

This book is filled
with unsent letters

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Foreword →

“A letter is written
as a space *shared*
by two people.”

The above quote is from Yiyun Li’s book *Dear Friend, from My Life I Write to You in Your Life*. It makes you wonder: what does it mean to that space when one person is absent? Where does that space go? What goes with it?

I started this project with the intent of gathering these unsent letters and hidden stories from a variety of perspectives. I wanted to read about how love, anguish, and regret made their mark on the lives of others. As I started sifting through these anonymous responses, I was struck by the authenticity behind them. Some responses were only a single, obscure sentence. Other responses were stories, written to take them and the recipient back to that moment in time they shared (or could have shared). Despite how different or specific the context of the letters may have been, the feelings conveyed were so relatable. We’ve all felt

love and anguish. We’ve all felt regret. The really terrible thing is that we’ve all felt alone.

Isn’t that sad? We can be so surrounded yet feel so very alone. We swallow our emotions and instead of legitimizing them by saying the words out loud, we write them down and throw them away. We enter this space that’s meant to be shared by two people and leave before the other person can arrive.

My hope for you as the reader is to enter this abandoned space with an open mind and open heart. Recognize that this space may have been abandoned for a variety of reasons, all of which are valid in their own ways. Share this space with unintended others and learn from it together. Above all else, find comfort in knowing that you are not alone in your loneliness.

What is something
you wanted to tell
them but *didn't*?

