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10 LETTERS

by

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Dear Ted Lasso:

I have long mourned my sparsely haired upper lip. Though, my admiration for your commitment to redemption transcends my mustache envy. Lately, I have been considering *cynicism*, how Postmodernism fails us and our deep need for sentimentality. Your directives to 'believe' and 'be curious, not judgmental' nourish my need for hope and unconditional positive regard. I dream to be a diamond dog – I will bring warm beverages for everyone, and when I arrive sullen with defeated eyes, you will lean over toward my shoulder to share wisdom made only for me. You will be close enough for me to hear soft words whistle through your thick mustache; I will feel the hot, middle-aged breath of restoration warm my already flushed cheeks. And when you are sad and vulnerable, I will hold you, because men can hug and bury faces into necks.

Cheers,

D

Dear Katie,

Cut your deep grooves into me, Nazca lines from an alien hand, a map to secret springs where the water tastes like limestone and languid ferns, or a cosmic ruse, the last laugh - toothless grins, calloused hands, tired stones, blood and salted sweat, the industry of misguided myth. Imagine the bitter taunts shared just before hyperthermia - cruel Chaucha is surely cuckolded, or, he is too small to satisfy and too pretty to dig. And, when you run your fingers across these lines, you can know, like we know quiet, dark and dangerous things, that even before I was, I was yours.

Love,

D

Dear JP,

Don't worry; the hope of the poor will not be taken away. And, I am getting better with my perfectionism; that is, I am seeing things through versus making them just so. Who could have guessed our lost friend would be found rigored, pale and bloated with one less foot, though, presumably, no less pride. I am well aware of the possibility that his demise spurred our mutual endorsement and deep affection. But our connection, since sacred, would likely have unfolded inevitably. I miss Haiti. I believe I've left a piece of me there that calls out for my return - such smoldering suffering that cries for our attention without hope of response. Do you remember the cumquats at the Hotel Montana that sent my tummy into a rage; the pigeon peas with rice and chicken served to us by ash-calloused hands and indomitable smiles? Those who have little share much to my shame and embarrassment. We are players in a cosmic, counter-intuitive ruse. What choice do we have but to laugh? You taught me to laugh at myself; the best joke in the world...I can hear your laugh, your stories, your earnest, desperate plea to extirpate entitlement. You reminded me once that my dad, as he slept with his eyes open at eighty-seven pounds, did not need a miracle; that he was a miracle. We are each of us miracles, magic and light, stardust coded to love and be loved.

I love you, John.

D

Dear Dad,

I have been dutifully rooting for the Sooners, and my skill at cooking champiñones continues to improve. I am still envious of your metabolism and mustache. When you fell on the patio in the middle of the night, and Daisy, that sweet pup, violently woke me up so that I could hear your calls for help, I knew that deep Sadness and her needle-point pains were waiting impatiently for me to invite them into our fragile, hopeful home. Like Nazis, cancer seemed obsessed with your anatomy, desperate to accentuate your form and its sinewy texture beneath paper-thin skin. When knees are thicker than thighs, the end is nigh. And at eighty-seven pounds, your time was scant. The World Cup was a nice distraction, so too the College World Series. Why you had us watch *Life is a House* still makes me wonder if you were being ironic. I'm sorry we kept talking about food, as the mutations throttled your capacity to host nourishment. Your perseverance outpaced your fatigue when you beat all of us in Bananagrams. Know that never once did I resent carrying you in and out of the bathroom. There are days when I think I would have gladly traded places. At your memorial service I could not look upon the photographs of you when you were young. I so desperately wanted to warn that boy about the things to come. Don't marry that one. Don't smoke. Get a colonoscopy at forty. Such hope in those eighteen-year-old eyes. Such pain on the horizon.

Yours,

D

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Dear Mer and Tay,

Once you do it, you will struggle to describe it: like playing bingo at the convalescent home with Leroy, who drools since his stroke and hugs you each time you visit. He wears a brown cardigan and could care less about winning 'a damned fool's game'. His room smells like over-cooked baked potatoes and his velvet house shoes are dark blue versions of grandma's peach-colored slippers. And when he breaks his hip and can no longer accommodate your monthly visits, 'the beginning of the end,' says mom, your eight-year-old heart quakes, shakes, leaks, lonely and confused, and you never see him again. It's like that.

