

## One Month After

By Sam Healey

Sometimes you're in my journal as "you," sometimes you're in my journal as "she," sometimes you're in my journal as your name, but everyday, it seems, you're in my journal. Since my journal is just a reflection of all the little moments and thoughts I've collected over the course of a day, that means you're everywhere in my life right now. Everywhere but with me, of course.

There's probably a lot of other things I could write about, but it would be next to impossible to pick the right one—a common theme in my life, now and always. Anyway, none of them are you. You're fresh on my mind right now. And I've found that writing is therapy. Putting pen to paper is a process proven, by some scientist somewhere I suppose, to release emotions in a healthy way. Like when I wrote out my long, snarky, and mean-spirited comeback to your first text that had broken our no-contact agreement and woke up the next morning appalled at what I had said to you, but so relieved I had only said it in my journal.

Actual therapy, of course, is allegedly even better. I saw a therapist once at the end of last quarter to talk about you and he told me I was "going through the grieving process in a very healthy way." Which is nice, but about as reassuring as those dog owners who say "Oh he's so friendly! He doesn't bite!" while struggling to restrain their rabid, snarling, actively foaming-at-the-mouth hellhound. Dogs make me think about you now. I'm sure you would've found a way to love the hellhound.

I'm going to see a therapist this quarter, too. For my own shit. It won't be a one-off.

In my nineteen years of life, I think you were the most significant thing to ever happen to me. Not the most important, maybe, but the most significant. There's a distinction between the two that I can't exactly explain, but it makes sense to me. When we met you were a supernova, a star exploding with so much warmth and beauty and vitality and love, and I was a guy with my feet firmly on Planet Earth. I had traveled across the country for school a few times, sure, but until I met you, I hadn't ever left Earth's atmosphere.

Technically speaking, if a supernova and a man ever collided, that man would be incinerated approximately  $10^{80}$  times over by ultraviolet and gamma radiation, liquified that many times by a flood of neutrinos, and converted into some strange form of plasma. And I've seen people in relationships do even worse things to each other. So I'm very glad you turned out to be a kind supernova. You swept me off my feet and whisked me into the beautiful and mystifying depths of outer space. What a journey it was. We saw enchanting nebulae, extraordinary constellations, and even the occasional terrifying black hole. But prettier than all of those phenomena were your deep green eyes. More wonderful than all the cosmos was your curly hair, especially that one curl that always rebelled into its own tight coil, an island situated just below and behind your ear. Warmer than the Sun was the way you smiled and meant it with your very soul, with just a faint, sweet, breathy exhale accompanying it; the way you laughed with a musicality more profound than the endless amounts of songs we sent each other.

Hotter than even the dying core of a red giant like Betelgeuse was—no, let's not get into that.

I'm publishing this. That's right, I'm publishing this, and some other pieces. I know you would

be proud. You loved everything I wrote, and demanded that I write more. That, more than anything, is how I know it was true love—the time we were in your room in the dark and after a long silence you finally asked, “When are you going to stop talking about writing and start actually writing?” You pushed me to be my best self, for things as big as my writing, and as small as getting on my ass from the sidelines of my intramural basketball game, yelling at me to play better defense. You called me on my shit when it stank. I’ve never felt lower than the conversation we had on Manzi Beach at 1pm, when I had just woken up violently hungover for the fourth time in as many Saturdays, and you told me I needed to get serious about controlling my drinking. I never want to feel that shame in front of a person I loved again, and since that moment I haven’t.

Shit, you were the one telling me I probably have ADHD, and now I’ve got an upcoming appointment with a psychiatrist. If I take nothing else away from our relationship, at least I’ve gained the knowledge—and thus, ability to pursue a solution—that many of my struggles stem from a neurological disorder, not an inherent laziness or inability to commit to anything.

It sounds so cliché, but then again you were all the good in every cliché that I’d always hoped for: you taught me how to love. And you showed me what love looks like. It looks like cuddling in a hammock in Central Park, before the cop told us to take it down anyway—I watched kindergartners throwing a Frisbee and calling each other poopy buttheads while you read a book from the Strand. It looks like listening to Jet Fuel by Mac Miller as we made the drive between Dublin and Sacramento for the fourth time in a week. It looks like you, willing to sit through the entire Extended Edition trilogy of Lord of the Rings with me, finishing the last movie at 3AM in

Palm Springs, of all places. I know what love feels like, too. It feels like wanting to be the best person for you that I could possibly be.

I've gained so much knowledge even outside of the realm of relationships from my time with you. Like before we dated, I for some reason was unaware that you get out of people and friends what you put into them, and I found myself midway through freshman year with a million acquaintances and zero friends. You showed me through your friendships what that could look like for me and mine, and since our breakup, I've strengthened my bonds even further.

Why did we do it? What were we thinking? I ask myself these questions everyday. The answer is always different. Always, I know that we did it the right way, for my heart is heavy, but not broken. Usually, I think it was the right decision. Sometimes, I question whether it was truly mutual. Whether a five-day rough patch was enough cause to jettison one year and one and a half-ish months. But I know we both met in the middle to make our decision. I know that our concerns about "what if?" and "what else?" in a relationship that was both our first were not going to go away, and would only get stronger. I know that since then, I've cultivated a stronger sense of self-identity, though I've missed you all the while. I know that I'm going to continue to do so. Really, I just wish our last meal wasn't at Sizzling Lunch.

There's so much I've wanted to tell you. Mick got accepted by UDub. I'm climbing V5s. I've gotten really into Funkadelic and there's a great song that samples a person shitting that I'd love to make you listen to. Maybe you know about the last one if you've stalked my Spotify. I only say that because I stalk yours from time to time. More than anything, I want you to know that

I'm starting to love myself more than ever, though it's not always the easiest thing to do. I want you to know that I really, really miss you.

I saw you at the library last week and I was not ready to talk to you, at all. Then I saw you at the library two days ago and I was completely ready to talk to you. It's funny how that works. When the third time comes around, I guess my brain's going to flip a coin. I won't be ready to have our proper catch-up for quite awhile, though I'd love for you to read this, if you want. But I'm not writing this for you. I'm writing it for myself.

When my grief is highest and I'm filled with deep regret, I remind myself of how I struggled to eat due to my anxiety about you. I remind myself of the times it got so bad that I threw up. I wonder whether I would have that anxiety with anybody, or just you. I think for the time being it's anybody. In my moments of regret I also think back to the joking argument we had that wasn't really a joke about who the funny one in the relationship was. Our senses of humor, it turns out, were pretty different from one another. But should that mean anything? I can never decide. A week before we broke up, I told you, not for the first time, that I wanted to grow old with you, and meant it. I take pride in the fact that I always told you exactly what was true to my emotions at the time. It's just that when you're young and still figuring out yourself, as we both are, those emotions change so quickly. But I know we were on the same page for both moments, the promise to forever and the decision for no more.

I can't tell if you're talking to somebody else right now or not. Hell, I can't tell if I am, either.

I try to separate my mind and my emotions when I evaluate things about my life, yet even with this theoretical distinction I can't decide if I'll ever find anyone better for me than you.

Rationally, they could exist, though that's tough to convince myself of. But I won't know if I never look. I need to live more and find out, I think. I can never make up my mind, but I make my decisions based on as far as I can see, and if I stand in one place my horizon is much more limited than if I start moving forward.

You, like so many parts of my life, I don't yet know the answer to, nor do I know if I ever will. But I think if it is meant to be, then it will happen. Whether that's a yes or a no, it gives me comfort. Nothing to do until then, if "then" exists, but everything in the world.