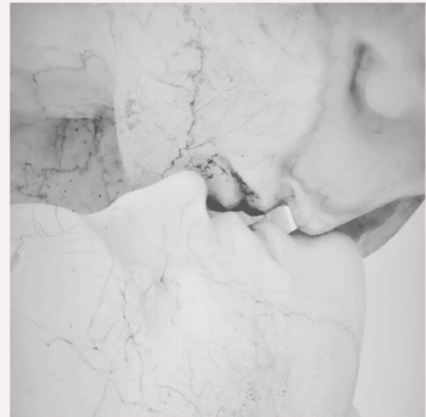


For You I Take a Breath



Kelli Anna

a collection of poetry

this poem was supposed to be about love
and it is if you read it as a letter
written on an overcast afternoon with rain
threatening and nothing to do but share
the loneliness with someone waiting
far away wondering and if you're ok

Love Letters

Part One: A Haunting of You

Xanadu Became the Sunrise

Devotions

Sin Stained Lips

Earth, Sea, and Sky

A Lover in Paris

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The Shape of Our Ache

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Full Moon

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First Read

The Good Girl

Good Morning on My Tongue

Persuade Me

Soft Love

Thank You for reading this offering of poetry

Part One:
A Haunting of You

{ For those who have housed a broken heart. In other words, for us all. }

let's go back
to the part where
you called me beautiful

Xanadu Became the Sunrise

Sometimes I wait and wait for you
to show me the cold places on my skin
with the warmth of your palms.
I wait for you to leave so I can
remember the emptiness of 4 am.
The universal hour of meeting
ourselves in the dark.

.

Kublai Khan built a summer paradise
of marble and gold where
falcons owned the trees.
Gilt dragons guarded Shangdu
and the sunrise of the winter solstice
shone through the inner city walls.
Khan's enemies torched his dream
and the stones and slate were stolen
for the walls and roofs of the town next door.
The artwork of Khan's majesty now
walls for the common man.

Xanadu fell to ruin, became the sunrise over the plains,
guarded only by cloud dragons breathing
out the gray smoke of low lying cumulus.

.

I wait in your paradise for the fall to ruin.
Made up and believing in optimal love,
when really I'll take what I can salvage.
Marble. Stone. Slate. A rich man's collection.
Whatever can be scraped from your absence.

the loneliness of 4am
no way to warm my skin
an unacknowledged winter sunrise
dragons in the clouds

I'll take it all to build my Xanadu from these bits of broken dreams.

Devotions

I won't mention the words
she wrote on her knees.
Words that landed on
your thigh and slept there
while the earth eclipsed the moon.

{ words I found while exhaling
devotion onto your skin }

I'll just hold my breath,
run my fingers over her sins,
and hope my tongue can
persuade you to stay.

Sin Stained Lips

I only confess on days when it's raining and
I'm sure it's raining somewhere.

My lips are sin stained,
I wear shame like a holey sweater.

I only wanted to dream with you.
To lie under your arm,
tucked in your hip,
night passing while we whispered
tomorrow's into the darkness.

I only wanted you to absolve me
of the years i spent not staring
into your eyes while hail mary's
coated my tongue like bitter medicine.

I confess I only wanted to dream
with you while the rain
beat the windows,
your arm heavy on my chest,
warming the very place I keep my sins.

Earth, Sea, and Sky

If I stood before you, wrists wrapped in flowering vines,
twisting to my shoulders, cascading to the floor,
in a dress sewn in the language of summer,
would you call me your poetry?

If my hair was washed in the sea, tied with kelp
and coral in salty waves waterfalling down my back,
like a nymph daughter of Poseidon,
would you call me your poetry?

If my skin was inked in the blue of galaxies,
freckled with a map of the constellations
to remind you that the stars were our first home,
would you call me your poetry?

If I was sun drenched and adorned with the
earth, sea, and sky, would that be beauty enough
for you to finally call me your poetry?

A Lover in Paris

When we're together
I'm careful to speak
no evil of her,
to keep her name off my tongue.

I claim you,
when I can have you,
heart and soul, yet
I know I can leave
no trace of myself.

I tell you that
I have a lover in Paris,
another in London,
a couple a subway
ride apart in New York.

{ You know the truth.
It's always only you. }

Tonight, you'll go back to her.
I'll drink black coffee until morning,

taking giant steps
away from you in my mind,
while my body
still calls you home.

At Arm's Length

I think what I'd like most
is for you to love me from afar.
Hold me at arm's length
a fingertip from touching.

Where my secrets exist
to be learned again and
again over days and years.