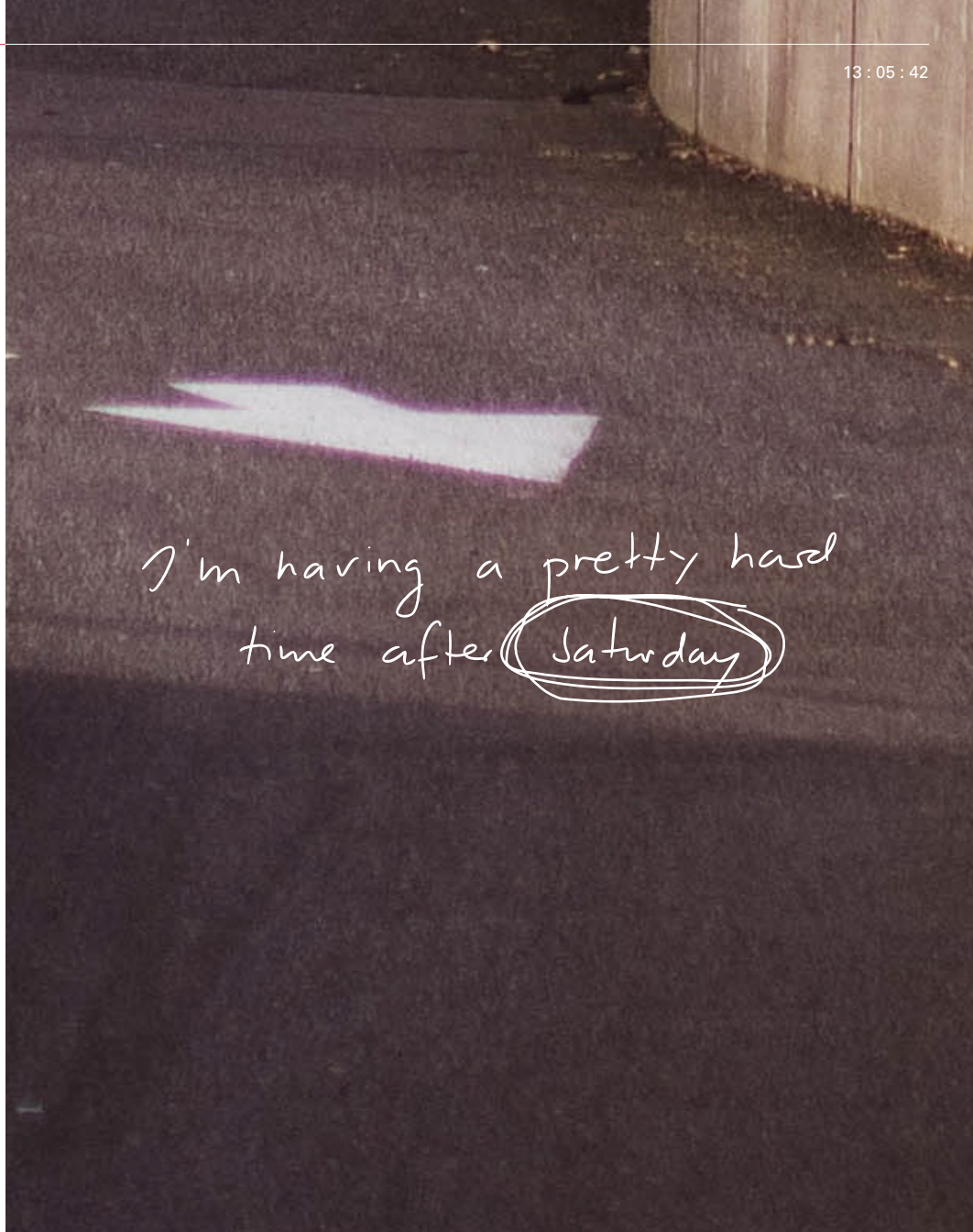
Estranged Connections

Quote by

Amor Towles

“For wasn’t it just a matter of time before we crossed each other’s path? Despite all the hoopla, wasn’t Manhattan just ten miles long and a mile or two wide?”

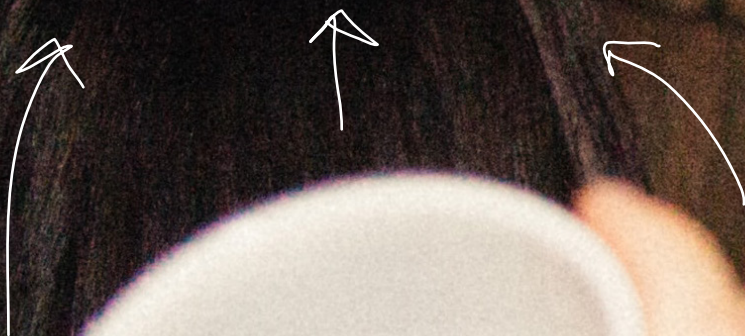
A girl in my [REDACTED] attempted to commit suicide on Saturday, I was involved in the situation because I was present when her sister found her. I assisted in calling the paramedics and getting her help.



I'm having a pretty hard
time after Saturday

I remember my friends

telling me to say something



I know this is basically one of those classic, "I saw one of my favorite actresses at a party and I was too shy to say anything," but hear me out.

I had just binged your show, *The Haunting of Hill House*, and it was honestly one of the most refreshing shows I've seen in such a long time. I'm a huge horror fan yet admittedly, I scare easily, so that show was both "haunting" and a blast to watch. I think horror movies are one of the most interesting genres because in addition to all of the scary elements, it can really conjure up a deep and emotional journey. And for the ones that I find too scary, I would simply look it up on Wikipedia and read the entire synopsis just to learn what happens at the end. But there's always this tada moment where the mystery sort of fades away, and you're able to see the underlying monster of the story. Sometimes it's a sort of sadness, an emptiness, or maybe a fiery anger. Whatever it may be, that element in horror seems to depict a sense the metaphorical monster that I think many of us experience in our lives.

Anyways back to the party where we crossed paths... I was with a bunch of friends and they were all freaking out about how you were so casually hanging amongst us. We were standing relatively close together and I remember my friends telling me to say something. People had come up to you several times, so I kept thinking to myself, "Just let her be. She's famous and what not, but just let her be." As the night dragged on, I couldn't help but think about how much regret I'd feel if I didn't say at least a "Hi." Alas, I mustered up all the courage I had in me and I walked up to your back and was just about to tap you on your shoulder when you started walking away with your friends. "Shit!" I panicked and quickly pulled my arm away from you as you exited the crowded basement.

