

Dear Author

Late at night, I wonder if she ever really had feelings for me. That's what's been most difficult: not her leaving, but rather wondering if she was honest.

What's most difficult is . . . did she really look at me, try to get to know me? Was she open to it? Does she really not have time, or did she look at me and realize, nah, not this one (and then there's the nagging, well, if I'd handled my feelings better, would it have changed anything, but no, that way lay madness)?

That's what counts, mostly.

I'd say that she was the first girl in a while I felt anything for, that she was the first girl since my ex- that I really wanted, but that'd be a lie. There were three years between my ex- and her, and those years weren't filled with girls, no, but they were filled with misplaced emotions.

Misplaced emotions. Not like I lost anything. Just kinda stopped thinkin' about where I was puttin' shit.

I fell for her. Girls will only play the games you let them, will only hurt you as hard as you let them, and she crushed me and hollowed me out because I let her. I let her get inside me, and why?

Because one day I saw her smile, and one day she kissed me back, and one day I let her in.

For many years, I've been the guy against the games. I called her the day after we first went out for coffee and drinks; I hadn't planned on its being a date; I was attracted to her, sure, but you can't go in expecting that. I can't, anyway. But we stayed at that coffee shop till it closed, then went to a bar and stayed until they turned on the ugly lights, and we were both still smiling when I hugged her, wished her good night. I didn't try to kiss her, might not have minded kissing

her, but didn't want to try. It was the effort I didn't want. The evening ended with a hug, and that was enough.

I called her the following day, told her what a great time I'd had. I just wanted to hear the sound she made when she smiled again.

She called it refreshing.

I like being refreshing. I've never been able to be casual. I'm not sure I'm wired in a way that allows for such casual relations, hooking up in bars, hummers in parking lots. Maybe I should try, just once, just to do it, just to understand, I guess, just for the experience.

No names? No faces? Just skin and sweat and bodies?

I've wondered, a few times, if I'm not bipolar. I get the days when I feel more charming than I have any right to be, and . . . well, there are just some days I wallow. I try not to, most of the time, and I hate whiny-bitch mode, but I know there are days I'm square in it.

But, you know, if it turned out I was, if I went to some doctor, and he said, yeah, you're bipolar, we're going to put you on some medication?

I don't know if I'd take it.

It's not a pain like abrasion or laceration: it gets down into your soul and hurts existentially, in a way nothing physical ever could. It's not so much an ache as suffering, and it feels like pulling back. Shriveling. Withering. Naked, in the fetal position.

I'll never forget kissing her for the first time. Lips and tongues and fingers in hair, body against body, her and I connected as the neighborhood, the world, the sun and the entire rest of the universe revolved around us, two, for just a moment. I still remember the amber play of the porchlights on her hair. My eyes were half-closed, or half-open, the same as my mouth, depending on your perspective. Her hair was soft, and her cheek was warm, and her lips were

on mine, and when her tongue danced with mine, it was heaven . . .

I damned near skipped when I walked back to my car. I looked back, as I approached it, and, of course, saw her looking at me, being a dork.

I was happy. Just. Happy.

She told me, later, long after I'd driven away, long after that evening, in fact, that she'd closed the door, and she'd put her back up against it, and she'd swooned. Like in the movies, she'd said.

It was Thanksgiving. There was a lot to be thankful for, that day. I'm not much of one for most holidays, I'm the guy who'll do something right up until you tell me I need to do it, but that day, I was grateful. That day, I felt likelikelike the luckiest manmanman on the face of the earthearth.

For many, many years, I've been anticipating a letter. A single letter. It will arrive, one day, in my mailbox, in a plain, white, business envelope, and it will be addressed to me in my own writing.

I will open that envelope, that day, when it comes. I won't expect much from that envelope, because I've learned not to; I've gotten many false envelopes, all pretenders to the throne. I've gotten almost hundreds of envelopes, and all of them save a couple have been addressed to Author, whom I don't know, and have thanked Author for his work, which is, apparently, not so engaging enough to make the sender enthusiastic about whatever work they just received.

I don't know anyone named Author, and I wish they'd stop sending me his letter.

The day my letter comes, I'll be expecting to open that envelope and find it addressed to Author.

But it won't be. It will say Dear Mr. Entrekin (that's me), and it will say that whomever wrote it is pleased to inform me that they read my novel, and they would like, more than most things in the world, to publish it. They will offer me some

small monetary offer for the rights, which I'll gladly accept, and I'll never, not in a million years, tell them fuck, you coulda had it for nothin' just as long as you got that story out there, but they'll probably know that, anyway.

I can picture that day. It'll be a day like any other. I'll be dressed like I am every other day, and I probably won't have shaved. If it's a Saturday, I'll probably be in a pair of shorts when I open it, and I'll probably be wearing my glasses.

Which I'll have to take off, because that letter, rest assured, will make me weep.

Those tears will be worth fifteen years of my life. They will be full of an awkward high school and college student who didn't quite fit either his body or his personality. They will be full of putting it all out there, everything, right on the line, and letting other people see it, and having them reject it.

Having them look over something I've put my best into, and look it up and down, *appraise* it, and ultimately tell me that, for whatever reason, my best wasn't good enough. Maybe they had a full client roster. Maybe there was a misplaced comma. Maybe they were interested in literary and I'm too rock-star.

Maybe a lot of things. Who knows? Maybe times a hundred, maybe times a thousand.

I've heard 'em all.

But one day, that letter will come, and it won't be a maybe. It will be a yes.

And seeing a book on the shelf with my name on it, that'll be worth it all. You just wait until the first time I see one of my books at Barnes & Noble. I'll be unintelligible for hours.

It hurts, yes. But given a choice between that letter, right now, and just the memory of that kiss, I'd say, you know, I can wait a little longer for that letter.

I will, of course.

I hate that I loved her. I hate that it hurts. I hate that I let it.

But I remember that kiss. I remember that other night, too, when I connected to her in a way I'd never connected with anyone else. I remember, the first time we were intimate, a glorious forever-image of her pulling back her hair (sorry, but the other details, well, those are mine. You understand).

Those memories mean something to me. Because I knew her. I knew her dog's name. I know where she went to school. I know what she's scared of, and I know the look on her face when she knows nothing besides pleasure I've brought into her life.

So she left, and what now? Reevaluate my morals and hopes? Get over her by engaging in a string of random encounters with girls I'll only call the next day because I feel obligated to, and not because I only want to hear her voice in my ear?

Somewhere, somewhen, there is a letter, and it is addressed to me. I just worry that all the rest will be addressed to 'Author', and I'm tired of opening his mail.

-Will Entrekin