

Remembering Autumn

The boundaries which divide Life from Death are at best shadowy and vague.

Who shall say where the one ends, and where the other begins?

- Edgar Allan Poe

—

“Hey, Lathan! It’s me, Autumn. Things are pretty around hectic here, so they’re keeping me a little later today. Don’t worry about it; I’m coming home soon. Go to sleep. I love you. Happy anniversary!”

For as long as I can remember, the world has been plastic. An artificial creation packed with pseudo people drunk on the idea that maybe their lives are real. That maybe anyone on this piece of rock we call a planet actually matters.

‘What if?’ they ask, their eyes concealing none of the hope and wonder that fill their superficial minds and devour them from the inside. They roam around, completely entranced by the dream they call life. Never straying too far from home or letting their thoughts wander past the horizon.

But, you were different, somehow; less hollow. The whisper of a light breeze that brushes past unnoticed when the world is captivated by the proud sun hanging overhead on a single piece of string. The highest branch on a tree that keeps stretching upwards when the whole universe is pulling it down. The last cloud left behind after a

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rainstorm; choosing not to pour over the rainforest, but instead to drift to the desert and sprinkle over the lone traveller.

But, in a world of figurines with two dimensional lives, you stood out. And I guess you stood out so much that the universe decided that you weren't in the right place, that you were too real for this world, too real for me. And now you're gone, Autumn, taking with you all the stars in the sky.

That voicemail you left me that night, I must have listened to it a million times. You sounded so relaxed, so carefree. Telling me you'd be a little later getting home. And how could I worry when I heard the lullaby of your voice coming through the phone?

You should know that I tried to stay awake; reading and reading and reading until my eyes were ready to roll out of my head. But you never came. And maybe I knew, then, at the back of my mind, that something was wrong, Autumn. But I didn't do anything. I didn't do anything! I just went to bed, as untroubled as a calm lake, and as ignorant, with not even the slightest ripple to raise my concern.

It was 4:27 when the phone rang. I didn't even notice you weren't home yet. With nothing but the dull glow of the moon peeking at me through the window, I was in the dark. I picked up the phone, then, irritated at the interruption.

"Hello?" I said, my voice coming out husky from sleep.

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“Mr. Springsteen,” said a cold, authoritative voice. I heard hushed mutters in the background. I shot up, then, remembering the events of the night before in alarm, noticing that you weren’t there - that you were gone as surely as that night’s sunset.

“That’s me,” I said, trying to keep my voice light in attempt to ignore my worry so that everything it came from might just disappear, and you might walk through the door with a small smile on your face and an outrageous story that would put everything to rest except for my relief at the sight of you.

“Husband of Autumn Elodie Mayfair-Springsteen?” said the phone.

“That is correct,” I said, my voice catching in my throat. I didn’t know, yet, what was coming.

A dejected sigh. “I’ve called to tell you that your wife, Autumn, is in the hospital.”

And we both know what came next.

Before I met you, autumn was my least favourite season. I couldn’t stand it; watching the leaves fall off the trees, one by one, only to sink into the ground, too naive, too oblivious to foresee the perpetual loneliness they’d dropped into. The season of fall.

But, then I met you, on the dreary afternoon of October 17th, 1982. And, somehow, that day, it all changed. The leaves beneath our feet weren’t dull and withered anymore, but radiant from the glow of your eyes. The trees surrounding us weren’t lonely anymore, but all brought together by your dazzling smile. Suddenly, you were everywhere.

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Years passed, and the world became a new place to me. I wouldn't have recognized it if you weren't there with that sense of familiarity you seemed to possess even the first time I saw you. My time with you wasn't just the best time of my life; it was the only time of my life. Nothing else seems real anymore.

Even my name sounded different, somehow, when you said it. I couldn't figure out how, but you changed it, and, from the first time I heard it dancing out of your mouth, it's never sounded the same. I can never even say it, never even think of it - of myself - without thinking of you. Autumn, you've become me.

Even when we first met, I knew we were connected somehow. Maybe our souls were created intertwined when the universe came into existence. Maybe they met once years ago. Perhaps we were Antony and Cleopatra, Lancelot and Guinevere, or Marie and Pierre Curie. I could feel those deeper ties drawing us together like magnets from the start.

Then we were married. Outdoors, of course; that's the only place you really loved. And we danced until even the sun was asleep, smiling to each other in the warm radiance of the moon that seemed to be shining only for us, only for you. Looking at our footprints in the dirt, I can't even explain how happy I was, and how untroubled, just seeing the marks we'd made on the universe together. And those footprints may have faded, but my memories won't.

