

Resistance Letter- Emma DeNaples

I made you a promise. Do you remember what it was? I lost it, somewhere between the birth of the kittens and that day they sheared off my hair.

It is getting harder to remember you. I'll try.

When we were fourteen, you tied a blue ribbon around my neck; you told me I was impatient, and beautiful. It was yule and we were dancing, and we were children, too afraid even to kiss routinely. It seemed to me a miracle that we were in love. It seemed to me a miracle that I was fourteen. We were dancing.

I saw you last January. You were wearing that same old blue sweater. It was an astonishing non-reunion, really; you were on the train platform and I was on the train watching strangers blur by behind the window, and then I found you. It felt narrative. I didn't tell you, but, as we pulled away from the station, I was wishing you'd appear in my train car. I longed to hear you, see your moles, wonder at your collarbones. I could have gone looking, done the appearing myself, but I didn't. (It didn't seem worth the humiliating admittance).

When we were eighteen, I took you down to the river; you took me to bed. I made our dinners from whatever root vegetable I could find nesting in the cupboard. I made cake. I piped your

name over and over in curled, broken frosting, and I smoothed it out before you could see. *I love you*, we said once, twice, throwing it at the walls and the ceiling, hoping it would stick this time. You peeled my oranges; it always played out the same. Tedious, sticky, sweet. Some nights, I asked if I could touch you back, if we could change the rules. *Not now*, you always insisted. *Not yet*.

Honeysuckle, onion grass, rubus brambles, dandelion, blue pine, roses. That perfect thumbprint of a spot below your throat and above your clavicle. We slept in my backyard. We ate everything.

It's hard to let go of someone who made me feel so wonderfully hideous, so divine. During the worst of it, at the very worst moment, I stood behind you as you sat on the sofa, and you bent back your neck and looked at me upside-down. I kissed you; I made you some promise. We were both worn from screaming and past the point of caring what we said. We were almost nineteen; we were twelve. We'd been dancing for five years straight. My feet were tired. I made you a promise.

I don't like you in the morning– why are you being so stupid– close your eyes– is that good baby– I can't understand why you would think that– hold my hand– take a bath– let's take a bath– I hate my father more than I love my mother– I'll wash your hair– I like you– I'm serious– we shouldn't tell them– let's play pretend– it's nice to meet you– don't ask me that– I think we should break up– I think we should try again– close your eyes baby– don't look.

You have brown eyes. You are so thin, or you were, and you're exactly my height, although I insisted you were taller. Your eyebrows barely exist. You have brown hair, brown skin. Your mouth is never still. I don't remember your smell. I don't remember your ears. When we were thirteen, you didn't have breasts, but I think they came up eventually. We were always moon drunk together. Your face was long. You were all warm browns but always cold. I can't remember your fingertips.

It is January again and I haven't seen you since the train but your name is still nightshade on my tongue; I can't say it, and I can't breathe. Maybe you turned my ribs to oak, or maybe they're made of antler. Maybe my throat is a garter snake, begging you to kiss me. I am coughing up black dirt, as black as the bottom of my left foot. I am being buried in crocus roots and arrowhead tubers and despair, kiss me kiss me kiss me kiss me— how fucking easy it would be! Come on. I am singing my cession in some white-feather language; I think I am ready to ignore it all, to let you lay me in the wheatgrass again. If you'd just kiss me, I am afraid this would be my succumbence.

No.

I made you a promise.

At seventeen you held my wrists, pulled me down and down. I sobbed into your chest. *You're so mean to me— you're so mean and I just forgive you again and again.* You apologized once, twice.

You held my wrists like they were your salvation. *Just be nice.* I was begging it. You murmured some affirmation; you kissed my jaw. You fucked me until I wasn't crying anymore.

The next morning, I woke up wishing for real feathers. We went to the art museum, to get baklava, to get swallowed up by wolverines. We reaped my garden and broke snap peas off the vine. I woke up wishing for yuletide, for a blue ribbon, for a return to impatience and beauty.

You left first. I left second, after that long, dark time, always locked up in some backroom, always making liars of ourselves. *You are such a fucking ugly person.* But it's always the first wrong that's the hardest to redeem, the first gift that's hardest to repay.

When we were fifteen, only weeks before that first ending, you came by and we made gingerbread. We watched a movie and you held my hip in one hand. We moved past tepidness. You kissed me; you held my ribs. The movie kept playing. I felt nauseous and adult. Didn't I make you a promise?

You write me your little grey letters every few months. I have given up responding; it never makes things easier.

Between classes, sixteen, we went to the wood. We found tiny bits of animal, mineral, plant. We slept in the wood, no, in my backyard. I'm sorry. I'm losing my focus. We slept between classes. I slept on your chest, over your right side (for the silence of it).

Mark me up– leave me breathless and aching– make me vomit– break my ribs– touch that moment at the small of my back– kiss my throat– swear that you’ll really hate me this time– you’ll really do it– just after this last time– we’ll really hate each other– and this will end.

I am trying to hold onto the timeline. Twelve, we met, thirteen, longing, fourteen, fifteen, hand-holders, sixteen, very angry and very sad, seventeen, *don’t-touch-me-there-they’ll-see* -*don’t-touch-me-at-all-come-back-again-come-back*, eighteen, lovers, nineteen, blank mass, twenty, three sightings, a wave, letters, twenty-one (it’s only been a month), letters. It’s only been a month. It’s almost been a decade.

I wish I had loved you less, or more, or not all. I wish I could have loved you better, or unconditionally, or all the time. I wish I didn’t cry when you kissed me. Mostly, I wish you had loved me in just the right way, so that I never felt buried or neglected or doubtful or cruel. I wish I didn’t feel dirty around you. I wish you hadn’t made me cruel. *You are so beautiful.* You kissed me. You kissed me.

I made you a promise. I can’t remember the feeling of your head on my shoulder. I can’t remember the hair on your arms. I remember the promises you made me, and I remember the moment you left that final time. We were sat on a blanket in the meadow, playing gin and watching those treble deer go by, but I can’t remember who won. When you had to go, you held the back of my head and kissed me through my crying, kissed my left eyebrow, my jaw, my cupid’s bow. I said goodbye first; I remember. I promised it. I am promising again.