



WE ARE BEAUTIFUL HERE

& everywhere it hurts

janeakelly

WEAREBEAUTIFULHERE
& everywhere it hurts & everywhere it hurts & everywhere it hurts

best viewed while listening to
inside my love by minnie riperton | the dress by blonde redhead |
come as you are by yuna



Leap

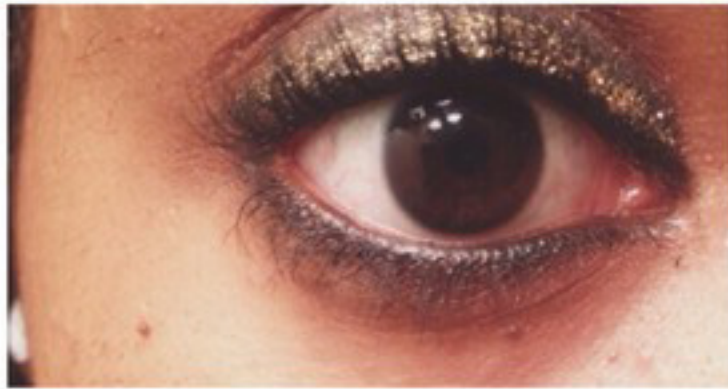
Got issues with touching you
a lot or a little; I can't figure out
what's too much— the feeling for you
or the feeling of you.
Prepositional despair.

Got intimacy problems and
it's funny, in that way where it
deserves a Netflix Original
where you send me gifs of the disastrous
heroine and say "Is this you?"
Hashtag relatable content.

Sometimes wish I could come around every
four years and you'd still want me.
We'd skype, text, fb chat. So chill.
You'd mark my visit on your calendar.
You'll wake up at an ungodly time to call me EST
and say, "Booze clarifies my need for you."

One day out of the year every 4 years
I will find myself in your arms. We will
say it makes sense, we are so busy /
like the ocean and the moon;
distance is required to make waves or
something. Leap Day hardly exists and neither do I.
I'll knock twice. You'd open the door.
We'd waste no time. You'd pull me close.
Gotta pee something bad, but you
hold me and I say,

Got here just in time for the last day
of Black History month. Studies say
Black women have higher self-esteem,
denser bones, and thicker skin. We are still
more likely to drown but less likely to scream.
Tell me I'm strong because I stayed away
for so long. I'm here. Happy Leap Year.
I missed you. Don't make me
sad, I am. You are
capable of love.



I fell asleep in my contacts and awoke with vision blurry and ever heavy heart

Do you also sit awake (red-rimmed and panda-eyed, heavy bags dangling under each eye like crescent moons) and think about the weight of words and how language is mother's crocheted blanket and whole-bird-full-fat-all-soul chicken soup around us during the coldest winters of our lives?

I cough feathers. Mouth full of chicken foot and slurping down collagen, I say a prayer, hope I don't choke on beat or swell from too salt because my body talks. Mother hopes to keep me warm even though her hands tighten with arthritis It can bring you near, it pushes you away. My mouth says "fuck you," my body says "fuck me," and my mind just wants distance from the two. I want a divorce. I want to love me, you.

I love you is a killer. I love you is modern science. Love is so enigmatic. Love is so problematic. It is sunrise when you think the Earth is flat. It's imagining the end of the world and waiting for the drop. I want to fall. Early morning, when Night unravels her curlers becoming Dawn with a shake of her sunlit tresses, you'll find me near the edge of the world falling apart.

Love that. Falling down, falling apart, falling in love.

You can fall off a cliff or you can fall for me-- both perilous.

God, what if we weren't taught about love? It wasn't a thing we craved or knew of. What if we just didn't say it and we veiled the word, spoke it between screen doors and kept it safe; love like purdah. What if love was something you uncovered? We didn't say I love you at all. You turn to your friend, over martinis, and say, I think he's the one I want to undress forever. She has blinded me entirely. I am shrouded by her.

Let's speak as if love is how we describe our strength, our arms, our hands. It would describe how much we could carry. Maybe love is the duration of time we can survive, love is how much we can endure together. Say we're nomadic and our feet hurt; we're hunter-gatherers and we're so far gone we can't see the trees for the forests; we're city dwellers and can't see the stars. It's a time when you want someone who can love a lot.