And that was that. For a while now, I've been thinking about what I had hoped to say to you. If I did tap you on your shoulder and you turned around to see me. Perhaps I would've nervously jumbled my words on how much I loved your work or maybe I would've weirdly complimented your outfit to make up for the complete waste of your time. However, after reflecting on it for some time, I think I know what I wish I would've said. You mentioned once in an interview how daunting that almost instant jump to fame was after the show came out. How it's difficult to navigate this shift in your life while trying to still be you. And I think back to your character, Nellie, how scared she must've felt in attempt to keep her family together amidst their inescapable ghosts. It seems as though life has this underlying monster, this kind of fragility when something sudden happens and flips everything on its head, creating its very own haunting.

Long story short, what I wish I said is, "Thank you." Thank you for reminding me in your real life and in your work, that what keeps you grounded is your family and your friends. Trusting in them, confiding in them, and wading through the muddy waters with them. As long as you're together, in spirit or in person, you can get past that monster.

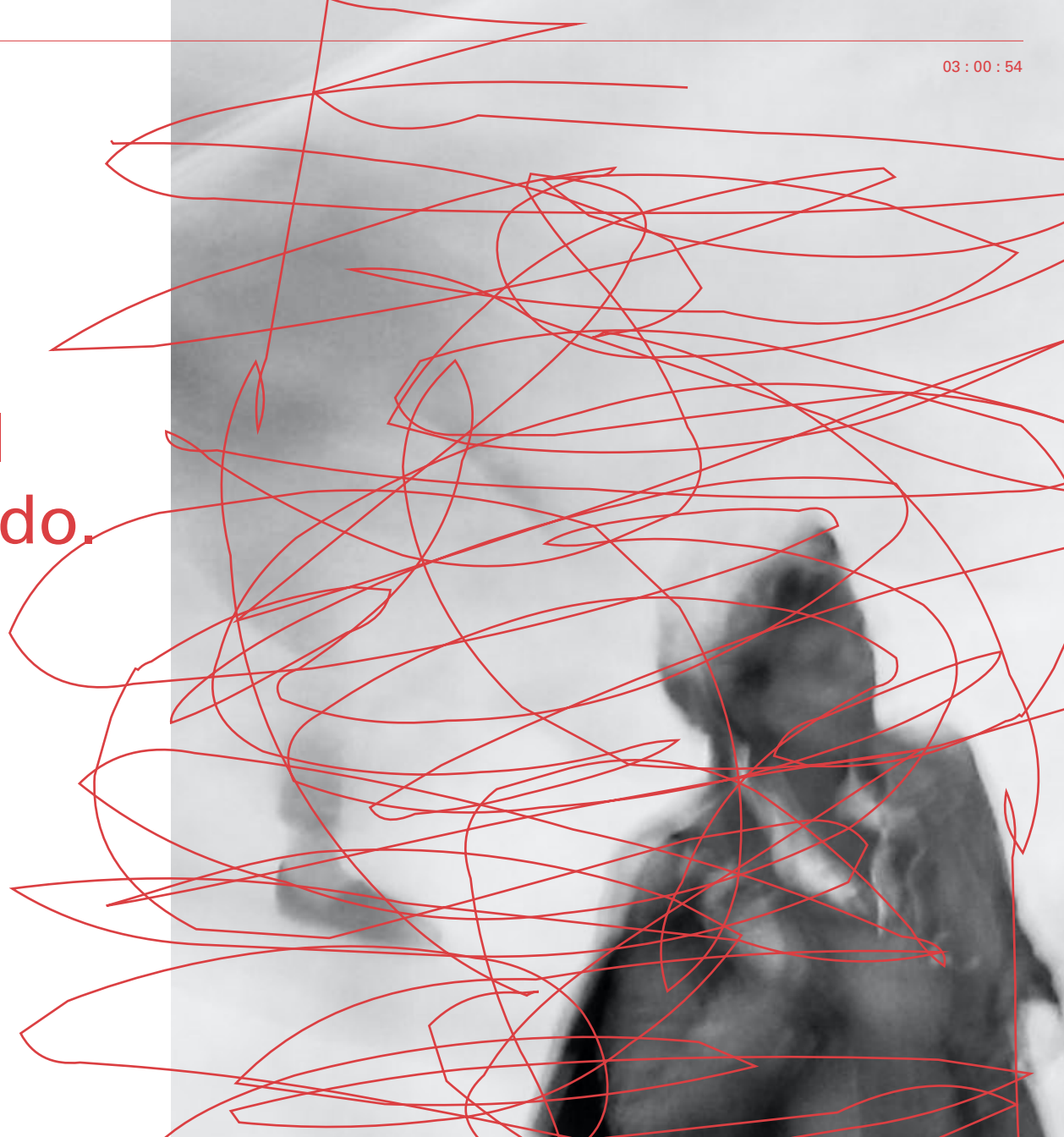
I'm sorry I didn't say hi to you as I passed you in the parking lot, where you were sitting on a curb eating your sandwich.