Onward,

D

Dear Neighbor,

From ninety feet away this yard looks green and freshly tended, perhaps even top dressed with dead fish and winter rye. To the captious eye incorrigible weeds create a geoponic ruse and strangle elegant blades of fescue with clunky, ground-hugging leaves and furry fruits that would choke the moles if they moved past feasting on the roots. Instead of grass-killer or invasive asshole, these agents prefer more delicate noms de guerre: Chickweed or Bellflower or Dandy-lion. And I, whether lazy or empathic, let them have their ruse. After all, I too look freshly tended from thirty yards away.

Sincerely,

D

Dear Dylan,

When your friend chokes to death while on Seabrooke Island, he will shit himself before he climbs the steps to enter the med clinic; you drove him there, because there was no time to wait for an ambulance. You will glance backward at him, noticing his swollen, blue face, before you leap up the steps, throw open the door to the Doc in the Box and yell that your friend cannot breathe. He will rush through the waiting room toward a panicked nurse and round the corner to take his last few steps. You won't know he is dead. You will pace the waiting room, walk outside to march up and down the eight or nine steps, notice a brightly colored caterpillar on your yellow shirt's lapel and wonder when you could have been standing close enough to any sort of flora to have attracted such a beautiful creature. Myriad rescue workers will walk back and forth and offer, you later realize, glances of awkward condolence. You will learn of his death when the doctor tells you to stay so that detectives can interview you - standard operating procedure when a young person dies. Your confused look encourages the doctor to casually clarify things: "Oh, you didn't know?" he asks. "Your friend is dead." You will sob and for a few minutes, forget that you are a living being amidst other living beings. Nothing will distract you from completely absorbing yourself in acute despair. Sadness deconstructs time and leaves you alone and sad and scared, disconnected from any semblance of context...enough for now.

Be well,

D

Dear Dylan,

As I was saying, you will start to come back to time and space. However morose those two will seem for a significant while, you come back and engage the heavy world with a strange duty to make sure the others can feel lighter. Because there are others present and elsewhere who will struggle to re-engage their own narratives - this includes his mom to whom you will write kind notes for several years before the pain and memories languish. The detectives will wonder why your friend has an Indiana driver's license. This will be the one time his fake ID works. They will ask if you have been doing drugs. "No, sir," you say. "We only drank beer." They assure you they are not there to take you to task over alcohol. Later they will search the beach house to make sure you were telling the truth. And you were. A well-meaning Methodist minister will tell you that God is weeping. Your father will begin heading your way from Atlanta. Your dead friend's step-father will rush past you to the neighboring pharmacy to pick up Xanax for your dead friend's mom. She finds out more elegantly than you but is struggling to breathe. That afternoon you will return to campus to button up your sophomore year. You offer to pack up your dead friend's room so that his mom and step-dad do not have to. You pass off his meaningful personals at his funeral, held at the summer camp where he had attended and worked for years. You judiciously decide to not include the magazines you found under his mattress.

Blessings,

D

Dear Dad,

I do not remember asking for any sacrifices, no vicarious salvation or substitutionary atonement. I would gladly return your gift of corporeal knowledge to have you still around to call me Dilbert or kiddo or buddy. Sister called today with the report from her first colonoscopy, arranged at forty because fifty may have been too late. What biological curse causes a family to grow polyps sooner than other people's intestines? I had five polyps, benign enough for me to wait three years for my next procedure. Sister had eight removed and she is waiting for biopsy results - seven to ten days of wondering if she will eventually die weighing eighty-seven pounds, in a diaper, with hollow cheeks, and swollen feet. I am sorry I forgot to turn on the Jerry Jeff Walker DVD after we gave you your final dose of morphine. I think Nurse Becky knew the assured consequence of administering the opiate when she told us to remember that death is the result of cardiac arrest and renal failure, her discreet explanation clearly meant to absolve us from guilt. I am finally remembering your smile and untroubled eyes - both suggesting you knew the secret to all of this.

I miss you.

D

Dear Universe,

I never asked to be born. I did not choose this anatomy nor this corpus and its hue. I did not ask for male-patterned baldness. My parents were thrust upon me, and I had no say in how I spent my early days. Freedom is fantasy; the universe, paradox. Salt, fat, and sugar kill us. Water bears cannot be seen by the naked eye. The victims of the livestock holocaust will never know of their brave sacrifice. And we, remote and mouth-breathing, will never hear their cries.

I remain humbly yours,

D