70, devour it in this new world, where people speak in a language I don't understand. I let my thoughts fade into the sound of it all, the romance language floating these streets, the smell of pastries and fresh bread, cigarette smoke and wine, all intersecting here at these crossroads of my past and future.

It's weird to be so alone in such a busy place. In New York, I've always felt too surrounded, too suffocated by people of all forms and personalities. But here I'm truly alone. No obligations. No ties. So I buy a baguette and some cheese for breakfast, a few bottles of wine and a pack of cigarettes, and go back to the apartment, down a glass or two of wine, try to write, but I find nothing, the mines are empty right now, no gold to be found, but it's alright, It's 10 PM in Paris, 4 PM back home in NYC, I'm all out of whack from travel and somewhere brand new, confused, scared out of my depth that something will go horribly wrong, I'll get lost, unable to make it back home, stuck in this strange world forever, swallowed by the tides. I fall asleep, drift into a completely dreamless sleep, all my energies spent on my body getting accustomed to this new land.

\*\*\*

Day one, I walk around, the winding streets and alleys filled with the smell of fresh bread, I smoke cigarettes and feel my cobbled shoes on the cobbled stones, I'm an anonymous traveller, taking it all in,

and the flowers are blooming and it's oh so pretty, and the sun shines bright on my new skin. I stop into the Rodin Museum, and I remember reading Rilke's "Letters to a Young Poet" talking about how Rilke revered Rodin, feeling the whole of art and freedom peaked in his sculptures, and I soon find I'm similarly entranced by the human creatures. When I'm staring at The Thinker, watching him think his bronze thoughts in his bronze brain in his bronze body on his bronze seat, his back hunched over in turmoil, or maybe ecstasy he aims to hide, his chin perched on his curved wrist looking for support, his thoughts weighing him down.

A couple stares at The Thinker next to me as I realize I am the thinker, and so are they, and then the man ask me to take a picture of them, so I arrange the sky and clouds and their smiling, love-laden faces and The Thinker, infinitely pondering above them all within the confines of the camera on the man's phone, but once I take a few pictures of them smiling, he gets down on one knee, and proposes, and I realize I'm witnessing a real moment here, realer than most things I've experienced, and the woman begins to cry, and says yes (or rather oui), and he slips the ring on her finger, the pretty diamond to remain there for all of time, and when she dies, she'll be put in the dirt and her body will decompose but the diamond will remain, wrapped around dirt, marrying life with death as they always were meant to be. Then the couple starts making out so I decide I should stop taking photos, and hand them back the phone, and they say "merci beaucoup," and I say "felicitations," and feel lucky to be a part of the moment.

Wandering the rest of the sculpture garden on this lovely spring day, wedding bells going off somewhere in the back of my mind, I see impossibly intertwined lovers perched, lips together, hungry for each other, his hand tentatively placed on her thigh. I see great power struggles, great fights, great wins, celebrations in these bronze people, and see folks walking, viewing it all as I view them, taking in all the humanity before me, logging it away in my brain for later, to draw from. Sometimes I feel like I can function like an art machine. I had nothing to write last night, so I take in all the life now, all the novelties and human intricacies and art alive in Paris, let it run through the art machine that is my consciousness, and hope it comes out later in the form of some kind of creation.

There's some event happening in the heart of the city at the Eiffel Tower tonight that I decide to check out, but when I get close, police and barricades block off the area, packed with watchers and talkers with foreign tongues. Hoping maybe the chaos will dissipate in a few minutes, I sit down, pull out a book of poems, light a cigarette, feed my input with material to draw from, but after a while, I'm fed up with waiting, tired by a day of exploring, so I take the train back home, drink some more wine, smoke some more cigarettes, and try to write but still nothing is coming out, and I feel lonely, and I've got no food and I'm terrified to spend money, my limited resources already dwindling, so I smoke and drink some more, read some more poetry, try to write again but it's all junk again and I get tired of this endless cycle of futile vices and I'm wondering why my machine isn't working, why I'm not writing anything worthwhile. I'm too wrapped up in the dark alleys of my head so I jerk off and go to sleep.

