

Doe, My Dear

by
Zen Hatlang

"I worshipped the myth I made of you, but I'm off my knees now." ---Traci Brimhall, *Dear Eros*

A Dream Is A Wish Your Heart Makes

I remember it so vivid, my hands on her hips, both eyes doe-lashed with
a lowered gaze

Fingers settling in place like crescent moons tracing their way up the lines
of her waist

My lips left gently-teethed kisses on the pink of her skin like we wouldn't
wake up the house in a sleep chamomile-laced

Quiet notes of soft gasps filled the atmosphere, just as sweet as the look
on her pretty face

Altar

I can't put my desires into words, I stutter when I put in the work, trip
over vowels until my teeth hurt

There's a vulnerability to the heart, I become fascinated like a child, it's
when the softest parts of me occur

Open heart surgeries, studying the anatomy of a cow's heart, or a beat to
my ear as I rest my head, it's my turf

I crave badly to hold one breathing and alive in my hands, melting me in-
to puddles, one I could tuck into a purse

I can only understand when two becomes one, if I didn't see the tattoos
or the blue veins, I'd think it's my skin

I like to encase people in my works of art, like a butterfly with colorful
wings displayed on paper, held only by pins

I kneel at the altar, where I dream of Isaiah 54:7 spilling out of her lips,
how love is like a religion soaking in sin

I repeat the rhythm in my head, the voice that stands out in a symphony,
like a song from 1959 or a gospel hymn

Ankh

I can't lose myself if I don't hold you together at your seams

Do I still have a place inside your home, or should I stay by any other means?

It's felt like I've been chewed and spit out, regurgitated into different themes

Am I still familiar to your heart or have I been different than I used to seem?

I'm actually in love this time, and with the one staring back in the mirror
My mind's no longer full of exaggerated sunshine, but there's also no longer terror

Might as well get the Ankh tattooed across my body like a computational 606 error

Pivoting is my only constant, the one advantage I have in this game of life to make it fairer

Could care less about astrological divination, the stars, the crystals, or the tarot

But I've been growing into my empty placements, the 5th, 7th, and 8th houses tether

Themselves to my spirit when I used to look for them with desperation in the nether

I can always start over with myself but with us, it's a desire I hold in my gut a little heavier

Blind Devotion

Last night, I dreamt of my teeth on your skin. They say love makes you soft, but I've never been more brutal in my simple admiration. These days, your name has been only your name and not what you've left behind or what we left off on. I don't know what it's like to not be intense. It's the only way I feel heard and seen without raising my voice so I'm not my little self crawled up in a closet and begging. I try to hide it, I fight it, but I become enamored like a child with a toy, wanting you to sit pretty and displayed on a shelf for everyone to see. And I think to myself, maybe I've only ever hunted because I'm afraid that I may not be able to sit still and be adored the way I adore others, devoted to like a blind man with mud and spit on his eyes. I may have been born sick, and I can only love how an animal craves when it's been starved.

Bloom

I've finally let it go, the version of myself that was stuck to the old
Words from my lips spur too intense to be softly cradled, reflected back
in ten-fold

My wings display themselves for you to hold, wrapped up only as they're
told

You'll swallow down kitchens of lust, but can I be taken in naked and
whole?

It goes beyond skin deep, it's a yearning within me that's always existed
in colors of blue

Wouldn't dare to say this sober and mouth shut, but I want to end up
with you, and on you

Is that a dangerous desire to play with? Mess around and see how our love
produces fruit

Half-written letters of sweetened goodbyes but they hide behind a gilded
truth

I'd create an entire new language to find euphemisms to describe you as
my muse

I'd hold the depths of Pangea's ocean in my palms and hand it over, no
need for a cruise

I'm mirrored back the idealized version of me in your self-intimacy, the
same way my poetry is see-through

My knots are untangled by your fingers, the way in your hands, I flower
and bloom

Bodies on Bodies

Tell me to forget how to rationalize love

Say you'll die in the war of my black hair

Like my brown, the ground may be colored bloody red without the skin
on your hands fair

Let us fall into flesh, your nails stained with my spit, come replace my
lungs with your fresh air

The musk of piled bodies on bodies only lingers if we open to show the
casket of our ribcage bare

Bound

I've always been such a vulgar child. At a young age, I derived satisfaction from twisting the mind, shame engulfing me as I felt like I was a fool mimicking an adult. I only felt normal with what was wild, and I crumpled up my desires, the innate way of my being, like paper into wooden barrels full of cheap liquor and shoved them off my ship until they sank deeper away from the sun. From the moment I found thrill in the obedience of the ego in my hands like I was a puppeteer, to the first time my fantasies were reciprocated by another with an unshakable flame but breakable bones. Bodies on bodies, the heat and sweat makes me want to wrench out my last meal. But if the meal was tied in place and bound by rope with no arms to cage me in, I might just let myself be seen by another, in the way lust glazes over skin through the human eye.