You'll turn to your friend and say, she is so full of love. When we had to travel again after the water ran out, she took more than half of my load. When we hunted for days for game and returned empty handed, she found nuts, berries, bark, and roots. We ate together and slept together, full. God. She so strong. I think I love her. She loves so much. I think she can bench press my heavy heart.



REFLECTION

Haven't seen my mother in years but
now I see her everyday. I ask her
why didn't she come back for me, why now?
I see her the way I remember her —
the most beautiful woman in the room
but now the memory was out too long
in the rain and rusted; a thin coppery film
of hate covering everything.

Yesterday I told her to go. I have a new mother.
Yet she stays and sits with me; drinks my tea,
eats my bread. I can't feed you anymore, I say.
If you stay, I'll never have company, I'll never be
loved.

Her body is heavy.
Grotesque and so she lays about and
overflows like an oil spill all throughout
my apartment. Mother, this is my land, my
green space. You cannot stay, go. You must.

I see her everyday. She smiles when I brush
my teeth and watches me do my hair.
She frowns at my thighs, tsks at the scars,
and pushes her nail deep into my belly.
She says, who ate my little girl?
Who will love her now if she's in
the belly of the beast, the whale,
in the sea? Let's pull her out,
pull, pull, pull! Save the little
girl. A few months ago

I saw the woman who gave birth to me
and she is doing as well as she can.
She hopes I'm well, if I need anything just.
I am in her prayers and I thank her for
that. I say, thank you for keeping me
in mind and please continue to write
my birthdate on the ballot for Heaven's lottery.



WHEN TIME PASSES, LIKE GLACIAL STRIATIONS, IT LEAVES FINE LINES OR TINY SCARS ON THE SURFACE OF THE MIND

Sometime in 1991, I was no longer an only child. I've felt displaced all my life.

Sometimes in 2003, I tell Sister Mary Catherine, I will no longer wear uniforms because none of the kids at school with parents who live at home, with family they don't see on visit days wear uniforms and all the pressure to be cool is crushing me to death.

Sometime in 1997, mom begs me to cry for attention. She needs to make my dad feel bad because he made her feel bad and I feel bad because I can't cry. It's the drugs. It always is. It's a cycle of inadequacy. Today I can't cry.

Not today. Maybe I was dehydrated. I don't know. "Come on baby, just cry a little bit." I tell her, "I can't. I don't think I can." A swift punch to the gut just knocks the air out of me, and with eyes blown I still can't cry. She tells my dad, it's my asthma.

Sometime in 2007, I turn 18. It was just a day. Someone died. Someone made me cry. I got older.

Sometime in 2002, I'm pinned to a dirty wall of an elevator in Myrtle Beach. Strangers fill it to maximum capacity. No one knows I'm stuck because it's just an embrace on the outside. On the inside, he's drawing me closer, balled fists into his ribcage, and he says "chill out." A woman looks over her shoulder and remarks that we're a cute couple. He smiles down at me, "We try."

Sometime in 1989, mom needed a lift. She's standing outside at a bus stop in the city in the DC. Her perm is frazzled. She's got work in the morning. She's got a government job. My dad drives a tow truck waiting at the red light. I hope that's how it happened.



Lenore

There are things you deal with alone. Mostly life and living. I am learning, I guess. If you've got a warm enough smile, pretty enough teeth and you smell like the fresher side of a seaside sunrise sometimes people feel bad when you're all alone.

I'm more like low tide rot and my teeth are falling out and no one's bummed that I'm alone because we don't throw funerals for beached whales; we complain that they died, we marvel at their grotesque appearance in the bewildering bright light of noon. Carve me up and honor all my parts, make scrimshaws of my teeth; cut me up like my grandfathers and let me heat your home, let my bones support your bosom; find use for me, posthumously.



Joan

Think about God a lot lately. Like a lover. Like an old friend who tripped me in the hallways but also pushed me on the swing when I wanted to touch the sky. It's confusing. I think about God more than I think about my future but a lot less than I think about sex.

It's something about needing to feel— that slow death, that ripening of fruit and the gooseflesh. Find God in the slow roll of my pantyhose coming off and the rough denim against my skin, the rapture and relief of it all.