\*\*\*

I dream of Willow, and wake up stressed but I go outside and I'm reminded that I'm in Paris and I'm here to explore. I smoke a cigarette, have a cafe au lait and a pain au chocolate and it feeds my machine with something, enough for myself to output a mediocre poem (spurred by my nightmare about Willow) about

a man in crisis, focused on the wrong things, but as I write it reaches dark, taboo corners of my mind, and I feel ashamed of these writings and wonder if my machine is broken.

*He sits underneath a willow tree  
(the one on the river)  
And lets his mind wander like a lost child  
But this child's been perverted,  
and he begins to think of women –  
tall, blonde, short, dark, big, small.  
He wonders how many he can lay before his life ends.  
Then he wonders why he wondered that?  
Then he wonders when his life will end.  
He had the perfect woman, once. He wanted nothing more.  
They sat here, once, together.  
He remembers the willow casting perfect shadows on  
her perfect face, creating waves that emanate through all time and space.  
He saw her in passing, recently  
and thought about her breasts. Of course  
he'll lay whoever he likes, now.  
Probably a lot of whoever he likes.  
(which is what he wanted, isn't it?)  
Time passes  
And all he'll remember is the wine and the willow  
Not the bodies, not the breasts, not his lust, not himself.  
Just her face, the shadows, the wine, the willow.*

I wander Paris this grey afternoon, and it's colder than I prepared for. Then I see a poster with Arlo's face on it. It's one familiar face (though seemingly less and less so) in a sea of unknown fog. Paris has made me feel as if I'm falling down a rock face that's smooth as a baby's bottom so I've got nothing to grab onto as I fall, but this poster is a small snag I cling to with my life. I stare into his eyes, dark and sad in the poster as he smolders at the camera, and I think about him, and then Melody, and those days we were all together before I became so jaded and we all became ghosts to each other. I put on his album just to hear a familiar voice, and it soothes me as I continue walking, but I turn back again just to see his face again on this lonely Paris street. Then I look closer, and though my French isn't good enough to read the sentences, I see dates, and I see today's date, and I see the next few weeks laid out on the dates on the poster, so I get out my phone and google Arlo's name and see he's touring his Album throughout Europe. He'll be in Amsterdam tonight, and the next two nights, and then he'll be in Berlin a few days after that, and I want to see him, even if he's too famous to see me as a friend anymore, even if I feel too guilty for kissing his girl, laying with her, seducing her, wanting her when she was his, looking at her body in the way I did when they were together and he was my brother, my brain filled with unholy lust and greed and jealousy sometimes, when I'd see her rub his back, so in love, I felt so alone, still do, always wanting what I can't have, then having what I no longer want, just like the man in my poem. I start to feel fed up with myself, so I continue walking, and the clouds get greyer, begin to drizzle, and Arlo's haunted voice plays in my ear and scores my melancholy walk down these Paris streets as I try to escape myself but obviously that

was impossible and I should've realized – you cannot escape yourself, only your circumstances, and I was living good before, just looking at the wrong things, paying attention to the wrong thoughts, just like the man in my poem.

Now I enter Pere Lachaise, the largest cemetery in Paris, and walk along these spirits, trying to feel the wisdom of the dead again, but this time it doesn't feel like wisdom, it feels like everything ill and unholy that tortured the dead that they didn't want to take with them to their graves, so it just haunts the atmosphere just above ground, latching onto anyone who stoops to a low enough frequency to hear it, which I sure can. I feel disgusted with myself, and disgusted with humanity, then I feel dramatic thinking about all that, tortured by dark thoughts and all on my own in a cemetery on a grand pilgrimage to Europe. I laugh it all off, and then, still tortured, take some deep breaths, try to remain present, breathe in the wisdom and calm that does indeed live here with the dead, along with the sins and the chaos. Ornate angels guard some of the dead, keeping them safe in their caskets. I wonder who they are that they need to be protected, and what they need to be protected from? I feel like a fool for coming all the way out here, blowing all my money on a trip to Paris of all places, this overpriced tourist attraction filled with racists and xenophobes who stare daggers at you if you don't speak their language.

