

## **“I’d Like to Get to Know Her”**

*by Allie Novakovic-Emberson*

### Her

I plucked a flower off the stem wrong, and it fell to pieces in my hand. I winced because it was a perfectly good flower, now all detached from itself and flying in the wind toward the waves. It was ideal for my spell and now just another casualty of the roaring gusts. I watched the petals until they floated out of view, but I remember staring off long after that. I don’t remember what I was thinking about. Since then, I don’t remember much of anything. Everything that was no longer is and I am left in the in between. Each glimpse of a reflection makes me tense; I expect to see another soul’s movements mimicked back at me, with just the slightest imperfections that I’d catch the imposter mid-frown. I saw the girl in the mirror, but did I really know her face better than a passing stranger? She seemed different than me, a separate heart. I watched her eyes cry, and I felt her chest ache, but since her soulmate’s death I have kept my distance from her sorrows. Instead, I’ve decided to start up the ritual again to show her a new prosperous bloom. I want her to know I’m still here and that we can grow together again.



Much like her once in a lifetime friend, the broken flower with delicate petals kept shy, blooming only a few days a season to tease a perfect peak of its beauty. The roots stay grounded, surrounded by mush covered unkempt forest grass and protected by the layers of life that shield

its vulnerability from the elements. It bursts open an orange floral masterpiece that puts the shade of dimming sunsets to shame, but rarely do we hear comparisons of their beauty. I looked up the name of the flower because I kept seeing them around, they remind me of the past. I look at them and I see him, and her, together, and whole. Daylilies. They're beautiful. The orange is sharp and demands your attention, while delicate enough to fall apart even with a loving touch. It's nice to know they'll bloom again, not only for the shortness of a day. But maybe that's what gives the day its meaning, after all: renewal. Thinking back, she'd always say, "there's nothing like a bit of midnight moonlight to charge up your bad bitch energy," but I saw the reflection of make-up-stained tears and I knew her truth. I still see the scratches up my arms from the days of stress, my eyes still burn from staring at the sun without a fearful squint. For so long she wanted to feel something and for it to be real. When I think back on that time, I can't remember the last time I felt her smile. When's the last time I heard her laugh? I barely recognized her distant presence, but I still put out my hand and I waited. I never stopped waiting for us to both bloom.



Through the tree peaks I saw the lake, particularly rough today. I stood my ground, staring out to the sharp swells. Through patches of colourful fungi furnished by my home, I swept up my pink can of sticky sweet hummingbird feed and filled the hanging bottle back on the birch tree. I closed my eyes for a moment and mouthed a magical invite into the world. For most, the world of faeries and nature's healing range is mere fantasy, yet likely haven't felt the warmth of a campfire at night, deserted from anyone other than the eons of stars overhead. I've

heard the howl of a wolf pack in the dead of night and followed illuminated paths of fireflies' glow. I've faced danger alone in the woods with unspoken guides to lead me home. I've bathed in deep rivers and sung out to Luna as she sat pretty in the sky. All of this, and more, makes me believe in what I can't see by eye. I like to imagine the connection between the buzzing birds and curious fae, watching each other intently as they slurp the stick sweet sugar at their tree. I haven't seen any hostility yet, anyways.

I traced my finger over his name etched into the white bark, carved years ago with my dad's old hunting knife. I felt my face twist sour as I shivered into my long, puffed coat. I walked back to the empty scape of yesterday's mistake, watered the green, and collected the last of the elements I need for the evening spell.



## The Green

I grabbed my black book and scribbled my intention. I scooped the honey and ground the herbs. I crushed in some earth and pulled at a strand of hair. Taking three, purposeful breaths, I calmed myself to speak in a low whisper. My intention was powerful, but I felt the weakness of my mind creeping doubt into my space. I drew a circle in the sand and stepped thigh-deep into the waves. Crashing cool around my limbs, I gave myself to the world. Sea and sky swallowed me whole and kept me in that moment. Still and listening.

With my eyes still closed, I licked my lips to feel the wind around me. It made me think of the day kayaking down the winding river, through the arch of fallen trees drooping gently in the water. The blurry parts of me were clear then, the girl I lost looked so happy. She *was* happy. I remember her precisely in that moment, looking up and all around her at the twisting branches forming the rarest natural rainbow over her head. The water was cold that day, but she didn't mind getting splashed if it meant warming up with him by her side. As her teal boat sailed smoothly through the opening, she ducked to avoid the last low branch. He followed her through, their laughs echoing past the herons, and the water lilies, through the trees and maybe even up the mountains. It was everywhere. It was joy.