Change

Change is the only constant in my life, rising from the ashes like a rebirth
after demise

I like what I find repulsive, 'cause lust and disgust are different sides of
the same coin, it's a tie

Every person I meet is a lesson, they're all blessings in disguise

A map of you, the geography of your body has me tracing your tan lines

Half of my mind tells me to be a little more harsh, that I'm too kind

But the rest of my heart says to love others without fear, we don't have
much time

On this Earth, where I'm afraid soon you may return to the dust

No shame in my game, I say what's on my mind so I trust

That I can accept there are no expectations or invitations

Most perceived conflict can be fixed with some communication and pa-
tience

I try to not treat people like they're disposable clothes thrown in a basin

To not register me in the database of your memory, I can't comprehend
it

Fawn over me, I know my connection to my emotions

Makes somebody out there uncomfortable like my feelings are their fric-
tion

So go love the way you do and I'll keep on chasing

Both the sunset and the imprints of people left on my heart, naked

Dark Night of the Soul

Enraptured by your mind, I want to know the way it works
There's a lot of ways to love you, so be the ringleader of my cirque
All in my head like no one knows, but a little indulgence never hurts
I'd dive head-first into your darkness to find any light left behind that
may lurk
Hidden in the shadows, I'm missing all the people I've ever loved
I'm falling, but I'm scared to fall too deep into the rough
Powered through my dark night of the soul so I'd never again question if
I'm good enough
Tried to avoid my chronic emptiness by covering it up with sporadic lust
And it's been like that since the dawn of time, from when I couldn't han-
dle a rejection or no
Felt like if my heart wasn't enough, then the lines of poetic body was all
that needed to show
I believe in a sort of karma, that you naturally reap what you sow
Did I kill off the one you love or have I just gone through rebirth and
grown?
Eyes can't look back at me properly, as if there's something within me to
fear
Like people don't know what to make of me, as if I don't belong in here
Growing up I felt like an infiltrator, in every space I was a part of or near
I've reached a state of emotional neutrality like I'm made of clockwork,
still figuring out my gears

David's Sling

To keep you in memory
Like the death of a soul that won't leave
Like a song that still lingers in my head
Even in a symphony I hear your voice instead
Like a Philistine, your smile is my David's sling
Quick, burn the fire out like a summer fling
Suffocation is alright if it's by your ring
On my finger, tight till it hurts 'round my neck
Contortionist, you twist my body into angles
In your rigger hands, I'm roped into tangles
I repeat words till they're subconscious beliefs
I know you pretend you don't care, that's a relief
Like a changeling in disguise, show me your ugliest colours
Whisper to me in your sickest and sweetest sound, I'll flower
The way I'll bloom for you, even when your lips turn sour
And I've lost all my power
I'll trap myself in a cage, confined in a princess's tower

Doe

The doe doesn't wake me up, it moves its shoulder away from my head,
gentle enough to consider me but abrupt to keep me at a distance
Its eyes are painted on a canoe hung in front of the art it is made of, afraid
to ask for repentance so those after me beg for forgiveness
Take the guitar out of my hands, it won't make noise without an amp,
and the strings wait to dig at your neck when you're wasted
I haven't wrote a love song with rocks and pebbles in the melody ever
since, and since then none of my songs have made it

Drown Me

I'd let you drown me in your seas until I'm struggling to breathe
Why is the best fruit always forbidden? I'd climb Jacob's ladder to get to
your tree
I've tried to reach in your mind, but it's a reflection of me
Can I show you the fruits of my labor if you planted the seed?
Third Culture Kid, the world has shown me all of its glory and wonder
My internal universe holds serenity even if there's lightning and thunder
I could be protected under angel wings, sheltered undercover
But you'd catch me unguarded, hook me in and pull me right under
Your sheets, suffocate me, and I'll say it's an eternal slumber
Tie my hands down with just your words, so I'm unable to do a number
You could be the one in my arms, yet it'll be my walls of Jericho that
crumble
But that's all talk, I need you to show me that your promises are more
than a mumble

Exes and Ohs

The seventh day was never created with the intention of letting me rest
When life had been moving on forward, Sunday took me back in time
and went for my neck

I used to miss her more than I remembered her, until barely any of her
features were left

But my body had recognized her stare, the same eyes that used to leave
me a mess

Didn't expect to see her three years later across the table, with her pres-
ence crawling up my skin like an insect

When fire intertwined with water, the steam left charred scars and took
away my breath

Her flame never ran out and like a moth drawn to the heat, I had to leave
before my boundaries were subject to her theft

I was somebody new in everybody else's mind, but to her I was just dif-
ferently dressed