I want to go home, but I think about my home and I feel that that's not my real home, no, not at all, so I guess I'm yearning to go to a home that doesn't exist, at least not yet, and I wonder how I can make a home for myself if I don't know what that even potentially looks like in the slightest. I curse my mother's ghost for bringing me out here, I curse her for leaving this plane with no guidance for me beyond a vague, prophetic dream where she told me my family history and told me to come to Paris, but not what to do here, not why to come here, just to come here, and I start to think I shouldn't have listened to my dreams, that I'm a schmuck, making stuff up out of nothing to justify a mediocre vacation that'll sap all my money. I start to think I'll die here in Paris, end up in Pere Lachaise, an unmarked grave like all the souls here who left this world without a mark, and how that wouldn't be so bad, that's where we're all headed, anyway, in the long run, when the sun explodes and everything, everything, is gone, and all that's left is the primordial ooze in a timeless void.

I sit on a bench at the top of the cemetery, staring out at all of Paris, all the graves, all the people; everything is below me and yet I'm feeling at an all time low. I wonder again why my mother brought me here, and then I realize she didn't, she's dead, and I brought myself here with no idea why. I've got to take responsibility for my actions. I pull out my notebook, try to write a poem, a story, *something*, but once again this machine is all gummed up and maybe it's the atmosphere, being around all these spirits but what comes out is something else, a letter to my mother:

*Dear Mother,*

*Why were you taken from me with no warning? Why were you given to me without a choice? Why do I pretend like you were perfect, that death took all the bad things with it and left your pure heart and soul floating here to teach me the lessons you never did seem to know? I'm an adult now, no longer your child, you've shot me off into the world, but maybe you're not such a good archer and I've landed amiss, broken, with nowhere to turn. I'm in Paris now, and the only thing I know how to do is go insane. At least when you were here you had my father, and me in your stomach. You had hope, that pesky, pretty word. I've got nothing, mom, and I'm beginning to lose my belief in you. You, who never believed in me, who*

*filled me with fear, with loathing, with absolute despair sometimes, who made me pull my hair sometimes, who tied me to a chair one time in fear. But I was a child, all I do is wrong and right at once, and so were you, a child in this world, off a plane from another country, just like I, trying to make something of yourself with no clue where to start. But you started, and so must I. Sure, I forgive you all your wrongs, but you've been hanging onto me somehow, haunting me somehow, and you've got to let me go. Please, mom, your grip is hurting me, please teach me what I need to know and then let go. Maybe you've got one more shot in you, lift the arrow off the ground and aim again, if you truly love me, help me, aim and let go, I've got to find my own flow, I've got to grow, and take it slow, while you sit below, or high above, mom, maybe you ran too fast, mom, running out of life, bumping into people on the way – me, my brother, dad, but I don't know, I don't know much about you except my dreams and the past, fragmented memories being broadcast to me through time, but maybe they're warped, distorted. I don't know what to make of them, mom, and I'm alone here, mom, and maybe you were alone too, mom, but nobody likes to be alone, I don't want to live in a shadow, much less yours, mom, and though I want to finish the work you never did, I want to break these curses, too, I'm going to find some semblance of my own, but in contrast, I'm pretty downcast, I'm looking at the future, the forecast, and it looks grim, I feel like I'm gonna die, and I don't know what to make of that, I'm sitting in a cemetery right now writing a letter to you like a madman, and I don't have answers just want to reach you, I don't even want you to reach me no more, I'm lying in a grave, begging for more time to figure it all out. Mom, I forgive you your trespasses, and I love you like a son, which isn't saying much, because I've got scars and issues too from you, and from everyone else in the world who's touched me, too, but you're dead, I've got to let you be dead, and live my own life looking ahead, now, not yours. Your north star was Paris, I've got to find my own, and head there, gotta find my own touchstone, instead of looking out at all these tombstones, so let's part ways until it's time, let's break this wishbone and make a wish, mom, you've got the bigger piece, got the wisdom of the dead and all you've learned from life, now take it, make a wish, and let me go, let me find my own path now, let me go, let me go, let me go...*

My tears stain the page as I close the book and walk away from this world of spirits, hoping the message is received.