When the world lost him, the impact crushed a crater-sized chunk of me, invisible for the naked eye to see. His brother told me he looked dead in the eyes long before then, but he never

knew the fire that lived in his depth of his vision when he looked at her. I channel the parts of her he loved the most and then it's easy, really, to feel him here. He flows through the atmosphere like he flows through her blood. He flows in her poetry, an oblivion of bliss. It's easy to feel him, you see, because he's everywhere. Don't you see him lead me as I walk along the green?

## Father Nature

Raised in the woods, not by wolves, but a man just as gruff and keen, I learned to hike before I could walk. You'd think the two need go hand-in-hand, but enough faceplants into muddy, dense, forest ground and your baby instincts will perk up real fast. My father is a hunter, raising me naturally intuitive to the sound of the trees. Together, we track furry friends through the forest, build forts, and just breathe. He first introduced me to the ancient Green Man, a deity powerful enough to bring life to all the trees in the spring. Like a separate religion, I clung to the images of the grandfather's face hidden in the trees and embraced his natural fighting spirit as I felt my own soul wilting. When I first perceived his presence, the leaves had already fallen, and several mushrooms popped up like fairy real estate in the yard. I spent hours – days – gallivanting around my enchanted fortress, singing to the ducks, and harvesting for a past divination. I still pull from this pure source of energy when my answers lead astray, refusing to dwell on darkness when there's always promise of another bright, green day. It's easy to wonder what if, but what will that do? What if you stopped and lived instead? I tried to warn my past self, I really tried to let her know, but her divination had its perks and it showed her the price of love.

During the Green Man's spring renewal was the only time she ever felt understood since then. She watched him intently outside her window, moving his leaves with the changing sun. With enough practice she could see imprints of his face within the trees. His face was strong and worn, covered in foliage with ivy wisps sprouting from his bearded mouth. It's easy to feel his presence in the blooming winter buds and high-rise midday sun. You can feel his breath warm the air and whisper a gentle good morning to the leaves. When she was just a tiny and smiley bug-eyed beauty that lived to hug the trees too tight and frolic with the faeries, his grasp kept her

feeling safe. With the help of the family spaniel, she'd crawl through thick brush, finding lost deer antlers and claiming her newest natural souvenir. And Jack in the Green was always by her side, leading her along to afternoon willow trees and untouched plump raspberry bushes. He taught her to be mindful, to give back to the trees, the water, the sky, and the bees. From every toadstool to the tallest of pines, he lends his growth to anyone willing to bloom. And blossoms tend to smell sweetest in their earliest days so in her youth best friends they became.

## Once Strangers

In China, they attribute daylilies with memory loss, or in a happier sense, “forgetting worries”<sup>1</sup>. A great gift for someone to overcome their rough patch and move on. They live in the moment. I remember the night he grabbed her hand on freezing 3am bleachers and she melted under the warmth of his skin; the last time she felt his breath on her neck. Who would the moment here and now... why would I when I could linger awhile longer in that one? It's too precious, that time. That's how I have to see it. No wonder all that's precious flows fast by like the wind.

At one point in time, we were strangers. That fact still blows my mind. I think about my circle often and how our paths led us straight to here. As a kid, my mom warned me to never talk to strangers and run the other way when someone pulls up asking for help. I know my street smarts, not to accept their deceitful sweets. I've always stayed close to home and kept safe, but years of suppressing my old spirit got me thinking outside my well-kept box. I needed to step one foot, then the other, back into the world after I lost him and finally – I did. I smelled the blossoms on the trees this spring. I said “nice to meet you” to strangers and now get to call them friends.

The day I sat in the airport crafting my paper plane, hands intuitively moving to crisp the paper with perfect precision, I felt like her again. My head filled with childlike wonder as I looked out to the platform, lost in the spiral of massive engines ahead. I remembered soup airplane spoons and the memories of all the things we used to do. It gave me courage to hop on that plane, headed to another place all alone for the first time. I met her there, a girl my age

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<sup>1</sup> <https://gardenofedenflowershop.com/blogs/garden-of-edden/feature-flower-friday-daylilies>



travelling alone with her cat in a cage. We talked the whole flight and suddenly, I felt calm.

When we waved goodbye at the baggage claim and went our separate ways, I held my head high and flew my paper plane into the sky with a smile. I didn't feel so scared anymore.

## The Perfection Problem

I never saw perfection as a problem until it crumbled nearly every wall I've built over me, crashing as I sat soundly, unsuspecting of a thing. I was suffocated, disoriented, abandoned by the parts of me I thought would get me far. I scattered years of notebooks kept neatly in a drawer and ripped them to shreds, sunlight slipping through the living room blinds. I would've watched them blow far into the wind, out of my sight at last, but I would never burden the earth's perfection with the mistakes of my past. I just picked up all the pieces, threw them in the recycling, and listened as the black bag clunked and crashed down the shoot.