I miss you.

I'm sad, I'm lost, I
don't know what to do.
Please *help me go
through this.*





I want you to know that I'm choosing to not bring you into existence because I love you.

I'm sorry that I can't give you the gift of life. This is the only way I know how to protect you from the inevitable pain and suffering that comes with living. I want to see your smile, to hold you and care for you with all my heart. I want you to show me that I'm capable of loving someone at a level that I never knew I could. I want to watch you learn about the world, to be my best friend, and to be by my side when I take my last breath. But these are my selfish reasons.

I cannot take the chance of giving you my pain, chronic illnesses, and parenting mistakes that are bound to happen. I can't bear the thought of you facing the cruelty of the world and what it means to be a human.

I'm sorry that I'm taking the small beautiful moments in life from you. But no amount of beautiful landscapes, rainbows, or cuddles can be offset by the horrors of this world. Maybe there will be a time when cancer, rape, torture, racism, climate change, injustice, diseases, and so on will cease to be a part of the human experience. But until then, I will do everything in my power to make sure you are not conceived.

I hope you never get the chance to read this letter. I love you.

We're not at where we
envisioned, but I hope
you're still *proud* of me.



*if we'd met
any other way*

I'm not sure we'd have ever been friends if we'd met any other way. The fact that we're not anymore says something, doesn't it?

Yes, it was me. I TP'd your
house twice out of revenge.
What can I say? I was the TP
Queen in high school, there
wasn't much else to do.

And you... well,
you broke my heart.



I wish you were still my friend.

We became fast friends when I was really sick, and you were in the army. Eventually, I went back to school and you went to London for university.

We drifted apart, but I really wish you were still my close friend. Things got really hard when you left, and I wish you were here to support me and watch me grow as a person.

I want to tell you how much you hurt me, and how I now feel like I have lost part of my lively and happy soul to be the me I am now.

But also I want to apologize, and also accept my part of the blame of what happened. It wasn't a great time for either of us, you were in a worse situation than me and I tried to remind you there were good things in life.

You said I helped you see the positives in life which made me feel happy too, but it wasn't enough, and all the red flags that I could see before started to stab into me more and more as you decided you were done with me. Your last message upset me but I didn't want to reply to it because I had had enough too. You wanted the last word so I let you have it, even when you texted me a few days later I knew it unwise to reply because it wouldn't help anyone.

But now I see you're being happy with someone else, and while that hurts a little bit, I am truthfully happy for you instead — I just wish I was a little further ahead in life than I am now.

