

# Letting Go

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# Letting Go

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these years will not last forever  
 but they will propel us into the lives  
 we were always meant to live  
 and we will live those lives  
 for as long  
 and as slow  
 and in whatever way  
 we're meant to live them

...

how many of you will I know in five years  
 and how will we know each other  
 or will I just remember you  
 as the ones who were there, bearing witness  
 when I let my heart run wild and free  
 one last time

it's hard to see that far ahead  
 with the smell of smoke and sulfur thick in the air  
 but also it's hard to imagine a future  
 where you're absent  
 when you all have taught me  
 so much  
 about how to start  
 loving  
 myself

## how to light a match

that rough spot on the side of a matchbox  
 is made of ground glass and red phosphorous  
 and when you strike a match  
 the heat from the friction is enough  
 for a small bit of the red  
 to transition into white  
 but white phosphorous  
 can only exist next to oxygen for a moment  
 before its atomic bonds break  
 releasing the energy of the universe  
 into a tiny point of space and time  
 and the heat  
 in that tiny point of space and time  
 ignites the sulfur and ground glass  
 in the match head  
 and  
 for a time  
 it flares  
 gloriously and pungently  
 before igniting the wood or paper of the match stick  
 and then the flame burns as long  
 and as slow  
 and wherever  
 as it is meant to burn

## introduction

I wrote the first of these poems (*ten years*) in October of 2023 and the last of them in the first week of April of 2024 (*again*). This time period also marked the start of my second year of HRT and my partner of eight years leaving the house three months after I had ended things.

The next six months were a whirlwind of feelings fully expressed – more fully and honestly than I ever had in my life. More rawly than I had since I was a teenager. These nineteen poems capture and chart those feelings as best I knew how, and the writing of these poems was therapy for the events they reference.

One aspect of starting all this in middle age is that after decades of living a shadow life and absorbing everything I could about transition – I knew all the clichés. Knew the lessons everyone else learned. Knew every pitfall of the heart to come, and yet, I still needed to do it all.

Knowing and feeling are different things. A heart in the harbor is safe but that's not what hearts are for.

Wherever I end up these six months will burn brightly in my memory for years to come.

Alana Storm  
 April 2024

## letting go

how long will I linger here  
 revisiting thirty-two  
 trying to cram  
 decades of lost experience  
 into a few short years  
 all of us  
 understanding things about each other  
 like no one ever has  
 but also  
 a gulf  
 watching all of you  
 embrace life  
 for the first time  
 and me haunted by the pale reflection  
 of having been here before  
 of knowing these lessons  
 but having missed the mark  
 how do I let go of the woman  
 i will never get to be  
 and embrace the one I am

an iris and chrysanthemum  
 may spend time in the garden together  
 but two spring blooms  
 do not face a fall flower  
 the same way  
 they look  
 at each other  
 eventually  
 i will need to let go  
 of this dream  
 of a young woman  
 and accept  
 the life  
 of an evening star  
 and maybe  
 that's already upon me  
 and the grief I feel  
 is knowing  
 the precious years  
 are ending  
 and that it's time  
 to start again  
 for real

**again**

as our relationship  
 disintegrated around us  
 i told my now ex  
 who I still loved  
 that I would only live  
 these first few years  
 of transition  
 once  
 and they were precious to me  
 and I would not sacrifice them  
 for anything or anyone  
 and I did not sacrifice them  
 and I've seen and gained so much  
 and now my friends  
 who started before me  
 are beginning  
 to hit two years  
 the early chaos  
 where everything is up  
 for reconsideration  
 fading  
 and I too am beginning to feel  
 the rest of my life  
 tug at the hems of my new skirts and dresses

**ten years**

as I pickup the pieces  
 i find  
 again and again  
 evidence of us  
 and grief settles  
 into my heart  
 so, as I find them I put the gifts  
 the notes  
 the plans  
 our old future  
 into a cardboard box  
 that I'll find ten years from now  
 and turn my eyes forward

**instead**

*dedicated to my feminist heroes from the 1990s*

we should be  
 on a porch somewhere  
 sipping wine, or a beer  
 or tea  
 reminiscing about  
 our wild old days  
 raising an eyebrow  
 at the youth  
 while secretly smiling  
 at the world  
 we built  
 for them  
 instead  
 i am outside  
 looking through that ripped  
 screen  
 door  
 that you and your goddesses  
 would never open  
 for a woman like me  
 so instead  
 i surround myself  
 with the others  
 and we will keep building the future  
 your fear  
 kept from us

closer now  
 to the hard one  
 but another friendship  
 separate from her  
 your bursting laugh infectious  
 your advice invaluable  
 only compassion  
 that I almost  
 fell in love  
 with your wife  
 finally you  
 “defines a name”  
 is that what I said?  
 the sly one accused me of  
 catching feelings from sex  
 but I had already let  
 the feelings catch me  
 waiting for you to catch up  
 only to realize  
 i was suddenly on the track alone  
 these are not the lessons  
 i wanted us to learn  
 the grief comes in waves  
 not really about you anymore  
 instead – all the wasted years  
 and the things I’ll never have  
 eventually, when the moon’s at apogee  
 low tide will let me  
 leave this beach  
 but for now  
 i’ll linger  
 and add  
 my tears  
 to the waves



