

Eight And You're In  
October 2021

One kindergarten kiss can't count as a crush, but

Second grade brought black hair, black eyes,  
and a last-name first-name my mother always got confused.

Three years - the next one took its bittersweet time  
circling middle school drains, sluggish as it dried up,  
lingering long as it left its stain behind. as

For high school, that's when I met a young man's smile,  
edge-creased, mentor hands that twist and guide,  
bare arms and baseball caps ever turned away from  
me. right on his heels, the drumline came in on

Five and the long angles of bass drum harness and  
skinny limb caught me up in the thundering beat even  
though his sharp dark glasses and pale-eyed laughter  
were never for me. he was ice-cold civility and looks that cut  
away until frost finally coated completely.

Sixth time was the charm. *boyfriend* sounded like  
star-splash silver, a midnight blue vast and eyelash-glittering,  
streaks of neon green slipping across our faces. he looked  
like the clink of our glasses, the brush of dark lashes  
on flushed skin. he tasted like telescope chrome and  
a sleeping sour betrayal too distant to detect, even back then.

Seven times around a perpetual cycle of love and lose, but  
a cute beaming face atop a drum major podium pulled  
me in. who was I then, to deny distraction? I wanted the  
cat fur on navy blue sweatshirts, the new york cobbles,  
the mirror bouncing too much of me back at myself,  
the right guy at the right time until time ran out.  
I let him go, falling back into open air to just sit in the sky awhile.

*Eight*, I now whisper to myself every time I catch your eye  
and you crack a smile bright enough to punch right through

me and I feel the sweet ache of your company cupped close  
inside my heart. I whisper to anyone watching over me  
each time you open a part of yourself to me the way  
friends do and I listen the way lovers do.

in band, we have eight counts to prepare for the next rep  
and then we're in, ready or not. looks like you're my eight.

are you in?

Three Months Since I Realized You'd Died

February 2021

I do miss you.

The person that now wears your skin -  
Soft skin I once touched,  
Tanned deep summer brown  
Around the fish-pale strips of your inner wrist -  
I'm sure that person would doubt it.

Let him.

The boy I once knew is good as dead,  
Trapped in the past.  
And him, I do miss.

I strain across veils of existence now,  
Splaying my fingertips for the dry rasp of your hand  
In mine.  
The glimmering darkness of your eyes  
When they curved upwards with the corners of your lips.  
The valley of your spine  
The jut of your shoulder blades  
Shifting warm under your T-shirt's  
steel-blue material and my palm  
Where the fabric bunches thin  
Between my fingers.  
Both our chests narrow enough  
To feel the other's warm heart thud  
Through our ribs.

I don't know if I'll ever touch you again,  
My gentle, steady flame of high school halls  
Synthetic band uniforms  
Sharp plastic odor of strange school bus seats  
Enveloped quiet in our darkness and the streetlamps drifting by  
Lying by your telescope under the stars.  
You died long ago.  
It was past time I told the cold doppelganger  
Frowning in your place  
That I will not associate with ignorant killers

Not even when they steal the form of  
Soft curls and softer smiles.  
Let your murderer taste the deep-bitten sting  
Of his consequences.

Just know that it stung me too  
When I sealed you safe and warm  
In my memories.  
I did what I had to do.

Amethyst  
September 2021

The one who keeps my heart now  
Has it tucked in his pocket.  
He didn't know it was mine, didn't know  
It was even a heart he found  
When the arrow knocked it out of me  
And he scooped it up without any effort at all.  
Never letting it bruise the ground.

Now he carries it safe and I let him hold it  
Let him view the facets and angles if he pleases,  
Glimmering in twilight LED strip light  
Purple in his eyes.  
Let him grow accustomed to its weight and shape in his hand.  
I watch him look it over with a quirk of his smile,  
His neat little campus sidewalk find,  
None the wiser that one appraisal might make him rich beyond imagine  
(Or perhaps it is cursed. Perhaps  
It will drain him slowly until he wonders why  
He thought to scoop it up at all.)

The one who keeps my heart doesn't think too hard on it for now.  
(Perhaps it's best for us both that he doesn't.)  
And I, well, I follow wherever he wanders  
With that little piece of me,  
One soft step behind,  
My eyes on his smile and my heart in his palm.

## Tell Her You Kept Going Up

October 2021

If I could see her now, what  
Would I say? When her eyes lit up at  
The sight of me, healthy and beautiful and  
Older, what would I say to my own face?  
Love fluttered from her lips like  
Butterflies, love for the boyfriend  
She earned in a romcom trope tailspin of  
Breaking-up-to-date-you, perfect  
Storm flashing in the stadium sun, that one  
Moment when girl saw boy at his happiest  
And felt the click of her heart latching on.  
Love for the trio she found on her own, love  
Especially for the grounded angel who met her  
At her lowest and found herself in turn.  
Love for the friend she prided herself  
For being able to keep past partnership, love  
For a boy she thought she would know forever.  
Love for *me*, of all idols, for the woman she had  
No reason to suspect she would stumble on  
The path towards becoming, love for the world  
That had only just begun to open arms to her.

If I met that girl overflowing with love,  
Secure in her world, in her head, what  
Could I possibly say to her now, when I've lost  
So much already in the black years since  
We were one and the same? She would wait  
For my smile until her own faded before its time  
And she would see the truth of me because who  
Can hide the truth from themselves  
The truth, that the darkness on whose brink she stood  
Toes dangling, would bleach her away like  
Fabric in a dust-choked hatbox too long locked  
Up, only to flake into powder at the barest  
Touch of her innocent, enviable hand

Fox Prints  
March 2021

Two foxes in Fox Heath last April to July -  
Glance through the second-story  
Bedroom window, spring wind  
Blown through airy screens, faint perfume,  
To catch a quick flash of auburn, ruddy  
Under the gray-bough oak tree and the  
Forest strip at the base of our backyard slope.

My home street and another in north-side Fox Heath  
Bookended a wooded line so thick with  
Swaying trees of heaven, maple, dogwood,  
I could forget our house didn't back onto  
Pure frontier, endless manifest destiny to a  
Nine-year-old's obsession with the natural world  
Stretching rubber band slingshots and scraping  
Sticks into spears and arrows.  
Soles of my feet toughened and grass stained  
Running through tick-brush and spined raspberry boughs and  
Sucking green air deep through my little limber body  
As moss and root and acorn cap pressed between my bare toes.  
Distant living room lights in the evening dark became  
Fairy glimmers, fireflies,  
Flitting into neighbors' yards as the sunlight, velvet-soft and purple  
Drops a cloak of evening over eyes well-attuned to woods-edge.  
My hair, a quick flash of fox-auburn between the grainy trunks and  
Swaying leaves of spring, surveyor of the  
Suburb wilderness.