I walk along in the rain, getting hungrier, smoke a cigarette to try to curb the hunger, but it doesn't work, and food would be good so I stop at a bistro, order a burger and some french fries and a beer, and pull out my paper and a pen and try to write, waiting for something, *anything* to come out of this broken machine, I feel like the cemetery put enough in so that I should be cranking out creations like clockwork, but my factory is still broken. I feed it with a cigarette as I wait for my food, reading some Raymond Carver short stories, escaping the city of lovelessness and broken promises and entering the worlds of broken families, alcoholism, dead dreams, and then my food arrives and I devour it, and I realize how hungry I am, how lost I feel, how I flew to Paris on a one way ticket with no plans and nobody I know, just the idea of a grand journey to Europe, a whim I had from a dream of a dead mom who's left me, who isn't here, and nobody's here, and I'm all alone, and I wanted to stay in Europe for months but I can hardly stay alone with myself for three days, feeling depressed, lonely, guilty, shameful, broken, all my past faults catching up with me even as I flew for six hours away from them to get here, all my future still thoroughly bleak, no ideas, no home, and I try to write this on the page in some semblance of art, but all that comes out are broken words and fragments. I smoke another cigarette to keep myself from crying. I finish my fries and my beer, pay, and get on the train back to the apartment I'm staying in that's not even mine, where all I

own is three shirts, two pants, a sweater, some books, paper, pen, a baguette, and some cheese, which I eat some more of, drink some more wine, write some more fragmented words because maybe I have to mine through all this dirt before I find gold, but I'm tired, tired of myself, tired of Paris, so I go to sleep, tossing and turning for hours before I finally let myself rest, let myself accept the healing that the night wants to gift every time we lie down. It takes a while to let it reach me, scared of the love it has for me, me who feels *undeserving*.

\*\*\*

I dream of Arlo, singing his songs, baring his soul onstage. I dream of myself in the audience watching him and sobbing, a catharsis I needed, feeling happy for him and his success, not jealous, not anymore, I'm growing past that childlike pettiness, I've learned my lessons, and all I want to do is listen to him sing and wish him well. When I wake up, I decide I want to see him, and maybe he'll remember me, maybe we can catch up and I can get past my guilt and maybe we can be brothers again like we used to, maybe I'll find myself born anew on this trip and reroute to find myself centered in this big world. I go to buy a train ticket to Berlin, but Amsterdam is on the way and I've always wanted to go there, it was on my list of potential places to stop in at on this formless unexamined stupid trip, so I decide I'll take a train there in three days, stay there two nights, then head to Berlin and see Arlo. I buy a ticket for his concert, and at least I now have *something* I'm headed towards, some direction, and I breathe, feeling slightly more grounded.

I spend the next few days going to all the museums, enjoying the art in the Louvre, the d'Orsay, bask in the glory of Monet's Water Lilies and a post-modern film exhibit at the Musee de L'Orangerie. I even take a trip out to Versailles; I'm not a big history person but the palace is cool, thinking about Marie Antoinette living within those rooms is interesting, but the gardens really get me, they're huge and neatly trimmed and the statues, golden and timeless with scenes of Greek heroes and tragedies. I think about how wonderful life would be to wake up and that's your backyard, but I think that all your problems would still be the same, probably, you'd just have more space to ponder them in, walking around without seeing a soul, and I actually don't know what that would solve, besides just having a big, neatly arranged backyard. I wonder if they ever got sick of it. I sit in cafes, eating pastries, drinking coffee, smoking cigarettes, reading, writing mediocre poetry that I've accepted the mediocrity of, because I have to be okay with creating mediocrity if I want to create anything at all, and maybe I'm just working on unblocking the pipes of my creating machine. I try to soak in these days because I'm beginning to understand myself, I get sick of something, I run away, then I want it back, and I think logically for a second (something I hardly do), and think about how wonderful these days are if I factor out my thoughts – I'm in Paris, alone, in an beautiful apartment, smoking cigarettes, drinking coffee, eating pastries, reading, writing, people watching, eating up life like a decadent meal, and the weather is great, too. I'll miss this one day. I know it. I know myself. So I enjoy it, if not for me now, for my future self. And just for fun, my last meal is 70 euros, and is decadence wrapped up in three courses of French onion soup, duck confit and roasted duck over a salad, and a Creme Brulee with two glasses of expensive French wine.