I've seen the world in shades of blue since then, mostly muddied versions of what I looked for in the past. I move sluggishly, my physical pace lapped by my mental criticisms spinning me dizzy in circles, never forward. It's hard not to blame the world for the consumption of my spirit, spat out on a platter of self-doubt with a hefty side of insecurity. It was easier back then.

We woke up.

We played.

We fell.

We cried.

We got up again, brushed off the dirt.

We got back on the bike.

All we remembered was fun.

The bruises faded; some marks left scars. Growing up with a world of expectations for yourself can end in disaster. I only ever tried to shift my mind of its pattern and pace when I watched the light dim from my eighth-grade substitute's face as she talked about her body being a disgrace. I couldn't tell you her name, but she was mesmerizing and bright. I shook my head at her joking self-hatred rooted deeply in truth. Once she grabbed at the skin of her biceps and squawked like a bird, masking her insecurities through jokes about her flightless wings.

Last week I found myself grabbing at my arms. Like powdered slopes, steep and winding, I ran down each line with steadiness. Ripples in a woman's aging body feel a lot like the in between of seasons changing form. It's you, but is it? You've been through so much, and what have you left behind? Are you happy with your choices? Do you think of your mistakes? Are you kind? Do you give to others in their time of need? Do you ever stop to think about what you need? Are you afraid? Are you ready for change? You are changing.

This week I found myself grabbing at my arms again, but I stopped when I thought of her. I hope she knows how beautiful she is. I have always admired her strength.

We

I first saw the dead parts of myself come back to life in the tiny town of Walkern, Hertfordshire, the year I left abroad. The village spanned a single road, where the rows of houses kept so close that neighbours were naturally friends. Chicken coops designated most of their yards, while cows and horses trotted around fields of green. I'd sneak them carrots all the time, a secret bond between new friends. In the family's garden, I harvested my feasts. Even grapes hung from the vine-wrapped pavilion above, spoiling her with nature's sweetness. When I went somewhere new, I felt welcomed. And whenever I came home, I felt loved. I felt the coolness of raindrops against my neck and peered to the sky to let them roll down my face. I appreciated each and every drop.



When I stopped by his grave again, I knelt to place a single petal-wrapped stone. I told him about my adventures and all my new friends. The festivals and the starry bonfire nights. especially gushed about my garden. Just past the ivy-covered red brick cottage at the bottom of the lane was my secret entrance leading to the magic. I'd walk across the plank bridge, up the winding concrete steps, and instantly find myself in an oasis. Cherry tomatoes and chilies hung off the side of the deck and dozens of flowers grew tall and wild around the warm saltwater pool. The water was lit each evening by twinkling lights and the blast of the neighbour's 70s rock hits

humming in my submerged ears. I could feel my heartbeat pulsing through me as I floated still. I looked up and spoke to him like he could still hear me, like he was living in a crater on the moon. I laid under the stars all night.



Last week I hiked down to the wishing well and I saw his brother there. He tossed a nickel, and I gave up a quarter. I watched it shine for an instant as it fell, and then the dark hole consumed it. Once I heard the plop in the water, I made my wish. I looked up at the sky as a loud plane flew overhead. I thought of all the people on the craft, laughing and beaming with excitement as they got ready to land. Others would be sleeping, catching up on rest, or reading their favourite book to pass the time, their head rested on a loved one's shoulder. I watched the plane until it disappeared into the clouds, wondering if we ever watched the same sky from different worlds.

## Growing Through the Cracks

Back home, boosted high on her grandfather's shoulders, she'd twist free the stems of ruby red apples shining at the treetop like a holiday star. The cores would be littered all around them as they napped together in the glow of the afternoon sun. Sure, they're a bit sour this time of year, but sometimes you need a sting to make you feel alive. She took a big bite.

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She pricked her finger to complete the spell, watching the red flow down the wooden bowl. I saw her standing there still uncertain of change. I thought she'd freeze again. But this time she just grabbed her leather-bound journal and began to draw a flower. Then, she turned to face me in the mirror. We stared at each other awhile, following every move. Her face, risen with scabbed anxiety scratches smiled through welling tears. She smiled. We both did.

I knew her story and her face, her troubles, and her grace. I see her in everything, and I want her to know she's loved. I wanted her to love herself the way she loves me. I know where she's been, and I want her to know where we're headed. I blew out the final candle, gripped the earth I knelt on and set free the spell, hoping my intentions reach her soul.

After all, I'd really like to get to know her. It's time I finally understand myself again.



## Works Cited

Bibeau, Gail. "Feature Flower Friday: Daylilies." 15 July 2016. *Garden of Eden Flower Shop*. <https://gardenofedenflowershop.com/blogs/garden-of-eden/feature-flower-friday-daylilies>