Nothing will ever have to
be done about the heart
you already hold, because

we'll never speak

of this thing that fills
the space, the infinite space
between our fingertips.

Yes, I think what I'd like most
is for you to love me from afar
where you'll never know how
rough my hands really feel.

Cold Spots

You dreamt of my hand
on the flesh of your arm
only to awaken to the warmth
of the morning sun's touch.

Perhaps I'd willed myself
to your bed and tugged
gently at your eyelids

to convince you I'd be next to you
when you opened them.

But there's only cold in the
spot where I will never be.

{ Did you dream yourself to me? }

Because I awakened to
the same cold spot in
another empty bed in
the same tease of morning sun

and felt you beneath my
closed eyelids
tugging gently.

A Haunting of You

I exist in a haunting of you.
Where your voice is an
attic scream I can't find,
echoing only through my mind.

Your touch an imagined graze
from a shadow on the
edge of my perception.

{ you were never really here }

Just balls of light and auras,
smoke and mirrors and slamming doors.

I would gather holy water and
a silver crucifix, chant prayers
of exorcism to these empty rooms,

{ but I like your imprint. }

I keep you though I
suspect I've created you,

{ a ghost of a love of my own }

fading in and out
next to my all too solid form.

Between Your Lines

I looked for you
in the lines
of your poetry.

I hunted for you
in the spaces between
your pretty words.

I rearranged the
letters to try
and form secret
messages meant
only for me.

Ultimately, I cried
out in anguish
when I realized
that there was nothing
for me to read
between your lines,

nothing but white space.

In the end
you remain a
stranger with cryptic
meanings my heart
cannot decipher.

Salt

I thought maybe you could
spare the time to love me,
even if only here in the dark,
away from the flickering
fluorescents of the cafe.

Slip a little attention my way,
like the Canadian pennies
you try to sneak to the clerk,
just to get them out of your pocket.

A few sideways looks,
a sleight of hand night in my bed.

Instead I'm standing in an empty lot
of gravel and highway noise,
with prayers on my tongue
and amens stuck in my throat.

Not even a backward glance from you.

I won't be unwanted change in your pocket.

I'll remember to keep my prayers sacred,
my amens on time,
for someone who looks back
even at the risk of turning to salt.

Forgotten Love

Love is made of forgotten days.
Lost time that lives deep in our bone marrow.

Love is precarious, slippery,
because so much of it
lives in what we can't remember.

I feel my love for you draining away
through moments I hold tightly,
broken by stories played on repeat.

Unconditional love must exist
in a dimension apart from memory
held tight in the forgotten things.

A Seashell if I Should Stay

words abandon moments on
hurricane lashed beaches
when the storm has passed
and the next moment is undecided

I'll close my eyes
open my palm

a water smoothed pebble for goodbye
a seashell if I should stay

{ let your heart choose }

place it gently

I watch you walk away
trying to make a cold stone
feel like a seashell

trying to make the end of the world
feel like forever

Another Message in a Bottle

Why am I still shoving messages into bottles
when the sea only takes them for her own,
swallows them in waves of apathy,
spitting out plastic and severed hands
from a world away?

Why am I still sending letters in code
when the code has been cracked
and I can no longer hide secrets
behind pretty runes?

{ caught between friendship and something that's not quite l o v e }

I walk the sand among bits
of plastic and severed hearts,

searching for a whole seashell
to put to my ear
in hopes you hid your truth there.

Love Language

I thought love should be soft,
the gentle rise of smoke rings
in a nearly dark room.

I thought love should be quiet,
the hush of used books
on a Tuesday morning shelf.

I thought love should sneak in
like the evidence of overnight rain
on wet streets sparkling with sunshine.

Instead love showed up hard,
second year Algebra in
a poet's composition book.

Love blew my mind with
a 50 mile an hour wind
that brought me to my knees.

Love was like releasing a genie
from a beautiful bottle on a night
when darkness kissed the windows.

{ I only got three wishes and the genie was full of trickery }

Love proved to be spoken in a language
I couldn't yet understand, but
enjoyed rolling around on my tongue.

Part Two:
The Shape of Our Ache

{ For those who believe in love that sits quietly in your chest and love that picks you up and spins you around in a whirlwind. For those who have hope in love that sleeps next to you and holds you gently. }

kiss me like fallen
berries kiss the ground -
hard, fast, and
in an explosion of color

The Shape of Our Ache

Let's lie a little longer
with pine needles
beneath our backs,
a musty wool blanket
providing warmth until
the sun rises against
the morning chill.