Now, it's 6 AM on a Sunday morning, start of a new week, end of one song start of another as I board a train to Amsterdam, leaving the city of love behind me, detaching from all the promise I had pinned on it, lighter and lighter with each day, each turn of these wheels, each thought I think I put down on the page.

### **GOOD DAYS IN AMSTERDAM**

I'm staying at a cheap youth hostel here that I booked on the train over, but it's 10 AM and I can't check in until 2 (or 14, as I adjust to Europe and their funny customs) and what else is there to do in Amsterdam but get high? I walk through the Red Light District but it's a Sunday morning and there's not much to see. The canals are cool. My back is tired from carrying this backpack. I stop in the first weed coffee shop I see, rid myself of my baggage and let it fall to the floor, immediately lighter. I buy a pre-roll, order a coffee and smoke.

I hear a woman with a thick Belgian accent speaking: "they don't know SHIT about the world. They're saying things about aliens, but they don't know SHIT. They are probably already here with us! The aliens. They are so ignorant, these government peoples."

An American man: "Yeah, yeah. Do you want any more of this joint or...?"

It's 2 PM now and I walk to the hostel, immediately burdened by the weight of my bag again. Once I check in and drop off my bags, I explore the place, enter the smoking room filled with smoke so thick you can't see your fist in front of your face. It's got a pool table, a guitar, and people smoking and laughing. I sit, calm and peaceful, absorbing the atmosphere of it all, young travellers everywhere who, like me, are hoping to find something on the road to complete them.

"Where are you from?" Says a man with an accent I can't quite place.

"Um... New York."

"Nice. I'm from Turkey," he says, taking time to find the words.

Another boy chimes in from across the room. "Like New York City?"

"Yeah, the city." I add in. I realize this is my first conversation in a week that goes beyond an exchange of goods or services. It's nice, if not a little awkward.

"That's cool. I'm from Dubai." The boy adds.

We talk for a bit more, I smoke a bit more of my joint, finish my last cigarette from Paris and bum one from the boy from Dubai whose name I forget, enjoying being able to smoke indoors, an entirely new idea to the silly American in the room. My dad's voice rings in my ears, *travel expands your worldview*, and I'm understanding it now. The world is wide, and humans come from all corners, crawling together, weaving a tapestry we cannot dream to see the whole of. Cogs in a machine. The guy from Turkey talks more as he smokes a joint, but as he gets progressively more stoned, he seems unable to talk. "I am... uh... translating to English... and the weed... brain... it's hard" which makes me laugh, his red eyes, his well-meaning smile, trying to explain a feeling I know nothing about, can only imagine the complexity of

such a thing. The impulse to speak, stifled by drugs and languages in a haze of smoke and situational irony. More people come and go, some speaking languages I can't even place, some play pool, most smoke, and then a gaggle of folks who look around my age come in, and I feel pathetic approaching them, trying to make a bid for connection, but they accept it without judgement, we're all in the same boat here, hoping to see the world but understanding the constant in life that is loneliness, and how we mask it with an unfettered air of coolness. We do the whole name game, high-school feeling icebreaker type shit, where we're from, where we're going, who we are, what we stand for in this goddamn world and all that crap, sometimes it feels like I'm giving a whole statement, why I'm here, all the events that have led to my being here running through my mind as I say my name and what I'm doing but maybe I'm just stoned out of my mind off this good Amsterdam weed, one of the guys I meet, Nacho from Mexico, has a joint and offers it to the group so we accept, and his brother Chavo, they're on a trip from Mexico, they've been planning for years, and they're finally doing it, this is their first stop, then they're off to Bruges, then to Munich and maybe Berlin, too, then off to Rome, and after that who knows? Then there's Taz from Seattle, who spent the last few weeks in the UK, Ireland and Scotland, on a farm at some point, and then off to Hamburg, then Berlin, and who has left the rest of their trip unplanned, and there's Giane from Brazil, who flew to Switzerland one way and left the rest unplanned, and there's Lasse, from Berlin, on a brief vacation from work, and there's Anna from Australia, who just got off the plane from Melbourne, and is stopping in London, then Madrid, then Lake Como, then Vienna, Prague, Athens, and then off to Candyland, around to Wisconsin, Helsinki, Iceland, down to the North Pole, back up to Atlantis, and finally Cuba. That's what it feels like here. World opening up wide. Meet a few more people in the smoking room, I left my phone in my room and I have no idea how long I've been in here, the smoke getting thicker and thicker in here and I start coughing, and it seems like everyone is from Australia, I meet another Australian girl, an Australian guy, two more Australian girls, three more Australian guys, and everyone is travelling forever, one month, two months, six months, six years before going back home, and I wonder how long I'll be out here? I may never go back.