The Idea of You

In love with the idea of you like I've sculpted your body with my bare hands

Every stitch on cloth is like I've sutured a wound closed 'till the red turns to tan

Vulnerability, let me crawl inside your mind and your skin

Every form of art surrounds you, every detail I can ram

Onto the paper, where your face starts to blur

But insensitivity is a product of socialization, and the nail that sticks out feels like a sore

Tell me your secrets, I know romance feels like a chore

But I'm obsessed with playing dress up, and you're my favorite doll

Karenni Jade

Desperation seeks to distract itself from the empty alleys with inhabitants during the day
But at night, the alleys are still empty, and the inhabitants have gone off to follow the sun
Silks of purple and gold adorn your body like the physical embodiment of Arabian spices in the air
You know, the African Sahara is not that far from the jewelled mines of India
And those before me would have incensed your skin and hair like lotus flowers above spring ponds
Wrapping around you a like a hug of warmth from the Orient
Burmese rubies lay on your neck as a pendant for a warrior
A warrior with a strong facade but a gentle heart
While I was a predator in a doe's clothing,
You were sweet tea leaves and sugar cubes
Times may be different, but people are the same as ever
I understand why my great-grandfather left India and the British for something far more precious than jade
My great-grandmother, she was his Karenni jade

Last Life

They tell me they're ruined, I begged to differ that they're not
Walking through the ruins of a museum doesn't erase that it held art
I paint stories on their thighs but they see my nails as a sword to the heart
My fingers press against my chest as if to hide the past from emerging,
covering it with waterproof tarp
It's just the way I am they say, as they're in the hands of another and I
watch on the sidelines
I let them, I finally let them, I think they must feel as if they are running
out of time
And they'd rather be with a hundred others than lose me quickly to their
own crime
Whose lesson is it to learn? They are young, but I feel as if I am on my
last life

Love That Ain't Taught

I don't want to hide away my heart
I know sometimes I can be too headstrong to be soft
Closing up my palms instead of reaching for the stars
I could find you just by the sound of your voice in the dark
I'm mesmerized, I know you're a projection of my thoughts
You remind me of all the blood-stained arguments that I've fought
Just for my right to love somebody, you know that can't be bought
A type of love that I've discovered for myself, it's not something I was
taught

Loving on Consignment

Loving on consignment, dreading security till regret forms out of separation

Scared of a steady beat, chemistry with no compatibility will kill this generation

This musical exchange we had between us was a lyrical conversation

My femininity is a performance, yet they act like I stole their daughter away from her kin

My Mona Lisa on the big screen, I've seen her do big things

From cigarettes and coffee for breakfast to embodying a caricature so mean

I always look up to the ideas I fall in love with, even the model at seventeen

From the South to the big city, no contact from my side, pinkies bonded with red string

I often wonder if my intentions have ever been about real connection, genuine and clean

Subtract hyperfixations and admiration, I can't say they'd still be in my daydreams

Hypocrisy helps the world spin, bringing lies to the light they've never seen

Too afraid to set the redirection, but somebody's got to break the mold and get labeled the fiend

Muse

Sometimes I wish I had been gifted with the hands of a sculptor or a painter, a different way to immortalize a muse

To be able to carve out pretty eyes with my fingers, or capture the exact pose where the sun hits skin colored with rouge

Like the girl I loved years back, I used to wonder how she free-handed her artwork, where her graphite on paper bore fruit

When all I have is words to create an image, figuring out how many syllables the rhymes will suit

When I get infatuated, I fall too deep, I become somebody else too raw to be seen

Almost like a two year cycle where I regurgitate my feelings until my own mind becomes a foe or a fiend

The only way to cope with the instability of my desires is to write through the cold till my palms generate heat

Gluttony is one of my deadly sins, but when I'm enamored by a beautiful face, I forget to eat

Muse of the Mind

In every poem, they see me
My eyes, the jet black, the dark
My name flashing by, developing a buttery and bittersweet taste that
leaves on their tongue a meringue tart
I know they bleed from the way their veins weep and how the words
squeeze around their heart
I've left my mark, poetic how I've become the muse of their mind, hang-
ing in their thoughts like framed art

On My Knees, At Your Altar

The clay in my hands melt into a puddle when you're around
Trying to form your lines from the tip of your head down to the ground
Any psychic could have told me your name would become my favorite
noun
They've been telling me about you, making your voice my favorite sound
Your arms are a religion I can find my safe space in
Not quite your lover, but I can be more than a friend
I'm on my knees at your altar committing sins
What we've got is just limerence, but it's intense
The way I speak about you, like love bites on your skin
Fantasies aren't enough, I want your perfume as my incense
I know I don't experience love the way others do
But that doesn't mean I can't ever be there for you
Let your hands be what my waist adorns, no need for the new
I'd buy Indian gold for your wrists, that's my ancestors coming through