*You wanted the last word
so I let you have it*





most of all
I miss you

I wish I could speak to you in my own language.

I wish I could sum up to you and your family how much your kindness and generosity really impacted my year with you all. You're truly amazing people and I am just so entirely grateful for everything you have done for me. The trips, the sights, the barbecues just for me were beyond anything anyone could ever deserve. I really relish in how limitless your care was and your acts of acceptance into your family. I wish that I was more confident to show you and tell you how much you mean to me and how I think about you all almost everyday.

I miss you immensely and I miss the way your house echos at night, and the crisp fall air that hangs around at dusk. I miss going into your kitchen around 7pm and asking if you needed any help preparing dinner. I miss your saltless foods and being introduced to strange meats and cheeses. I miss the yogurts you would buy me and the fun we would have after dinner around the table talking and laughing. I miss you asking me every weekend if I was going out at night, and me saying no hahaha. I miss your animals and the way we would make fun of the cat for being so fat and it loving me the first day I arrived.

There is so much within that year that I miss but most of all I miss you and I am so entirely grateful to have you all in my life. I am pretty sure anyone who meets your family is truly amazed by how wonderful and genuine you all are and I thank you so so much for an unforgettable experience with you.

Painful Connections

Quote by

C.S. Lewis

“It is easier to say
‘my tooth is aching’
than to say ‘my
heart is broken.’”

I will resent and hate you for the rest of my life for the trauma you put your wife and kids through.

I can't begin to describe how terrorized my childhood and now adulthood has been coming to grips emotionally unpacking the physical emotional and verbal abuse I went through growing up. I despise the way you've displaced the burden from my mom to my siblings by depending on them financially and emotionally to keep you stable. And I hate them for believing you.

I hope you find a life for yourself outside of the pity you've grown to house. I do wish you the best, but it needs to be a life that is detached from the life and people you've ruined.





Go fuck yourself.
You hurt me and so many other people.

You really hurt me.





You broke me.

I never agreed to any of this, and you took advantage of me.

How can you call
yourself a Christian
when you treat me so
horrible?



i'm happier now



I'm happier now that we don't talk.

I was miserable and didn't realize it, and my self-esteem and body image have recovered so much now.

***You're a lying, cheating
bitch and I hate you.***



treat me like your
own daughter

I wish I could tell you how much you hurt me.

How I've been hurting for years because you treat me like I'm worthless. You can't even tell me that you love me, you tear down my accomplishments because it's never good enough, and you make me feel like an outsider to the family.

Every night I replay in my head all the things that have happened, what you've said to me, and the times where you were never there. The home that was supposed to be my safe place wasn't even home to me. To you, maybe I'm being dramatic. I'm exaggerating everything and probably having some "teenage issue"

I'm in my twenties now and the more I think about it over the years, the more it hurts. The more I realize that I wasn't wrong for feeling sad or getting angry. You treated me like I was a soldier and couldn't even treat me like your own daughter. To you, it was only a moment in time trying to discipline me and it was justified, but to me I have a scar that holds years of trauma and probably will never heal.

You told me that I was
an accident and you
wanted to abort me. I
really wish you did.





*you
degrade
people*

You are a toxic person.

I feel that you should not be in a leader position when you degrade people you work with.

I wish I had stood up to you sooner.

Having you talk shit about me to all our old mutual friends hurt really badly, but I hope it made you feel better. You can have them, if it helps.

I hope you've grown up. I hope you treat your friends better now.





I don't know how else to start this except ***fuck you***. I bought a whole ass plane ticket to visit you on the other side of the country. I was so excited! You seemed excited too! Except when I got there you stuck me in your friend's dorm to sleep in (I did not know this friend), instead of with you (the person I flew to see). You told me it's because your campus was religious and only men were allowed in your dorm. Fair enough.