I buy a whiskey from the hostel bar and down it. Nacho and Chavo and I go to buy another pre-roll, and Nacho keeps yelling stuff like "CENTRAL PARK" or "EMPIRE STATE BUILDING" because I'm from New York. I like these guys. I'm liking Amsterdam. We go back to the smoking room and Lasse is ranting about movies to some girl and she turns around and holy fuck that's a pretty girl, her pale, pale skin contrasted by her dark, dark hair, her blue eyes piercing with light, blue like the sky, like blueberry pie, so blue you can see your own bones, or something, and I start talking to her, and she's *also* from motherfucking Australia, and I start to think how many goddamn people are from Australia? And why are they all leaving, travelling for months? What are they escaping? Kangaroos, tasmanian devils, I'm asking her if she sees those there and she's so pretty and I'm so high I forget what I'm saying, my mouth moving without knowing what it's even moving towards but she doesn't seem to notice, she's nodding along, and she's rolling her own cigarettes which is so insanely cool, and I ask to bum one like a fucking bum, she says yes, rolls me one, and we discuss cigarettes, how much more cost effective it is to roll your own, which must be true, and I decide to buy papers and a pouch of tobacco when I get to Berlin, and then I think of Berlin, the greater picture around me, New York and Arlo and Melody and Jay and Davis and Janey and Alice and how Alice asked me if I "planned to be a menace with girls in Europe" and I said no, I don't, and how this pretty girl is in front of me and I have to let go of all attachments, be alone in this world and I wonder how that sentiment even got engrained in my brain like a tattoo, and then she's showing me her tattoos and they're so fucking sick, a cowgirl and a flame, I'm feeling things I don't wish

to be and stoned as a horse who was tranquilized for acting out but the horse wasn't acting out, the owners decided to play God, put a saddle on the thing, hammer metal shoes to the horse's feet, but anyway I excuse myself, go to the bathroom, vomit, head back to my room where I forgot there's five other beds, and four are occupied with people, three of which are sleeping so I sneak into my bed and I'm still in all my clothes but I cannot change right now, paralyzed by the feeling of being watched, freaking out again from being high and being somewhere completely unknown, but I breathe, let it pass, think about the girl, I didn't even ask her name, hoping I'll see her again tomorrow then hoping I won't, it would only complicate things for me, and these thoughts along with others pass through my brain as four people sleep around me and I lie paralyzed for hours and hours and at some point a fifth person enters and climbs into the bed above mine, and I think what a strange world I'm in, so free that I'm chained again, or so chained that I'm free, and at a certain point the sun is rising, and I don't know if I slept at all, but here I am, in Amsterdam, tired and probably still stoned but rolling like a complete unknown, a free bird in a Ferrari on a Sunday morning.

\*\*\*

I wake up and walk around. Amsterdam is pretty and nice. I buy a coffee, try to write but my brain is slow and tired so nothing comes out but the coffee and the cigarette are enough for me to be satisfied right now. I take a walk in Vondelpark. I wonder if Arlo was here. It's weird that I'm retracing his steps so soon after him. I'm excited to see his show. A biker comes zooming past me, dangerously close to me, and three more do as well and then a hundred more, a thousand more, bikers zoom around wildly at every corner and alley and turn here in Amsterdam. I lay on the grass, smoke a little more of the pre-roll I have, relaxing into the ground, and it's hot, so I take off my shirt and play some music, and time leaves the room, it's just me, Jimi Hendrix and his guitar, the grass and sun against my bare skin. Some guy approaches me and smiles, and then says "good vibes!" and leaves. I feel my muscles sore from all my walking and all my baggage, literal and otherwise, so I start to do some yoga, the grass growing taller between my toes and I breathe it all in and my lungs fill with grass and I'm just grass now, I'm a grass man, and I smoke some more grass, write a poem about the glory of Amsterdam, breathe in peace, breathe out blessings to all. A woman in roller skates flies over to me, asking for a lighter, which I give her, and she lights her joint, skates away, and her man comes skating over to her, a stereo in hand blasting disco music, and the two begin to dance to the disco on their roller skates, their bodies flowing divinely with the music. I watch this all with a smile.