## sextent 2024 and one quarter

we have kissed once since  
 birthday fun and conspiracy  
 discussed art  
 in a week you will tie me up  
 and I will lose myself for a bit  
 with you watching over me  
 but most precious  
 is that day  
 at the museum  
 and that thai restaurant  
 when I left, somehow realizing  
 that timidity was no longer  
 serving me  
 and you  
 a solid friendship  
 close enough for me  
 to buy your drugs  
 and discuss our exes  
 who seem to have gone  
 to the same  
 shitty school  
 priestess and hedge witch  
 comparing survival notes  
 the sly one next  
 who helped buy me a crown  
 who painted my nails  
 and knelt before me  
 as I lay a sword on her palms  
 conspirator zero  
 collecting us all  
 under her roof

## the grime

i want to kneel  
 on the bed  
 lock eyes  
 tentatively touch  
 without breaking gaze  
 and wipe away the years  
 of shame  
 guilt  
 and obligation  
 the cover our  
 new  
 impossible  
 bodies

**into the groove**

i launch off my left foot  
 and slide on my right  
 into the living room turned dance floor  
 left foot dragging behind me, then up on its big toe  
 my slide nearly timed to the drop  
 so I pause, correcting for drift  
 and then swing my hips down and my arms up  
 returning to that moment beyond time  
 that all dancers go to  
 fourteen, hearing a pop star sing  
 “only when I’m dancing  
 can I feel this free”  
 and thinking “that sounds nice  
 could it be for me?”  
 in one smooth motion  
 i swivel my left foot down on its heel  
 bend my right knee  
 and then push down with my hands  
 palms parallel the floor, perpendicular with my arms  
 like I saw that drag faerie do  
 all those years ago  
 in seattle at neighbors

are you worried about hurting me?  
 or my hurting you?  
 or is it just your texas born shame  
 that clouds everything?  
 or are the clouds my shame  
 having dared to ask someone to love me  
 the way I wanted be loved  
 and the answer was no  
 again  
 my codependent heart torn  
 between wanting to give you  
 everything you need  
 and learning that this does not include me  
 we’ve always been two girls  
 trying to think our way  
 in and out of our feelings together  
 and as I work through my grief  
 i hope that you’re able to embrace  
 whatever it is  
 your manners are hiding  
 and tell someone  
 even if  
 that someone’s  
 not me

**manners**

i tell you where  
 i thought my feelings  
 had come from  
 and the distress on your face  
 your careful words  
 “thank you for telling me”, you say  
 stilted  
 manners  
 your actual feelings held back  
 why’s that?  
 it’s been a month  
 since I told you  
 i wanted to fall in love with you  
 on that false february spring day

i spin, both now  
 and all those years ago  
 i look up  
 and on the the second floor balcony  
 catch her smiling down at me  
 the latest of what will be  
 a pattern of women  
 who i will choose to love  
 and who will hold my wrong self  
 too tightly  
 breaking our hearts  
 back in the living room i look down  
 and see you  
 smiling at me  
 from that couch  
 and then I see her smiling at you smiling at me  
 and i see all of us  
 holding on to each other  
 just right

**NOW**

the idea that  
i should have known  
and acted sooner  
haunts me  
but  
had I acted sooner  
i wouldn't know any of you  
the way I know you  
now  
and knowing you all  
the way I know you  
now  
is worth everything

**some sundays**

some sundays I delay my shot  
to help me write  
the really sad poems

**sextet 2024**

the sunlight  
 that was peeking over the valley walls  
 as we all bedded down  
 has grown bold  
 and now peeks through the blinds instead  
 framing your eyes perfectly  
 as we all begin to stir  
 my first night in ages  
 feeling the warm kind touch  
 of a friend  
  
 and you, the evening before  
 cross legged on the floor  
 not caring that our limbs  
 fall casually on to each other  
 our smiles easy  
 our bond  
 that defies a name  
 growing stronger  
 with every shared word  
  
 and your radiant smile  
 masking, perhaps, your grief  
 but you keep moving  
 growing more powerful  
 beautiful  
 and strykingly monstrous  
 in unsurprised  
 when we realize  
 it was your hand  
 pulling my hair  
 in that pile of  
 six warm bodies

and I grieve  
 letting go  
 of the you that never was  
 the you I was ready  
 to trust implicitly  
 with my heart  
  
 and I hope  
 the woman that's there  
 is one  
 i still want to know  
 and that I can find  
 a different way  
 to love you