{ Last night lives in our
fingers barely touching. }

The beat of the moth and
the poetry of the moon
piercing the longing for
another who fits the
exact shape of our ache.

Any One of You

I believe I could love any one of you
on nights when I'm writing poems
to the white face of the dipping moon.

I can feel any one of you here
with your poetry and your books and your vinyl,
your scent just inches from midnight.

Eyes of sapphire or jade or dripping chocolate,
skin like lush vanilla or slow roasted coffee.

While I write poems to the clean white face of the moon,
your lines are only odes to the dark side,
where things are kept hidden.

I believe I could love any one of you
whose words carry me through unguarded moments
and stain everything blue with unguarded sadness.

It's raining again
and the cold is seeping in
we're out of bread
and I drank all the gin,
but the bed is warm
and there's room for two,
so answer me this,
can I belong to you?

I'd Rather Stay Home

Look

I never enjoyed things that might kill me
or leave my limbs in a sling.

like roller skates
or roller coasters
or skis
or cars

Just one misplaced second
and your knees are full of gravel
or you're upside down held
in place by a strip of fabric.

{ I know this makes me hard to love. }

It's hard to enjoy the ride when
you're in constant fear of failing breaks.

Maybe we can talk over a glass of wine,
take a walk through an early snow.
I'll even let you drive me home on wet streets
to a bed with clean sheets.

While I won't be next to you on the slopes,
I'll happily wait by the fire for you.
I'll be your break between downhill runs.

Warm and quiet when your hands are freezing.

Meet Me in Kyoto

Meet me in Kyoto -
I'll be waiting, book
of zen koans in hand.

You can find me by
following the sounds
of jealousy, believing

that maybe you wished it
were someone else waiting.
Someone bolder, someone beautiful.

{ the thoughts come without permission }

After all, we've never met
until this moment in Kyoto
beneath the cherry blossoms.

an embrace, so quick
a laugh, so shy
a walk, beneath the lanterns
while the mountains keep constant watch.

After hours of crushed pink sidewalks,
at last a rice paper room
a futon for two
sake scented breath
an embrace, lingering
while the silent shrines look away.

Harvest Moon

I saved the moonlight for you,
preserved in the cool October
rain that fell while you were away.

I persuaded the trees to wait
to peak just for us, asked the
harvest moon to fill your empty seat.
{ Where you sat with your leg against mine,
before the long days led you astray. }

I've saved just a hint of moonlight
upon my lips, should you ever
come back to claim it with a kiss.

Frost Bitten Dreams

Let me dream with you
on cold nights when
frost fronds climb
the window like
ghost ferns in search
of missing sunlight.

We'll dream of city lights,
mountain heights,
transatlantic flights,
all the ways well spend
our nights when the snow melts.

Tell me your fears,
I'll take them on.

Tell me your desires,
I'll make them mine.

Tell me every fantasy
you climb into when
reality is too much for you.

I'll hold them all
and mix in my own
until slivers of light
shine through the
tendrils of frost.

I'll hold you while you dream
more dreams to spill
into another freezing night.

The Oneness of Gravity

Footprints cast in wool and water
mark the place you stood naked,
dripping as the razor slid over
white foam cheek and chin.

My mirror image watched as
blood dripped from shaving cuts
as blood dripped from this body.

Water streaking down your legs,
blood meandering down mine.

Such a mix of god and goddess,
such a taste of a honeyed past cast
in amber light off the razor's blade.

We both shed water.
We both bleed downward.
We both stare into secondary eyes
to find the oneness of gravity.

For You I Take a Breath

I won't tell you how my
heart skips and stops
when your lungs stutter,

breath catching in the bronchi
like finely shattered bone.

How my love rests like
an apple slice in your palm,
at the mercy of your lips.

I won't let on how my mind
skips and skids when faced
with a future that forgets
the slip of your callused hand.

For you I square my shoulders.
For you I bow my head.
For you I take a breath.

{ for Marie and her Daniel }

Be My Lungs

sometimes there's no room
in the tight spaces
for my share of air

below the anxiety
around the palpitations

when I can't breathe in, please

be my lungs
be my breath
slow my heart
take my hands

take in what I need
and show me how to
open these tight spaces

show me how to
accept my share of air

No Sleep

I don't want to sleep.

I want to lie in your arms
and whisper truths
until the moon turns away,
until the sky grows pink
with the bashful lilt of
the new day eavesdropping
on every word we release
from the cage where we
thought they were safe.

Where they were slowly
crushing us under the weight
of our unwritten love poems.

Just One Night

Offer me your arms
for just one night
so that I might sleep.