Picture Perfect

I'm worn, like tattered war-torched canvas patterned into lines of ash like
gingham print

I allow my mind to be altered by somebody else with a database of the
right words to say, so they can mold the way I think

My lips shut seething teeth to hide away my starvation, I excuse the de-
sires as temptation for the weak

I'll be the picture-perfect trophy for you, but in my dreams, all I wish is
to be worshipped on wrinkled sheets

I know my intensity ain't for the meek, it's dangerous to get used to the
fire like lifestyle creep

Telling myself that I shouldn't pine over it, like disrespect flamboyantly
dressed in expensive fabric and mink

I refuse to be an enabler, I'd rather my heart keep to itself than beat inside
an empty home, before it gets the chance to sink

But I don't know how long I can watch empires around me rise in har-
mony, who are the people without their king?

Rumpelstiltskin

I needed them to be more than what they could be
Spinning words into gold, a rhythmic symphony
When fresh mint leaves intertwine with the tang of their hazelnut green
And sage fills up the air like scented epiphanies
Never stood upright on a pedestal, they stepped down a long time ago
I wanted to follow into their footsteps, every movement was sewn
Fine leather of skin, brown but with a porcelain glow
Holding my arm like Gaia cradles the Earth to her bone
A finished book in my hand, the future retold
Their beauty was beyond the fair, and that was what hurt the most

So You'll Stay

She fumbles with my fingers in her hands as she sits on my lap
I'm sure she can feel my heart beat as my chest holds her back
The movie displaying on the screen up ahead is a blur of motion
I hold back on all my dreams of her and I bite down my confessions
From spewing out my wild thoughts of us in a floating array
Yet I walk on a tightrope and silence myself to make her stay
I love the way she looks at me when the sun has set and the stars glow
I gaze up in awe at the sight above us through her high-ceiling window
She must love me I think, yet I'm scared of her every word
Her anger is a changing sky and I fear when she'll explode
So I stay quiet when I want to speak, so she won't leave me and let me go
I don't want to lose the warmth of her on my body so I do what she says
so

The Poetry of the Ocean

The sea used to be a scary thing, I was afraid of its depth
But now I'm trying to hold onto every wave that I've felt
What I once thought I didn't like became what now makes me melt
I write about the poetry of the ocean, but I don't kiss and tell
Grasping at the azure foundation surrounding its brown orbs
Losing myself in the tides, maybe I lied that my feet are anchored into
the shore
Adoration, I've never seen a deer on the beaches before
Growing up is reawakening your inner child and going back to love that
is pure

This Witch of Mine

Your mother and I

We've been lighting lamps with kerosene, the blue reflecting in her eyes
I've been bombarded with dreams of the past, back to a time when my
demeanor was more shy

Writing songs about young love in a class where my fingers stained from
the markers and wire

It's been years since I've bit from plastic bags of frozen milk, palms hold-
ing candles with dancing fire

I was her familiar, I'd follow my witch into every lifetime with different
storylines and reigning empires

I felt like David when he saw Bathsheba bathing in her courtyard, look-
ing down from his rooftop that sat higher

I've always wanted to be understood, but forced myself to stay quiet
about the way I yearn and desire

The Tower of Babel

And like the Tower of Babel

My words fell until they divided into different languages amongst themselves

How my heart adores in my mother tongue, but only in English can it be articulated to tell

If I got on my knees, held and kissed your feet, is it your body or my soul that would sell?

The waters desired to be your shade of blue, but they became a cerulean hell

I don't know how to breathe above the surface, my neck is held tight in hands cruel

Infatuation made me a desperate poet, none of my violence could agree to a truce

The forbidden fruit could have brought out the worst in me before I realized I was art too

Speak to me the way you would've as a child, without walls to protect yourself, the rawest of you

Author's Notes

A genuine thank you to my friend Eugene Narramore who drew me the illustrated cover for *Doe, My Dear* after I sent him the concept I wanted in a conversation. What a lovely gift. At first, this was my collection of carefully curated poetry about limerence and obsessive feelings about others from my adolescence. The one last souvenir I'd leave behind for others to pick up and view a glimpse of the condition my heart was in, leading up to the last fleeting moments of my childhood. My kiss goodbye to the infatuation of my youth. However, as I've come to spend time drafting the manuscript, I realized I wanted more out of this book. I wanted it to be a self reflection of the years leading up to the age of eighteen. If I could, I'd tell my younger self that our intensity and obsession will follow us for the rest of our life. They are not parts of us to demonize, but to embrace and express. Instead of pouring out our heart into others, we should be pouring it into our art, into ourselves. I used to desire to be loved, but in truth, my soul was longing to fall in love with myself, and I was chasing that through others.