## different way

we talk again  
 and when I get to my car  
 i almost cry  
 which is a change  
 from the last time  
 and the time before that  
  
 we have said things out loud  
 and they're not what I wanted to hear  
 but they do anchor me to the present  
 instead of imagined futures  
 which is why I needed to hear them  
  
 i feel  
 resentment  
 that you were not  
 careful with my heart  
 that you were reckless  
 in your new embrace of love  
 and not ready  
 when a romantic  
 like me  
 was there to drink it in  
  
 i resent that your feelings  
 are still muddled  
 and not known to you  
 but then what can I expect  
 from a girl  
 who was six  
 the first time my  
 adult heart was broken

this isn't our first time  
 sitting close  
 but the soft kisses  
 are new  
 i ask  
 what sort of kisses these are  
 and you show me  
 less softly  
 i hesitate  
 looking at her  
 you tell me  
 its ok  
 and my hesitation dissolves  
  
 and finally you  
 with that sly smile  
 and those cagey eyes  
 all next to your glasses on the night stand now  
 unmasked, a peaceful face  
 you sleep through breakfast  
 but the five of us  
 will wake you later  
 and give you a smile  
 less sly and less secret  
 all of us  
 our masks gone  
 radiant in the light  
 of a new year

**through the wilderness**

the first time we met  
 i resisted the urge  
 to kiss you – honoring my agreements  
 and as you took your leave  
 i entered my number into your phone  
 and described myself as  
 “the lady from portland you almost kissed at that party”  
 and then gave you a look  
 and you left  
 an hour later – our lipstick smudged  
 and had you said the word  
 i’d have come to your room  
 and ground my agreements  
 against your thighs  
 until they were dust  
  
 the second time we met  
 your city washed clean  
 by a june thunder storm  
 dinner  
 your nail  
 gently scraping the skin  
 of my middle finger  
 your wicked smile  
 as you saw the places  
 it took me

and worst of all  
 none of this stops me  
 from saying  
 “you should take me home  
 give me your weed  
 and anything else you want to”  
  
 and i worry  
 about my delight  
 when his eyes  
 light up  
 in thirsty disbelief



**worry**

across the table  
 is the me  
 i was dreading  
 middled aged  
 shabby stubble  
 kind of charming  
 over a layer of bitterness  
 and strong opinions  
 about girls and scenes  
 long gone  
 clinging to a hipster youth  
 that does not fit  
 much past thirty two  
 which for him  
 was two decades ago

a block and a half  
 back to my hotel  
 high ceilings, tall windows  
 high enough  
 that the city  
 was a din  
 nervously undressing  
 my raw body – ten months new  
 yours complete  
 you asked about mine  
 and showed me the  
 care touch and kindness  
 that had left the relationship  
 i was leaving  
 you knew where I was and what I needed  
 because you'd escaped the same prisons  
 then I kissed all your lips  
 and asked you to stay  
 and you did  
  
 dawn wakes us  
 me, naked, watching you slide  
 back into that dress  
 hoping, one day  
 i will look half as good  
 the light caught my naked body  
 and you took a picture  
 kisses goodbye – for now  
 watching you navigate  
 the street below  
 back to your car and life

the third time we met  
 my hand exploring the depth  
 that was not minimal  
 hearing your moans  
 same as mine  
 on that bridge in that park  
 as you whispered those things  
 in my ear  
 coffee and laughs  
 on your couch in the morning  
 after the dawn hours  
 with your head on my shoulder  
 crying  
 as I ran my fingers  
 through your hair  
 soothing you  
 hush little baby/don't say a word  
 our trip too short  
 tender confessions without possession  
 i imagine our fourth time  
 and smile at memories  
 waiting to be made  
 but I do wonder  
 how all that came next  
 might have been different  
 if not for the chaperone  
 of cities too distant

but unbidden, I wonder  
 if I was young again  
 prettier  
 if my curves were there  
 but less and smoother  
 skin free of blemishes  
 no varicose veins  
 no eczema scars  
 if I was more relentless about pursuing  
 a certain sort of feminine beauty  
 if this new middle aged body  
 that I love  
 had a crown of blonde hair like hers  
 instead of grey and  
 faint dishwasher brown, what then  
 and if, when I was as old then  
 as you are now  
 i could have known my feelings  
 and looked them in the eye  
 and claimed the body and life I wanted  
 instead of making myself small and compliant  
 and settling for scraps  
 if any of that were true  
 could I have charmed my way past the frontier guards  
 stationed outside your heart  
 could I have made my way inside  
 taken up residence  
 like a naive teenage romantic  
 and waited for you  
 to discover me