I head to the Van Gogh museum, my high faded out now to a cool mellow yellow haze on this calm world. I have some falafel for lunch, my belly full and satisfied. I run into the girl from last night and try to clean myself up but I look down and I'm already clean, this shaggy, free version of myself I'm meeting at the same time as her. Her name is Olivia, a name I've always loved since I fell in love with this girl in sixth grade, who's apparently on archeological trips in Africa now like some kind of Indiana Jones. I ask this Olivia where she's headed. "I'm going to the Van Gogh museum," she speaks in Australian through her pretty pink lips, and the accent tickles my nerves.

"Fuck no way, me too." Is God real? I wonder in a moment like this, then wonder why I'm such a doofus sometimes, thinking things like that instead of enjoying Olivia's silky black dress.

“You wanna go together?” She speaks magic Australian words and we walk together, and the whole time I’m falling in love, at least I think I am, I’m a fool for love, giving it all away, and her pretty blue eyes cast a spell on me like the spell of Van Gogh’s paintings, four dimensional and overwhelmingly *good, earnest*, and I think about how depressed he was in his life, how evil he felt, chopping off his ear and all, but maybe it’s because he put all his good into his paintings, these thick spiraled cloudy blue skies like Olivia’s eyes and we stand side by side, wordless as we take in his paintings. We traverse all four floors, not needing to speak, the space between us and the paintings inching closer and we enter the world of these paintings, Olivia and I live like farmers climbing Van Gogh’s cypresses, and we never touch, but our eyes keep fluttering to meet and it’s a feeling I’ve felt before, and always goes poor, but oh man we’re on floor four, gotta go back to the hostel before, and I’m goin to Berlin in one day, no less no more, but maybe she is too because everyone last night was Australian and going to Berlin, too, the whole world culminates, lives and dies in Berlin, and Arlo’s there now, living it up, singing, the crowd probably begging for more.

“Where you headed next, mate?” She inquires.

“Berlin. How about you?”

“Oh, I meant today... but I don’t know. I didn’t plan this. I’m just on a six month vacay from work.”

I’m embarrassed by my misunderstanding but the conversation is going, flowing now so I don’t have time to think about trivial things. “Oh, I had no plans– Uh, that’s cool. What do you do?”

“I’m a chef. I hate it. I should probably quit.” She laughs, looks back at me. “You know, my job withheld three months’ pay from me. And I’m working sixty hour weeks! I’m indispensable there. Shit is bananas.”

“Bananas.” I repeat. I laugh at this. She laughs along.

“Yup. Pretty bananas.” The word pronounced buh-nah-nis, her accent bringing a smile to my lips, her lips bringing a smile to my lips. Then, she asks “so what do you do?”

“Oh I’m– nothing. I do nothing, really. I’m travelling. I graduated school a few months ago.” my sardonic tone bringing judgement to my heart, but her heart doesn’t seem to mind, and we talk more, about school, about her job, the kangaroos and tasmanian devils until we get back to the hostel, where Taz from last night sees us and tells us they just went to a market a few blocks away with the best food, and we’ve simply *got* to go, and Olivia and I look at each other, shrug, step outside again, and we go to the market, eat pickled herring sandwiches, stroopwaffles, and fresh berries (which I choke on, embarrassed out of my mind, coughing until my eyes water, she looks at me like I’m a child), and then head back to the hostel. It’s eveningtime now after our long pretty day together in her long pretty black dress, and we say goodbye, and I let go of it all, let go of it all, filling my mind with the smoky world in the smoking room, floating higher and higher.