The trip was great. We had a great time - even though the nights were awkward for me when I returned to a dorm I didn't know, filled with people I didn't know, in a whole state I didn't know. We went into the city and ate great food and played in the park and looked at the moon. I still had a lot of fun. Until you started acting weird when we went to go hang out with your friends. Then the trip turned awful when your friend told me she was actually your girlfriend. Cooooool.

I still had several days before my flight home, too, so I had stay in a totally unfamiliar place in which I knew nobody but you, who I was no longer okay with being around. You knew I was hurt. You knew you fucked up. But I still never got an apology. Not even a little bit of remorse from you. It's been a long time by now, and it doesn't sting to think about anymore. I still have fond memories of that trip, and I still have fond memories of when we first met and the sweet friendships we created at that time. I have even found myself wondering how you are doing every once in a while. But you lost my respect. I wish I had told you off then instead of internalizing it. I also wish I had been able to tell your girlfriend what was going on. I also wish I had Venmo requested you \$600 to pay for the plane tickets. I don't think I was using Venmo then....

It really hurt my feelings when you stopped talking to me. Who ghosts their friends? I'm not your ex-boyfriend. I'm your ride or die. I **WAS** your ride or die.



Love
Connections

Quote by

Marguerite Duras

“I think about you.
But I don't say it
anymore.”

You were my first *real* love. And even though we were so toxic, I don't think I've ever loved the same way again. I feel like I've never stopped loving you, even when I hated you. I've been in my current relationship for 2 years, and though I love them dearly, it's weird that I love you more. I just wonder if you feel the same way. We've both moved on to different relationships, but do we still have that mutual love?

What would happen if we met in a cafe in 5 years? Would we instantly fall in love again or would we awkwardly ignore each other?

I know what I want the answer to be.

Would we instantly
fall in love again?



thought I'd gotten over it
but
I guess not.



I think I've loved you for 7 years. I know we don't talk as much anymore and our relationship only went so far as being good friends. But looking back a lot of the times we talked and hung out I love to sit in and daydream about.

When I first got to college I always thought I was so silly for having this long lasting crush on you that started in eighth grade and thought I'd gotten over it but I guess not.

And you know what, maybe it's not that I'm in love with you like I want to spend the rest of my life with you, but that I love you as a person and friend. I regret not texting you back or being present the first few years when we'd talk and I blame that on our drifting. I loved the way you never took me for surface value and saw past that.. I think that's what I admire about you most.. Because I definitely judged you on the surface at first as being the typical jockey white boy who only cared about whatever jockey white boys care about.

But yeah. I just. I love you a lot and I hope you know how much you've always meant to me.

I love you.

I thought

I still

loved you

I had a dream about
you last night. When I
woke up, I thought I
still loved you.

I'm in love with you,
I've been in love with
you as long as I've
known you.



as long as I've known you



↑ never wanted to
share in any way

I wanted to tell you that I love you, but I never thought that that would work between us.

I knew that you could never focus completely on me, and I never wanted to share in any way. Sometimes I wonder if keeping that to myself was the right choice, if maybe had I said it then I wouldn't question all my relationships now.

It's ridiculous that after years I'm still affected in this way.

I wish the timing remained right.

I wanted to get out of my comfort zone and get to know you better. We could have been closer if time was on our side. When I first met you, I didn't know what to expect.

But then I heard among our friends how happy I seemed whenever your name was mentioned, whenever you joined in for study sessions or meetings... Something about you made me feel refreshed and happy. I was not sure if this was a trap but regardless, if you were still here, if you never flew away from me, I wanted to be with you. I can only imagine us together rather than making it come to life. I don't know what went wrong or why you cut ties but I will always remember the small details of our conversations and moments that we shared.