For just one night
watch over the world as
it slips from my shoulders
pooling like silk on the floor.

Keep it safe while I dream
curled into your chest,
the gentle rise and fall
showing me how to accept
my share of oxygen.

Shelter me from worry,
{ for just one night }
hold me close to your heart
for just one night.

When I fall in love it will be for now. For as long as it lasts. For an hour, a day, a year. I will no longer think in lifetimes that change and shift and bend us into unrecognizable silhouettes of who we once were. For now can be more than enough.

Cottonwood

I'll follow you as cottonwood
seeds follow the wind.
May into June, sun into moon,
I will follow you through
green wood, to where the
river meets the field.
There I will lie with you
soft as cottonwood seeds
drifting over your skin,
light as a kiss in a new month.
May into June, I will breathe
you in like new life
in an old world.

Color Storm

Stay here with me.

The northern lights are trying to pull
truths from where I hid them when
the night still provided cover.

It's too much to withstand alone,
the force of this color storm,
and I was hoping you could
show me some of the ways
that you are broken too.

The sky tints our lips like absinthe
and a kiss may drive us mad,

but the ache between these
fingertips barely touching
will do nothing to bring us
closer to the scent of
me flowing across your skin,

to the feel of good morning
resting lightly against your lips.

Enough

I'm afraid to stand half naked
in a well lit room
with today still on my skin
wildfires and clover,
the weight of lifetimes
written in silver pen.

Would a taste of honeydew lips
be enough to make you not see?

Could I distract you with my touch?

If I knelt to beg you not to look,
your hands gripping my waist,
could you pretend I'm small
enough to satisfy you?

Would the lust on my breath be enough?

If I slept in your arms after,
our hearts slowed to a steady,
shared beat, would that be enough
to make you see the beauty in
the way I wear these scars?

No Explanation

I'll offer no explanation
for being yours without exception.

If my shape could fit
the dip of your hip,
I'd slip in against your chest.
Rising with your breath as you rest

a hand lightly on my back,
just above the crack

of moonlight spilling
in under the blind.

This wasn't supposed to be love,
but it was the wine, the way
your words moved through mine,
that held me fast like the knot
of a silken sash around
delicate wrists, as your lips...

We'll leave it there with your
hands in my hair. We'll say no more
as our sweat hits the floor.
You'll need no more explanation
to know I'm yours without exception.

Hold Me Tonight

I trace your veins
like flower stems
bending toward
my fingerprints

downstairs Tracy Chapman
sings about the right
words at the right time

the last streetlight
blinks on falling
over your back
like the easy fall of
my legs over your hips

like the easy rhythm of
the ballad your body
sings against my mine

Part Three:
Slow Hands

{ For those who believe in soft love, slow hands, and
streetlights throwing shadows on bare skin. }

you're like mocha on my tongue
smooth with a hint of chocolate
sweet, warm, with the feel
of being just a little naughty

Streetlights

I've had to choose a new muse
for nights when streetlights
play heavily against my skin.

For nights when I imagine
the shadows to be a waiting lover.

I've had to replace the memory of
the every once in awhile whose
fingers danced across my hips,
but who's lips could never whisper love
into the hollows of a collarbone.

Let my new muse be gentle
with a touch like a feather
brushing my inner thigh,
with his breath a sigh
against the curve of my neck,

his body resting lightly
over mine while the
streetlights play against his shoulders
and the shadows look away.

Rain of Roses

My hands are sticky with secrets
harvested from the rain of roses,
inky red and smooth
trailing down his back.

I was never meant for the
scent of his garden,
was never supposed to
stop and smell his roses.

It was an afternoon stroll
past a garden shed,
an exchanged word
over the bumblebee buzz.

Later, evenings on picnic
blankets stacked three
deep, hidden among
the red petal bushes.

Summer sweat
hands wet from
the rain of roses
down his back.

These roses are not without thorns.
but the beauty is worth the pain.

Sea Billows

Tangled folds of white cotton.
A bare leg, a sun shadowed hip
escaping from the night.

Outside the sea billows,
racing toward the sand
again and again embracing the beach.

Here the sheets shift, you
reaching toward my hand
again and again embracing sleepy skin.

Wave after wave after wave
until the tide moves out again.

Beach Glass

I smell the salt in your skirt
from the breeze off the bay
where you walked in search
of the colored glass lining
the windowsill behind your
head. The sun catches your
laughter, suspends it in a ray
of light. Your skin smells
of the sea and sandalwood,
tastes like the rim of a margarita
glass. A foghorn in the distance
echoes the moans
guiding me home.