## frontier discovery

you tell me  
 that you're often not aware  
 of your feelings until well after they've happened  
 and even then they sometimes mystify you  
 or in my words  
 "you mean until the circumstances  
 they've created overtake you and  
 those around you, huh babe?"  
 but I bite my tongue and stay silent  
 and remind myself  
 that there was a time when the caverns  
 of my mind and heart were  
 unexplored territory to me  
 and I was older then  
 than you are now  
 and how  
 thanks to the pills  
 and the injections  
 we have both found  
 a new forrest of feelings  
 to explore  
 and when we stumble  
 it's no one's fault  
 that's the nature of exploring a forrest  
 and I'm grateful we're still there  
 to pick each other up

## gravity

there's that thing  
 where a certain sort of  
 new kiss  
 creates  
 in an instant  
 a multiverse of possibilities  
 so large  
 that it pushes all the air out of your stomach  
 leaving only room for the butterflies  
 and days later  
 as we talk about it  
 and make the right decisions  
 most of those universes  
 fade  
 not meant to be  
 but I can't help but feel  
 melancholy  
 over the lost chance  
 to fall into your  
 or someone's  
 or anyone's  
 gravity  
 regardless of the consequences

**catch**

i watch my friends  
 falling into each other's arms  
 learning  
 what these new, impossible bodies  
 and feelings  
 are capable of  
 and my heart swells  
 joyful to know them  
 to stand with them  
 comrades  
 or maybe,  
 when I want to cry a little  
 sisters  
 and then – inevitably  
 i remember  
 when I was that young and  
 learning  
 what I could settle for  
 in a body, and mind, that  
 never fit quite right  
 and no one to tell me  
 who, or what, I was

so I will tell her  
 about my dreams  
 and I will tell her  
 how the world stopped when our lips met  
 and why the risk is a fear worth facing  
 but my lopsided heart knows that I need this more than her  
 and my lopsided heart knows how that story goes  
 but if the wax on my wings is going to melt  
 then it should melt  
 and if a ship smashed on the rocks  
 can be made sea worthy again  
 then maybe this will show  
 my lopsided heart  
 that it wasn't her fault  
 and she deserved all the love she needed

sometimes  
 if she's lucky  
 she finds that heart  
 that the world hid away  
 in a box made of tar  
 somehow pristine and new  
 she cracks open her ribs  
 and nestles it in  
 next to her old lopsided heart  
 and discovers it needs her  
 to run wild and free  
 again  
 and the old, lopsided heart  
 looks on with the fear  
 of a parent  
 knowing  
 that the wax on her wings  
 won't hold  
 knowing  
 she will smash herself  
 against the rocks  
 because the old lopsided heart believes  
 that to temper a heart  
 into the shape of a life  
 that you want  
 means breaking it  
 again and again and again

all those men – young and old  
 who just needed  
 a bro to love  
 and a blow job  
 and how easy I found it  
 to meet them only half way  
 and the women  
 who I would fall into  
 with no regard  
 for my own well being  
 my love and desire  
 dwarfed by nothing  
 save  
 an envy  
 so large  
 i could barely see it  
 what even is water  
 so I watch my young friends  
 falling into each other's arms  
 and I stand with them  
 and also, I have laid down with them  
 but sometimes – despite everything  
 i'm still afraid  
 to ask them  
 to catch me

**she deserved it**

we're clinging to each other  
 naked  
 in that grey morning light  
 my finger running across your bare shoulders  
 your smile filling me  
 and then I start awake  
 empty bed, the rest of it fading  
 and I already regret  
 i feel too timid  
 to tell you  
 my dream  
  
 it's not that I disagree  
 when I hear you say  
 our friendship is  
 too important  
  
 it's that  
 i wish  
 i knew  
 if any part of you  
 wanted  
 to risk it  
 as much as i do  
  
 all romantics learn  
 in our own time  
 that letting a  
 heart run wild and free  
 has consequences  
 and as hair greys  
 we temper our hearts  
 into shapes  
 that fit  
 the lives we want

but sometimes that heart  
 isn't your own  
 sometimes the world hides  
 your real heart away  
 in a box made of tar  
 so a little girl builds a new heart  
 from discarded parts  
 lopsided, charming even  
 but one that's unable to hold any shape for long  
  
 and that girl enters the world  
 and lets her lopsided heart  
 run wild and free  
 and when the consequences  
 can't temper it  
 into the shape  
 of the life  
 she wants  
 she moves on to the next one  
 again, and again, and again  
 looking for the life  
 that will never fit  
 and exhausted  
 she decides between  
 accepting her life of quiet misery  
 or quietly ending it