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And then came the monotony. The days and nights that seemed to exist only to reciprocate the days and nights before. I could tell you were unhappy; the light in your eyes had dimmed. You were a bird, meant to discover the world, and I was a cage trapping you in a place I knew you weren't meant to be.

And finally came October 17th, 1989, a brisk autumn morning with a cloudless sky. The day we finally escaped. But, I don't need to tell you this; you were there. What I should tell you are the things I was always too afraid to say. The words trapped so far within my self-doubt that they were never heard.

Autumn, my fascination for everything about you will never, ever leave me. I remember it all. You liked cherries, but only when they were the light colour of the edge of a sunset. You only ever listened to old music, because today's has no soul. You loathed the idea of an office, of any place that could tame your spirit; and you hated seeing caged animals and picked flowers that had lost their roots. Your biggest hope in life was to see the whole world.

I don't think I could ever forgive myself if we hadn't travelled. If your dream of exploring the planet had turned into a burden you had to carry with you in death. But, in those two years, we managed to see it all. You enjoyed the scenery, but the best part for me was seeing you and the glee your entire existence seemed to radiate whenever you found something new to fall in love with.

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I *still* see you sometimes. Did you know that? Constant reminders that you were here, that you existed, that you were real. I see you on the shelves of that record store you loved. In that little yellow Volkswagen Beetle that drives by every day. In the mint chocolate chip ice cream at the shop down the road. Sometimes, I'll see someone walking through the park or on the beach, and for a fleeting moment, I'll swear it's you. But it never is. You're gone, and I know I should stop trying to bring you back. Hope is an illness.

The worst is when I'm at home. Maybe it's because it's something we built together, something filled with memories of laughter, fun, and love; something that seems to be filled with you. You're a painting on every wall, a statue on every wooden floorboard. If I listen closely, I can hear your steady breath engulfing me in an embrace. And for that moment, I'll resign to you; I'll be happy. But the problem with moments is that they always end. And sorrow always leads me back into its seemingly endless depths.

But here's the strangest part. I never even cried. Not once. Of course, I'm drowning in my wistful yearning to hear you say one more thing, to see your playful grin one more time. But, I think I've accepted that I can't, and that the memory of you that's slipping like sand through my fingers and your energy that I find everywhere are all I have left until I join you. I don't need to cry. It's just you, going on another one of your

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adventures - on your last adventure - and, one day, I'll join you. I'm sure it's a marvellous one.

I don't know why I'm saying this all; you would've hated hearing me like this. So, Autumn, I hope wherever you are, you're having fun, for yourself and for me. I hope it was all nice and peaceful. I hope you know I'm here, that I'll never stop caring. And I hope you'll be waiting for me when death pulls me into its arms. I miss you.

I even visited you the other day for the first time. I walked all the way there, and roamed along the edge of the riverbank, just thinking of you, and wondering where your ashes had drifted in the months you'd been in there. Of course you were never really in the river. Everything about you is somewhere else; wandering along the edges of my mind, but never coming too close in fear I might find you; floating through the sky making the world brighter, happier, and more special for those who didn't even know you; bringing company to the leaves that had fallen off the trees in the park. The only thing in that river is your old home - the place your soul found refuge for 27 years. But, you, Autumn, are everywhere.

The stream was different that day. I couldn't feel the wind caressing me, couldn't hear the animals frolicing, couldn't smell the flowers bestrewn along the edges of the water. Everything was numb. The air had somehow lost its freshness we always relished in, and was instead polluted with my memory of you and everything that made

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you Autumn. It was a pretty miserable trip, Autumn, but I'm glad I went. It showed me that you aren't lost, that you're still here, making my life sunnier just like you always did.

If I told anyone that, they'd say something trivial thinking they're providing comfort for me, probably something about closure. But I didn't go to the river to find closure. I went to find you, so that I can open my eyes to the universe knowing you're by my side. Closure is highly overrated. How could I, one day, just decide to leave you behind and start to live again, just as I always had? It'd be like surrendering my identity. You'll always be a central piece of my life, Autumn; the sun around which I orbit.

But, still, I just wanted you to know how much you were and still are to me. I love you today as much as ever, and I'll love you just as much for infinite tomorrows. And even if the universe shatters, we'll find each other while everything else unravels and becomes the most grievous thing of all - memory of what once was there.

So maybe this anniversary wasn't what I expected it to be. Your body may have surrendered, but everything that makes you Autumn didn't. You're a candle that can't be blown out. This anniversary marks the day that your soul left home to do what it was always meant to do; wander.

And, to the universe, you might be just another leaf falling off a tree in the heart of the fall, but to me, you're the cool autumn breeze carrying those leaves home.

Forever,

Lathan