All I would have to say to you if you came back was *“thank you.”*





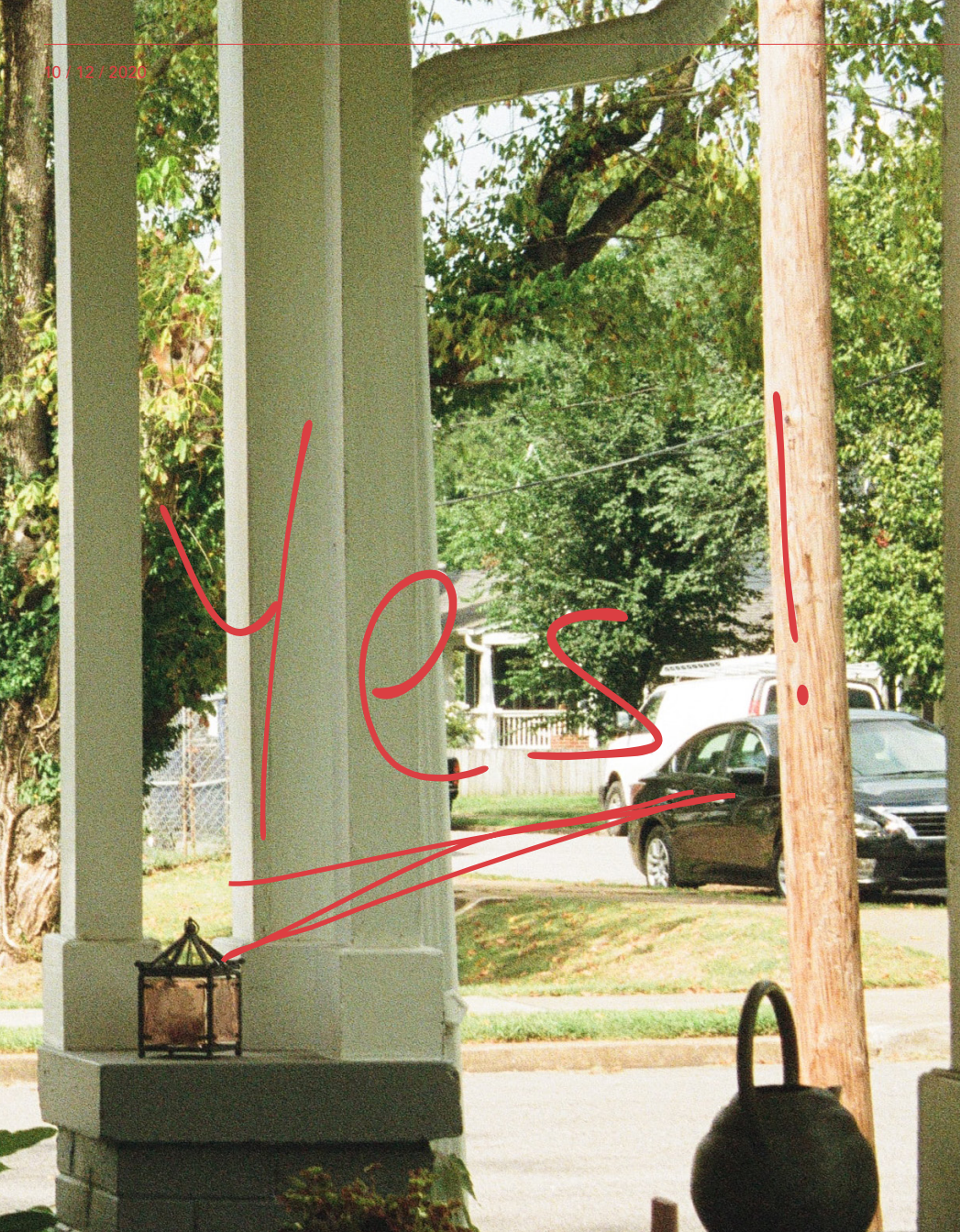
You were my first real love.

I had no idea at the time. I wish it didn't have to end the way it did. I wish I could have been a better (and more self-aware!) friend.

I was jealous, manipulative, and unkind.