Nowadays the only things that enter me are ghosts— I'm haunted and am in constant need of hands to be laid upon me. Why don't we call french kissing speaking tongues? I'm all teeth.

Lord, what an awkward experience, but what's it to you since I don't even believe in you unless I'm shaken desperate— if I'm pulled beneath a rip tide, if the thief of my virginity needs to be struck down by the improbable and the unlikely for breaking into me—

I beg for something to let me live, for something to let me die. All in due time, right.

I used to talk to God all the time. When you were a child, did you ever pretend to be asleep after a long ride— closing your eyes when you felt those familiar bumps and turns the closer you got to home— and your body anticipated discovery. The sweetest part was when the door opened and my body was so deliciously limp as my father gathered me in his arms— sometimes, he would curl me along his powerful arm and nuzzle my face into his neck; aftershave and diesel. Rigor mortis would set in and my hand would stiffen around a piece of his flannel shirt.

That's maybe when I felt the closest to God, to the sky, to the Earth when I was being carried to bed, to the coffin and let down gently into six feet of sheets— my mother's voice commencing the eulogy:

She just doesn't want to walk. She's never wants to.



I WAS A TEENAGE SCAVENGER

I'm too nosey. I always want to know what I shouldn't want to know.

Always want to ask the flavor of his cum or the number of freckles; how it made you feel to cheat on your girlfriend with her best friend, if it felt any better to fuck a stranger in your parents bed rather than someone you loved. I want to know if you prefer to sleep with your head on his belly or with your nose close to his armpit. I want to know when it started— when did you know you couldn't go the night without hearing her laughter?

Arnold Schwarzenegger predicted that he would come to America, marry a Kennedy, and hold office. Do you dream big too? Did you know that when you watched him lead your best friend up the stairs that years later it'd be your turn? I have dreams all the time, but you know what they say— always deferred and never the bride. I'm the raisin in the sun, hardening and waiting. I like to watch, dirty voyeur, nose to key hole— I'm too nosey. I want to know what I can't have— does he stutter or hiccup before he says your name; is it more of sob or a plea bargain?

Sometimes I wish we didn't have possessions. No hers or his or mine. It'd make falling in and out of love easier if you didn't think of yourself as a belonging or of belonging to someone, with someone. It'd be easier to share and to let it go. You're not mine, you belong to the universe in which you were born; you belong to millions of atoms I cannot see, and you are loved by so much— not just me. We are beautiful here and everywhere it hurts.

It'd be easier to accept betrayal, I think. Instead of thinking of it as a cheating, instead of blaming your friend, you can just think of it as a communal process of living. You must give back the dead to the Earth, as it is the way of things. If your love dies inside of you, stillborn romance, it is a grotesque weight to carry around.



I WAS A TEENAGE SCAVENGER

You can remember how yesterday you were radiant with life and today, you're ashen. You'll go through the labor of things, as it is the way, and then return the ill-fated romance to the Earth. I knew a girl, once, who tried to carry a sad, dead thing to full term. Her skin turned green and maggots festered in her heart; her bed became a grave and there wasn't a priest on this Earth that could lay hands on her.

A long time ago griffon eagles devoured the corpse of a hiker within the hour of her fatal fall. It was very sad. It couldn't be prevented, no, not really, but perhaps we could have slowed it down. The Griffon Eagles are starved of their primary source of food, the carcasses of cattle, because we, humans, possess the dead. We own it and it isn't the way of things. We burn the bodies and never ask if they want a burial or cremation or to be food for scavengers.

Who gave us the right? So I'm saying.

We must return the dead to the Earth. It is the natural order of things.

We must give it back and surrender ourselves to the flow of the world. We must let go. Palms at heart center. We must let our dead hearts go. If it makes you ache, itch, burn inside to watch him move on, to watch her love someone else— return it to the Earth. Let her fall, let her rest and let the vultures have her.

If you're lucky, they'll be so starved and leave nothing but a pile of clothes, bones, and happy memories of when you were in love.

we name storms after people
because they are nature's
biggest disaster.



Kelly, J. is a hot mess.
She loves jalapeño potato chips.
She lives in Baltimore, Maryland.

the.importance.of.being.kelly@gmail.com