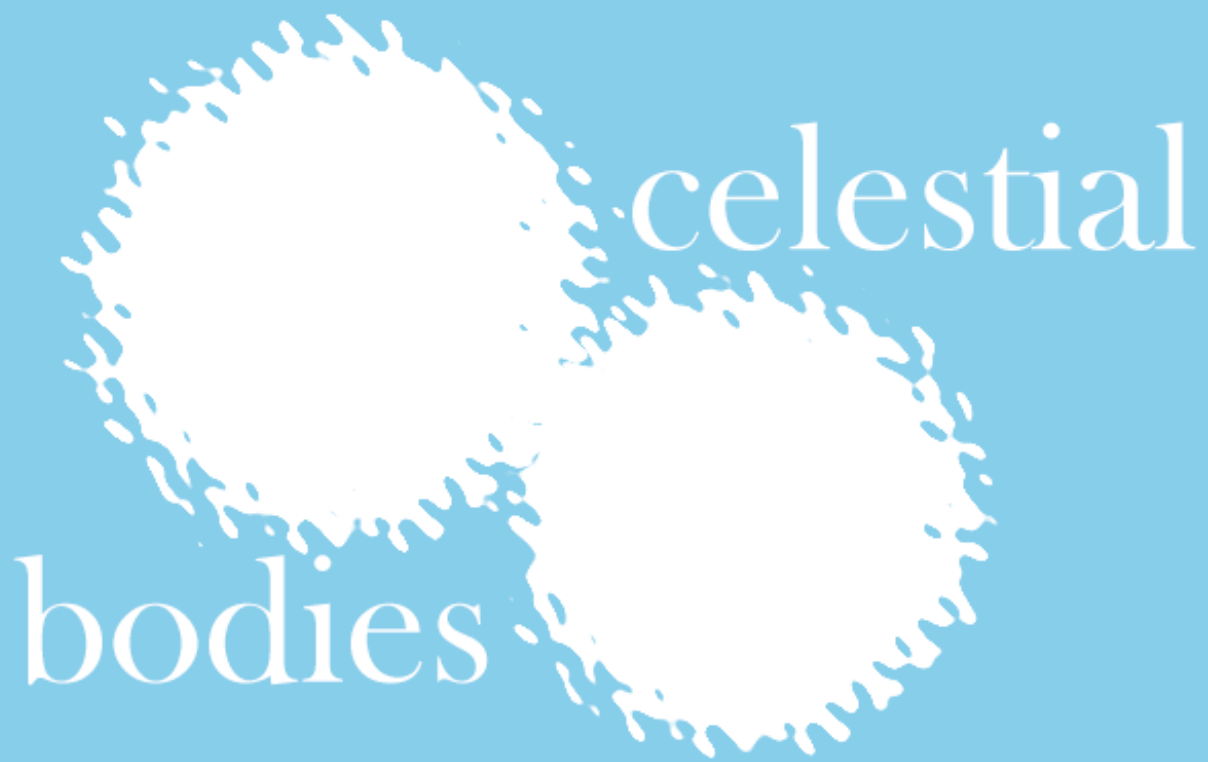


these



celestial

bodies

caitlin gaudio

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Edited by Nadia Gerassimenko

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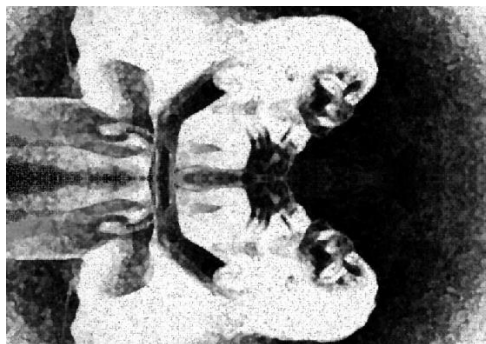


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It still haunts me

You used to look at me
Like I hung the moon
And stars

But now
When your eyes encounter mine
I see torrential rain
And cracks of lightning
In a dark sky

I realize I will never again spend holidays
In the tropics of your irises

And I lose the pieces of myself
That ever believed
Love
Could be enough

I hope I still mean something to you.

