

Dear Dirty Burbs: A Series of Unfinished Letters You May Never Know About but Have Anyway

Blake Feser

Dear Dirty Burbs,

I am hesitant to call what I lived through with you love. You were within my reach but never close enough. The thing about it is that it never felt like mine to hold. It existed in a realm only we created and resided in. I know I felt it, but was it real?
one.

Every detail, every place, every word shared was real. I have proof we talked, that we knew each other better than we knew ourselves. We worked together, talked almost every day for nearly four years. Your brother knew me by name, he was as excited to see me as you. Your parents took pictures of us before that fateful night of the Christmas party you begged me to come to. I met your grandparents. Some random family friend was there too telling us to stand closer and pretend to like each other. Your coworkers liked me more than I anticipated. You never begged me to come anywhere else after that. None of that could have been made up.
two.

I am convinced that I could navigate your house blindfolded. Your basement was emptier than mine has ever been yet warmer and more inviting. The floorboards creaked and were cold to the touch, they were dark wood, a nice contrast to the light grey walls. The couch you told me you found off Kijiji ‘brand new’ that you picked up with your dad someday in late November. The bar fridge you and your brother kept stocked, you always ended up with a drink in hand because of it. A TV with a basket overflowing with blankets underneath; I was over one summer and your mom covered me with one because I wasn’t used to the AC. A guitar you swear you’d learn how to play. A half-assembled gym set behind the corner of that couch. The hallway that connected your brother’s room to yours. The bathroom in the middle of said hall was equivalent to a pigsty, but the blue lights were a nice touch. Your brother had the most obnoxious neon lights for a bedroom, how did he ever sleep with those?

The pictures of you and your family when you were young. A little boy in a frame smiled at me with his little toothy grin. The photos were in black and white but managed to capture the sparkle in his dark chocolate eyes. He wore a flannel; his hair was spiked, looking dapper as little

boys do for family photos. Leaves were being thrown in the air by him. That same boy, grown up now, stood in front of me. Still wearing a flannel. Tall and alluring. Hair still dark but wavier now, he wore it naturally; I adored it. His jaw more prominent, covered in stubble which I didn't mind. He grew into himself and maintained his charm from that boy in the frame. Smiling still, trying to be brooding but I knew him better than some front he put on to impress me. A smile trying to obscure what would send anyone else on the next flight out, but what I was willing to change my future for.

What I knew best though was your room. The way your room was just slightly messy all the time. The walls painted a dark nearly black grey. The unmade bed that looked better than mine made. The guitars hung off the walls just enough to make me anxious they would fall at any moment. Your sticker-covered mirror. Your desk had everything but work on it. The fake vines you hung on your ceiling that you asked for my approval of. Art that never made sense to anyone but you. Your favourite album covers. Textbooks untouched for months. A TV too big to fit the space, we spent hours watching your favourite shows together.

Maybe I am still looming in your basement.
three.

It had to have been real. It wouldn't have been worth it otherwise. I loved you deeply and recklessly knowing it wouldn't last. I was selfish to think I could keep you forever. Part of me wishes it wasn't real, it would be easier for me that way. I wouldn't be as remorseful.

My body knows it was real. My fingertips are ash-stained from the fire you started in and around me. That love hibernates in my bones, takes refuge in the cavern in my chest. My lips are cursed to have yours seared onto them. My flesh remembers every inch of yours like it was just an hour ago when I clung to you. Bodies don't lie but does mine?

four.

I remember when we were just friends, the phrase you were so fond of holding over me. When we went sledding in the dead of winter at midnight at some hill twenty minutes out of town. It was frigid and the hill was so steep my stomach dropped on the way down. You insisted I go down with you because I wouldn't have otherwise. That was the first time we held hands, but mittens blocked our skin. I held your hand that night like it was the only time I would. It felt the same way I held your hands most nights the summer two years that followed; like our lives depended on it.

five.

Neither I nor my heart have ever been so certain that what I had with you was love. I can't go a day without remembering a glimmer of you. I would be lying to myself and everyone if I said I wouldn't give up almost anything to see your face light up again. To hear you say my name in your voice as sweet and dark as your favourite spiced rum and coke. To feel your skin against mine. To see your smile. That smile you hated but I fell in love with the more I saw it; the way it was just a little bit crooked but perfectly set on you. To feel your breath against mine. To look into your eyes, piercing and mystifying yet light and welcoming, dark chocolate with streaks of honey. For you to look into mine and point out how dilated my pupils were; we both know why you said that. To feel your heartbeat and be at bay.

six.

I drove you home at two a.m. a week after New Year's Day last year. You called me asking for a ride. I couldn't believe I was hearing your voice. You were slurring your words, but you held it together. I couldn't leave my house fast enough. I woke up my parents, fearful of telling them why their daughter was in a rush at such an hour, and for you of all people. I picked you up. You were crying. Your friend who I couldn't stand sat in the backseat spewing some bullshit. I picked you up because I cared too much to leave you stranded. I knew that was the end. I went against my better judgment because I thought that despite you telling me no, and you weren't ready for a relationship (lies by the way), somehow me putting my sanity and heart back into this world burning I would have you for good. You apologized for what happened after your friend went to sleep on the couch. That apology was pointless, I wanted it as much as you.

seven.

I remember everything about you and still can't trust if it was real. You didn't want me to think it was real. Looking back now with the rose tint I do; this all could have been a highlight reel of someone else's love I stumbled upon. An exact blueprint of your house and the imprint you had on me remain, yet I struggle to discern what was real and what wasn't. There is no reason for me to believe my love for you was conjured in fever dreams. And yet I wonder if all the nights I spent awake with you, laying under your sheets, comforting you, laughing with you until you covered my mouth, so we didn't wake your parents, the nights where you told me secrets no other soul knows were nothing more than my imagination.

eight.

The entrance to your house was the place I despised most. So much was unsaid there. Each time we kissed I was taken back to the entrance. I waited for you at that entrance when you would talk to your parents about me. I stood in its vastness looking out of the stained-glass panes admiring how they distorted the streetlights. That entrance made me shiver. It was a liminal space. It trapped and tormented me. I hated what lay beyond its doors; I had to go home, and you weren't there. I loved what lay beyond its doors; we locked ourselves in your room and shut the world out. You were always confused about why I waited for you before I left the entrance, I just liked to hold your hand down the stairs. That entrance ruined every chance to speak, to know the truth. I needed to tell you how I felt, we needed to talk about what was next, I needed to know that you wanted me around. The entrance caught all of that, the questions in my head bouncing around, being amplified in the emptiness that was your entrance. You asked me what I wanted to do in that entrance as if my answer changed every time. I wish I had known when the last time I would stand in your entrance was. When I would be condemned. Maybe then I would have acknowledged what the doorway and ceilings had known since day one.

nine.

But I couldn't have known love if not for you. And I still do have love for you even if I don't want to, even if you don't want me to. I know you don't think about me, and I know you don't care, but this is what I have of you; this is what you've left me with. This is the only love I've known. So, forgive me please, for my reluctance to let go.

With more love than you know,