I love you. I'm sorry I never gave you the chance you deserved because I was scared to leave my comfort zone. I think about what we could've been *everyday*.





I wish I had said yes to your marriage proposal.

I wish I had been strong enough to follow my heart instead of my head. I wish I had said I love you no matter what.

We were young and foolish but my biggest regret is not taking the chance and seeing where it would lead us. I will always love you and you will always hold a piece of my heart.

Hey, I like you. Will
you go out with me?



Do you *regret*
not telling them
how you felt?

I regret it

I don't regret it



I regret it

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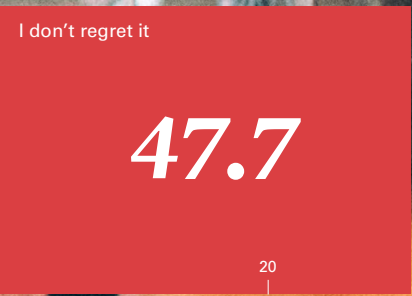
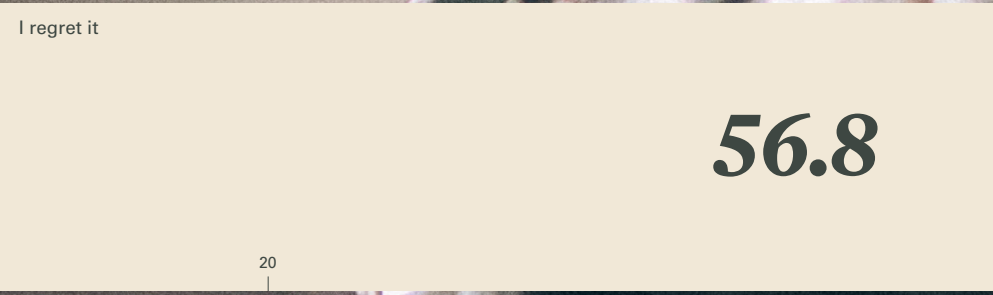
I don't regret it

5

10

15





Why or *why not*?

I'm happier now, and regrets don't make things...

It's very uncommon to verbalize our love and life is short and I wasn't able to tell them...

it was a lonely old man, who would have been this person blows up when faced with the truth

I honestly think about it way too much. I also don't think our paths will cross again.

I've moved on, married and have children but I wasn't out at the time, so it wasn't possible

This person was an asshole and deserved to hear. In an Asian family, the stigma behind emotions.

because I don't actually love him anymore. I worry that it means he'll hurt other

my dad doesn't deserve to know how I felt and I feel like it's too late to say anything.

it was too late, and they were gone.

Best

Sincerely

Thanks

Yours

“How surprising to find it...this love I *must have felt.*”

The above quote is from Laura Kasischke’s book *Space, In Chains*. While “love” may not be the right word to describe all of the words expressed in this book, each letter had something harbored within that continued to exist and breathe beyond its memory. It may have been love, it may have been hate. But as Elie Wiesel said: “The opposite of love is not hate, it’s indifference.”

And even though you as the reader entered this abandoned space as mentioned in the foreword by reading this book, at one point in time it was really, truly alive.

Another thing I want to bring up is that I wasn’t completely honest with the entirety of Yiyun Li’s quote at the beginning of this. Li’s full quote is this: “A letter is written as a space shared by two people; by not sending it, its

writer claims the power to include and exclude the recipient simultaneously. Out of cowardice or control an act is performed in the name of caring or discretion.”

I agree with Li in her interpretation of a letter as a space shared by two people, but I don’t think writing an unsent letter is an act of cowardice. I think writing an unsent letter is an act of self-reflection and bravery.

To write an unsent letter is to unbury a lot of emotions, and then rebury them out of protection of yourself and the recipient. It’s to revisit uncomfortable memories and continue on with the burden of having them. I am so unbelievably grateful to all those who contributed – regardless of what Li thinks, I find you brave.

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stamp
here

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