Breath of the Wild

I'm filled with
the breath of the wild

an animal hunger
to penetrate your defenses
with the piercing sting
of my d e s i r e

to drag you to my den
and toy with you
before you collapse in
a breathless twitching heap

I'm filled with
the breath of the wild
but lucky for you
I'm afraid to e x h a l e

Slow Hands

his same slow hands
that soothed a soul
his hands that sang
like a song around a waist

could they sit softly
on the small of a back
while his smile sits snug
in the hollow of a collarbone

could they flirt with an undoing
of buttons and breath
raising goosebumps on
skin bereft of soft kisses

could he relax into
the softness of arms
waiting on a waning afternoon

to wrap around and will
that his soul be soothed
by the slow hands of surrender

No Conditions

Is there love that exists
in illogical ways,
in hearts that don't care
about time and space?

Love that says:
your eyes are all that matter
hold my heart and don't let go

touch me in all the places no one
cared enough to touch

Is there love that exists purely
in the electricity building
between your chest and mine?

Can love exist in this unconditional space?

You Are My Poetry

All I want to write about
is the contour of your hip bones
where they meet my own.

The color of your shoulder
sliding beneath my fingerprints
leaving evidence of me
over every inked inch of you.

My body is open to you.

My legs longing to wrap around
and bring you in deeper
while your mouth never
lets me forget the way desire tastes.

I can't write poems when all
I can write is your name
over and over beneath my
fingertips in gentle circles
of unwritten poetry.

Full Moon

The darkness of the new moon
lingers between the places where
your body once met with mine,
when you rose to fill to fill my
heavy sky you claimed each night.

Waxing slowly through the phases
to the climax of the light.

With our waning breath and
morning slipping in,
you slip out into the dawn,
leaving me alone to wait
until the full moon rises again.

Liquid Desire

drench me in your downpour
let me feel the full weight
of your cathartic cloudburst
soaking lips, chest, hips
run in rivulets over my skin
fluid fingers tracing a topography
that thirsts for the
intensity of your tempest,
that willingly drowns in
puddles of your liquid desire

First Read

I'm envious of the book
resting across your lap

the way you cradle the spine
as if the paper were precious

the way the pages sigh
beneath your rough fingers

I want nothing more than to
be the story that holds you rapt

to let you open me gently
and read me for the first time

I want my words to slip
between yours like
water around stones
your hard verse welcoming
the liquid nature of my rhymes
the way I flow without form
through the shape of your lines

The Good Girl

i've never wanted less to be a good girl
to mind my manners
keep my hands to myself
cover up c h a s t e l y
what I'm dying to e x p o s e
to hold my tongue when
it wants to wander over
your cold hard truths

i've never wanted less to be a good girl
who does what she's told
never gets h i g h
or drinks more than one glass
to avoid losing control
and spilling s e c r e t s into your mouth

i've never wanted less to be a good girl
pink and v i r g i n a l with
legs tightly closed against
your penetrating stare
against your ink stained hands

strip the good girl from me
button by button kiss by kiss

get me high
pour the wine
open the thigh
cross the line

i'll be your good girl
if it gets you off
but my white dress is soiled
with v u l g a r words
and your mouth is full of my name

Good Morning on My Tongue

Your scent wrapped in sleep
is like good morning on my tongue.

It's the Sunday crossword, strong
coffee, and sunlight through
a crack in the curtain hitting
a spot just above your hip bone.

I want to be filled with you
like ink filling the squares,
like coffee filling the cup,
like the curtains full of sunshine.

You smell just like good morning
and I could linger forever
in the whisper of your sleeping breath.

Persuade Me

persuade me with your mouth
pass your lies onto my tongue

persuade me from your knees
whispering pleas against my thigh

persuade me with just a fingertip
tracing your name on hidden skin

persuade me again and again

until the screaming stops and
your arm rests softly
like the night against
my still trembling hips

Soft Love

Sometimes can't it be soft, this love?

Can't it drift like river ripples,
bloom like pink petals?

Can't it be a peach skin love
like velvet under your fingers?

I want to be softly under you,
legs entwined while your chest
rests against mine.
Hip to hip as you move

{ oh so slowly }

I think sometimes it can be soft, this love.

I think it can melt like fine chocolate
against your tongue against mine,
caress like the first summer breeze,
like the whisper of your name on my breath.

Thank You for reading this offering of poetry

If you would like to read more of my writing, you can find me here:

By Kelli Anna



I really hope you enjoyed this collection of poetry exploring love that feels good, that hurts, and that has inspired poetry for as long as there have been poets.



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