Nacho and Chavo are going to a club tonight and before they even ask I say I’m in, of course I’m in, and we get a group together, Giane and Anna and Lasse, Olivia and Taz, and we drink in the park with a bottle

of Vodka (or Voddy, as the Australian Anna calls it), talking about our lives, progressively drunker and drunker, and Olivia and I, drunk off an unknown amount of vodka keep laughing at each other's jokes, next to each other, stealing side conversations, and I'm so drunk now, I don't know what I'm saying but it seems things are working, and whoa ok now we're getting up, walking, and then we're in line for the club, now at the door, now inside, dancing to the techno and it's so crowded, and the music is aggressively mediocre, boring even, and I'm drunk and sad, dancing, flailing my limbs around, this place as crowded as Shibuya crossing. The club is a sea of drunk Dutch people and I look around and can't find Olivia, I've got no idea where she went, so I give up on her, let go, dancing more, drinking more, stumbling home with Nacho and Chavo. I drink some water and go to bed. It's 4 AM and I leave for Berlin in 11 hours.

\*\*\*

I wake up at noon, hungover like dirty underwear, lucky I even woke up at all. I go outside and drink some coffee, buy some weed to smuggle into Berlin, and pack up my bags, get ready to go. I go downstairs to the smoking room to see who's there to say goodbye to. I say bye to some Australians whose names I don't remember, then Chavo, who says Nacho is out but he'll give my goodbye to him. I'll miss them both dearly. I say goodbye to Giane, say goodbye to Taz, and then Olivia enters the room, just in time, her pretty blue eyes and heart-shaped face, and I tell her goodbye. Then she says "you're going to Berlin, you said?"

"Yeah, why?"

"I'm heading there tomorrow. We should meet up. Have a blast." And I'm thinking *oh it is on*, and we exchange phone numbers, and I smoke a bit of a joint, get on the train to Berlin, feeling up, up up, heading east, east, east, seeing Arlo tomorrow, seeing Olivia again soon, enjoying the movement of the train, which, as the wheels roll, the engine spurs, whispering *chugga chugga*, it also whisper *blossom blossom blossom bloom, one day you'll end up in a tomb, womb to tomb, tomb to womb, the in-between is filled with tunes and swoons, enjoy it all under the moon*, and I drift off to sleep, dreaming about me and Olivia in Sicily.

---

## MELODY'S THEME (SIDE 2)

I used to not understand a lot of the things Andrew and Arlo would speak about. I still don't, looking back on it all. But they spoke a lot about death, too. After Arlo died, time went by and I processed these huge, devastating boulders that come rolling through your brain with loss. I slowly started to see the world as wider than I had previously.

People are often afraid to think about death. I still remember a teacher of ours speaking about how we are typically unable to fully comprehend the fact of dying. This immense elephant in the room. He said humans can only think about the fact that we will die for seven seconds before we get scared and have to

distract ourselves. Arlo would always laugh in class when he said that – a scoff that meant “not me, I’m different.” I always rolled my eyes when he did that, thinking it arrogant, but I understand it now; he’d lived with death ever since he was seven. His father was dead – he was raised by death. Not only was he able to think about it, but he knew it well, looked it all from all angles, examined it, and wasn’t so scared of it after all. That much was clear.

But none of us should be scared of it. Death is as much a part of life as life itself is. Death gives life its meaning, it puts things in perspective. Death is as much a part of life as love is, or as our hands are. Not being well acquainted with it is much like living without ever seeing the stars. Like you’re missing a whole piece of it. And to live with death is to live more fully. And so Arlo lived fully, and it took him to the stars.

When his album, *THE SUN, WHO BURNS LIKE DADDY’S WHISKEY*, came out, he was catapulted into fame immediately. The internet was saturated with him – photos, interviews, his songs over videos and posts – and only growing exponentially. I watched him turn into the image he is today, made up of his online persona, the things he would say repeatedly in his interviews, his little quirks appearing with the cameras. Who he was – the boy who called me “sugar sweet melody”, told me my eyes “sang the blues,” cried when I cried – was obliterated, gone from the face of the Earth. He became something else entirely, something new to be reckoned with, my folded, layered relationship to him. His album achieved worldwide critical acclaim, as I always knew it would. It rose the ranks of the top charts and stayed. It hangs there, pinned with a nail, stuck forever. A time capsule of our growing together and apart for the world to see. Our hearts torn bare across the mountain of songs making up the album.