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A Widow's Letter To Her Love by Lucy BASHARA

"You talk like a book," you said.

I've been up for days thinking about you. If you came back, it would take you a second to recognize me. I'm older now, wiser, and I wear glasses just like you.

Do you know that?
Can you see me?

It's been over a month since you left, but I still haven't been able to watch your favorite movie. Or listen to your favorite song. Or throw away your toothpaste.

Where were you when I called?
Where was I when you flickered out?
Where are we when we ask if our lives were enough?

When I told you I loved you for the first time, it poured out of me like a prisoner's confession to a judge, deciding my life's fate. I often tend to get carried away with my monologue of feelings, but in that moment, you didn't laugh like my mother. You didn't roll your eyes like my sister. Instead, you said something I have thought about every day since. "You talk like a book."

To me, that is the most important thing I have ever been told. It was so important that I went home and took off my shoes. I lay calmly against my bedsheets. I listened to the rain and the trees hitting my window, and I thought to myself, "I have wanted to disappear into space for so long now, but when I'm with him, I think I'd rather have my feet on Earth."

Do you know that?
Do you worry about me?
Do you want me there with you?

You were always ready before I was, rushing me along as you tapped your watch. Whether it was a party or a date or a trip to the grocery store, I was always just about 20 minutes behind. You would scoff and say, "On time is late," to which I would respond, "I'm doing my best."

I used to roll my eyes at your breathless voice calling my name from downstairs, ushering me on, my shoes already in your hands. I would give up seasons. I would give up books. I would give up breathing to hear you call for me again.

We always balanced each other out, you told me. As we grew older together, we adapted into ourselves and melted into a single being. I started leaving the house earlier, and you would stroll back late, often quoting, "My doctor told me to get more fresh air."

My doctor tells me the same thing now. I take our nightly walks alone, and I see you the clearest at dusk.

Can you see me?

Is it you in the clouds, glowing my favorite shade of orange?

August wind is my favorite wind. It blows people's hair out of their eyes, smoke away from my face, and leaves right off their branches, never to return. Fall was your favorite season, but you left too early to see it.

It's a beautiful one this year, but it doesn't matter.

I don't fill our house with the smell of oatmeal cookies, slightly burnt, because neither of us can bake.

I don't sit on the park bench with a book using dried leaves as placeholders between the pages. I don't rock in our matching porch chairs with a coffee mug to warm my hands, humming to the radio until you wake up.

I don't even get out of bed.

Do you know that?

Are you angry with me?

I remember the first time I stayed the night; the next morning, we spent hours laying on our stomachs in your bed. I was reading your books, and you were eyeing the paper. I emailed my professor, "I will be absent from French Literature due to an illness."

You put on some piano music off a vinyl record. Even though it was winter and we were pale as ghosts, the window stayed open day and night. There was no reason; it was just something you liked. Living on the third floor, you could still hear the people walking the streets, and you needed the chatter to fall asleep.

We danced to this classical piece that I had never heard, and you noted how nicely your hand placed on the small of my back.

"It's a perfect fit! Don't you think so?" You asked as we shuffled around the room.

"I really don't know how to dance to this," I responded, shy and embarrassed that I kept stepping on your bare feet.

"How do you dance, normally?"

"Brutally, incessantly... I throw myself around like a storm and close my eyes so no one can see me. I take off my shoes and pretend I am a bird, waving my wings with no shame or fear of getting hurt."

You smiled and laughed, and it was the most perfect laugh I had ever heard. I remember thinking at that moment, "Man, I would love it if we made it," and then we made it.

I wrote manuscripts, and poems, and French literature on napkins in cafés about that morning. And also about every moment we shared after that. Because of you, I will never run out of inspiration, or ways to say I love you. I gifted you pieces of scribbled paper with tea stains and folding creases, while you gifted me years filled with red wine, laughter, and feet to the stars *love*.

So this is my way of saying, when you died in the heat of summer, a new me arose from your ashes. I've been trying to find the courage to see you, and speak to you, and hold you again in your new form. I belong with you, and I am growing restless in your absence.

Do you know that?
Will you hug me when I arrive?

This is the last piece of art I will make for you, just so you know I will never forget. This is our most final goodbye.