

A Winter's Mourning

I never slept with you in life, but I sleep with you in death. Every winter for the last decade, from the first days of the New Year, when daylight suffocates in the stranglehold of early darkness to the late days of March, passing vigil on the day of your death and the day of your birth, I seem buried beneath the memory of you, the way a country town lies dormant, nay paralyzed, beneath the fallout of Nature's own version of nuclear winter.

For three months each year I sleep with your ghost, my restless heart decaying in the silent knowledge that I still feel you after all these years; when you seem to have unchained all the others, you seem unable to give up the ghost with me, at least not in the card catalogue of my memory. I have begun to curse memory more and more each day now, because it, of all things, keeps me bound to a time and place, however real, that alarms me not so much with the ease and careless moments of days long gone, but with the very fact that those days long gone can't be lived again, even if I wanted to do them over, that they are just plain dead and gone, pieces of a puzzle of a life, an image of a life, that can't be put back together again.

I remember how I learned of your death, in an instant message in February 2002, from a mutual acquaintance, who I haven't heard from since, who wanted me to know what happened because she knew how enamored I was of you when we were in college. Shaken and horrified she left me, telling me you went and jumped into shallow water off a pier in the Florida Keys, breaking your neck, taking you, one of the two most beautiful men I had ever met up to the age of twenty-five, away from the world. I remember being faithless at that period, and then becoming angry with God for allowing you, the only one of us I believed in, who was finding his path to dreams fulfilled as an actor, to go and do such a stupid thing and die on us, crushing your dreams and those of us you left behind. I always remember the date of your death, February 8, James Dean's birthday; another dreamer whose halting looks, piercing eyes, and early death left him forever young. I know before that winter ended I wrote the first of two poems marking your death.

I remember the memorial that was held for you on your birthday, March 10, at Olmstead Theater at Adelphi. You were only a student there for your junior and senior years, but you left your mark, and all of us familiar with you, your talent, and each other were there, listening, as your boyfriend eulogized you, and as three of the girls sat on the stage (Erin the dancer, who never shaved under her arms (how European!), was one of them, I remember), purple and white props for a Greek tragedy to be performed behind them, singing one of your favorite songs, Fleetwood Mac's "Landslide". To this day I cannot help but always cry when I hear Stevie sing, "Mirror in the sky what is love? Can the child within my heart rise above? Can I sail through the changing ocean tides? Can I handle the seasons of my life?" Ten winters later and so much remains the same. Still I

wonder what is love and why you had to die, not to mention if I'll be able to survive another round of the seasons changing.

I remember (oh, how I remember) the first time I saw you, on my first day at the university, when I went to sit down in the cafeteria, and there you were on the other side of the room, with your dirty-blond hair, green eyes, and naturally tan skin, and your khaki-colored messenger bag slung across your chest. You were and always will be the only one for whom I can honestly say it was love at first sight. There is no reason to wonder why. It took till just after Spring Break, but, through the mysterious entanglements of fate and who knew whom, we eventually met, though it was too late, for although you had just come out you were already dating someone. Through my grand theatrical gayness I was found terribly entertaining by yet another blonde (will the story ever change? or like history, just keep repeating itself until I realize I am the darkness to everyone else's light?) named Carolyn in my World Literature II course, and I mentioned you to her, though I didn't know your name, and she said she knew you because she was dating Chris, another acting major, and so that's how I met you, though nothing came of it. Nothing had to come of it, apparently you were strong enough to make such an impression that it is sixteen years later and I can still remember you like it was only yesterday; as clichéd as that is, it is severely true and no other words can really take their place.

After seven years I wrote the second poem to mark the anniversary of your death, and rereading it now, I see nothing has changed. Your death still stains my heart with a question mark as to the value of life, yours and mine in particular. Why, when you had so much to offer, did you have to die so young and so tragically? There is no sense in any of it so I must stop questioning your untimely end. Why live when you can't live, when you are chained down by forces, inside and out, that prevent you from moving forward in life, from fulfilling your dreams, the only things that can make you whole, but that you know even more definitively in your heart those dreams have to die because there is another tapestry for you to weave, one that will unfold beneath your fingers more fitting to the person you are, though you can't see the patterns as you are weaving, because you do not have the omniscience of the Fates who have designed this vision, this experience, for you. Mankind is regrettably notorious for having only hindsight, not foresight, but maybe it is better that way, so we can learn from our mistakes, one can only hope, and not have to suffer through the same experience, the same sorrow, yet again. Once should be enough, shouldn't it? There is no way to end this heartache or this narrative. I look out my window as the sun sets in orange behind a faintly glowing splatter of clouds and I wonder not when, but if, this pain will pass, this pain, this remembrance of you, and this stunted search for lost time in a past whose riddles can't be dissolved, the sphinx not put to death and buried in the welter of infinite sands scattered about the broken hourglass of my heart. In the face of how things stand and what I have written, there is nothing left for me to do but to wait out the remaining days of this haunted winter in the hope that with these pages I can let you go.

