

Letters To You and Me

by Nathalia Velasco Herrera

How can women so tortured stand so tall?

How can women so tall be so afraid of it all?

I can't stand the way she sees the world.

“Nunca hay que llorar”

“La vida siempre es buena”

“Desperdiciamos la vida cuando estamos tristes”

Image Description: Photograph of young girls playing cards collaged over *The Discourse* by Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema. Piece of paper embellished with flowers and candles has poem that reads:

“mind how long you stay
She ins't one for late nights
But she'll come home
If she sees candlelight”

Below is a north-facing photograph of New York City on a gloomy day taken from a high angle of Washington Square Park. On top of it sits another bit of paper with a journal entry that reads:

“The city feels different every time someone leaves
she belongs to nobody not even to me.
The city feels different shiver through a breeze
Some stole the sun on the way home from Brooklyn.
The city reminds me of you.”



I'll never be sad again.

Emotion

Emotional
E motion all.
Words tend to lose their meaning.
Lose loose
Nothing is real.
I can't listen to the songs I listened to yesterday.

"Sad Seine" the melody of my day

I wear "Sad Seine" like glasses it tints my world dark rose
Not the way La Vie en Rose did. Not the way that you did.

Image Description: Collage features photographs of Soho, an apartment view from the West Village, and sketches of scattered eyes. *The Birth of Venus* by Sandro Botticelli is remade with a mixture of a photograph of Nathalia and her friends having lunch at a field trip. Two journal entries sit on the collage. The first, taken from a pre-written text reads:

“Hey I just don't think this is going to work—”

The second reads:

“I am so upset. I'm upset at the fact that you didn't tell me when you knew that I spent every day—
I'd understand it if it were—
but that wasn't the case and we all knew it.
I told you everything. You knew everything that I went through, you're the single person I—
felt like I had to downplay my emotions—
It's been ten months and none of you—
—but please just be honest with me—”



It's October again.
Life and her thing with cycles
Last October was all about you

This October I can only think of you.

How ironic I came across the letters right when I was losing you

I swear I'll never be sad again.

I swear I'll never be sad again

I swear I'll never—

Maybe just...

Image Description: The photographs in this collage include photos of New York City in Soho, The West Village, an apartment view towards Gay Street, and Elizabeth Street Gardens. The notes on this collage say: "The floor is glittery" and "The world is so much taller than I am". These quotes are written in small letters scattered throughout the images of New York.



I used to watch the sun recede into the trees.

Taking another day of my life along with the smell of dirt and leaves.

By myself

No desired company

Nothing really mattered to me.

Hoping the crystals on my forehead would enlighten me.

in our twenties, all of us hang on by a thread

The world was darker than it used to be.

It's chilly tonight?

I hope it is.

I'm shaking under these rings.

Mom's necklaces are tangled, who's thinking of me?

Alone.

Never one for company

Used to wander when we were kids

Never really were a we

Image Description: Blue toned photograph of hands touching purple flowers. The landscape of a Chula Vista, California, sunset featuring a yellow lava lamp, plants, and a cat. The moving landscape of El Valle de Guadalupe in Baja California, Mexico. Collage of *American Gothic* by Grant Wood integrated into a catholic choir photograph of two young girls. Integrated quote “In the deepest and most important matters, we are unutterably alone” (Rilke).



It was special.
You and me.

Bulletproof glass,
Jump until your feet bleed, it won't care enough to budge.

I fell right through the cracks.

They still ask about you.

In the commotion of it all, I forgot to write the world a letter about what you'd done to me.

They think it's just like how it used to be.
Solving puzzles was fun until we became one

Peeling a layer of skin off when I tell them.
Wide eyes make bad company.

Please don't try to get close to me

Image Description: A girl wearing a white bucket hat walking in front of a yellow-toned moon, San Diego cityscape of cars and streetlamps stand between. Repeated images of peaches and oranges in a two-tiered basket with the quote “search the reason that bids you write; find out whether it is spreading out its roots in the deepest places of your heart, acknowledge yourself whether you would have to die if you were denied to write. This above all ask yourself in the stillest hour of the night: *must* I write?” (Rilke). At the bottom right of the collage is a

photograph of Nathalia at her eleventh birthday, the face of Johannes Vermeer *Girl with a Pearl Earring*.



I moved two thousand miles away
and the moment I come home you surrounded me without even having to look my way.

this is good for me.
you don't say a word.
Where did you go?

Where are you?
Walking around the pool talking to me
Sitting at home talking to you.

Never one for sentimental but you did so well when I needed you.

You helped me with all my problems and became the reason my parents think I'll need therapy.

Image Description: A small collage comprised of three pictures: A landscape of an oceanic sunset in Baja California, Mexico where people walk on a near-empty beach. Trees engulfing the entrance to a beach pathway with the sunset peaking through in Tijuana. Small bits of chopped peaches. Flowers of light blue, yellow, and pink are outlined in brown and detailed with beige lay sporadically surrounding the three images. "What occurs in your deepest interior is worthy of all your love" (Rilke). A remade version of Gustav Klimt's *The Kiss* with young Nathalia's face on top of the women's. The right-most edge features a small amount of pink, yellow, and blue drawn-on flowers. This photograph features the quotes: "Change as you yourself become different" (Rilke) and "love your solitude, and bear with sweet sounding lamentation the suffering it causes you" (Rilke).



When we speak, look me in the eyes, please?
Don't sit so close it's weird, please?

Just call me to the side, please?
Just think I'm doing better. Please.

You only ask questions you already know the answer to.
Do you need two twenties?
Is this what she made for you?

So good at pretending, aren't we?
So on this night in July, tell me, who should we pretend to be?

There's not much that matters to me.
But don't listen to her.
You're not being too much.
You're not being enough.

Do you remember the night we cried on yellow roses
You told me you loved me like I loved you.
I still have that rose,
I don't think that you do.

Image Description: Collage lines the right side of the paper. Photographs include a sunset view from San Diego, California that has blackened trees bordering the bottom of the picture. The sky is a mixture of pink and blue with the clouds separating into three sections and merging at the bottom center. Photograph of two girls at a hotdog stand; Nathalia, and a cut in picture of the face of the woman in Berthe Morisot's *Summer's Day*. The sunset is pictured through a car window of the scenic route along the coast from Valle de Guadalupe to Tijuana. Painting with Nathalia's face added on top of *Cradle* by Berthe Morisot.



I don't know if I like being home without you standing next to me.
I've gained different pillars, but they're missing this one puzzle piece.

I ask myself how it would be.
I sit between two tables and don't recognize you anymore.

I don't get your stupid jokes anymore,
Beautiful bullshit niche references that cue in the ones you decide to let in.

I know how they feel
Tap to the heart.
God, it's almost like telepathy.

It's too late
The music is loud
The tables are gone and every comment of yours means nothing because that's how you want it to be.
And I guess we are talking with real words like real people do. Like strangers do.

That's what we are on this drizzly night in July, something I never thought we'd be. Strangers with a novel's worth of history.

Image Description: Dark Brown drawn on eyes from the top right corner to the middle left.
Photogram of a green fig-eater beetle on a red surface. The quote featured reads: "To love is also good: because love is difficult. For one person to love another: that is perhaps the hardest thing that is handed to us" (Rilke)



Rilke, Rainer Maria, 1875-1926. Letters to a Young Poet. San Rafael, Calif. :New World Library, 1992.