There is a nebula in your irises

It is with perfect clarity
I can recall
The way your eyes look
With sunlight glaring off the white snow
Cushioning the ground

I can trace the pattern of your gaze
As it transverses
The pages of your parents' old books
Covers worn like sun baked leather

The paper crinkles like the lines
Around your lashes
When I get your surly lips
To curl up at the corners

It's almost scary
When you look at me
Like no one in the universe
Could ever be as lovely

To be the sole focus of your attention
Would create a great temporal rift
In the universe

When I look at you,
I swear my eyes must blaze like Altair
Because you are the place
Stars are born

Lux et veritas

We were sitting in the back of your parents' car
Pressed like books on a shelf
And coursing between us was
The nervous energy vibrating inside my bones

Connecticut may as well have been another universe to me
But I hitched on to you
And managed to experience its full magnitude
Through edacious eyes

I was caught in a meteor shower of tradition
Wondering what astral body
I wished upon to end up here

Your kiss still felt
Like something I'd dreamed
In the middle of a New Haven courtyard
At dusk

I want to write us a chronicle
As old and rich as this university
So one day
When someone digs up the remains of my life
They hear your name
Falling off my abiding tongue

Your love was the oars

I don't remember
The first time I told you
I love you
Perhaps it was because
We both already knew

I do remember
The first time you told me
You missed me
I was fascinated you managed
To drop an anchor in my water

I was convinced it had long frosted over
But you rowed through the waves
Until you reached me
Resurfacing every time you capsized
From my blustering blows

Now I've got nowhere left to flee
You've stolen the option
To bury my feelings
At the bottom of the sea

I could make constellations out of the freckles on your shoulders

I love you like the air
In my lungs needs to be released:
With burning immediacy
And comfortable familiarity

I amass memories
Like sprinkled stars
Splayed out across the midnight blue

I use my finger to trace paths
Between the isolated embers
Reminding me of the person
Whose skin I know
Better than my own

I wish I could zip open your flesh
Climb inside the open cavity
And understand the language of its anatomy
Fill in the empty parts

I need you pressed against my skin
When the cold breath of winter
Is licking up the base of my spine
For, even the waves rolling off the sun
Balk in comparison to your robust heat

I'm not ready to lose you

I'm afraid of the dark
And things I cannot see

I'm afraid of the ocean
And its ability to swallow me

I'm afraid of distance
And afraid of time

And if
As it passes
You will still be mine

You are a fire

The smell of campfire gave me false sense of security
A reminder of fall
When we didn't have impending separation on our minds

Under the suffocation of summer heat
We were both fully committed
To living in this fantasy we constructed around ourselves

I submerged myself in the ocean of your eyes
And continued to pick myself up
Every time a rough wave took my legs out from under me

We spent endless days in the sand
As I read stories that were not ours
And tried to escape reality
If only for a moment

When August came
A certain darkness cast over me
Like clouds of thick smoke
Forging dizzy paths into the sky
As they curled off charred logs

I'm trying to smother
Our uncharted hereafter
But circumstance acts as kindling
And neither of us knows how to fix this mess we've created

My hands are blistered
From clutching the escape ladder
Your flames flirt with the fragile rope
Blazing ruthlessly and searing your mark
Into the places you've been
Blackening everything your carelessness touches

It's your birthday, I can't even cry if I want to

For weeks,
I obsessed over finding the perfect present
One physical object that would convince you
Things between us were still okay

From where I stand,
Immobilized,
Afraid one sudden movement will bring this all down,
It feels like you're slipping away
And some idealistic part of me thinks this can be fixed
With one perfect gift

So I boxed up all my expectations
Tied neatly together with a green bow
Adjusting it over and over
Until it looked as perfect as the happy face
I composed after a night of pointless fighting

You and I had long become
Convincing actors in this scene
Where everything is always fine

But I believe,
Too soon,
One of us will say something that can't be taken back
And, like the fragile tissue paper
Stuffed inside my little box,
There will be creases too deep to smooth out
And we won't be able to pretend things haven't changed

You tore us into a million pieces
But still
Confetti of what we used to be
Won't stop swirling around my head

After you pried open the box with care
And untied the bow with nimble fingers
I could feel your arms snake around my waist

Equally unwilling to let us go

As you buried your face in the dip of my collar

I love you brushed against my skin

Packing my insecurities deeper into the discarded box

And allowing me to believe

You could still love me like before

Did I leave my heart in a silver CRV?

A teacher of mine once told me:
Never date a boy without a car
You weren't yet seventeen at the time
So I prepared myself to wait

The day you offered me a ride home
And climbed behind the wheel of your first car
I knew I was in trouble
Because it only took
The first few minutes of our journey
For the secrets I'd been bottling up
For half a year
To tumble into the airspace between us

The energy sparking off us
Would have jumpstarted
Your car battery from the dead
The intensity could have lit up miles
Of our suburban streets

(That was the first time I wanted to kiss you)

Over time,
I made your car my abode
Settled into its soft seats
And claimed the passenger side
As my rightful throne

On late nights
We got in the car out of habit
And drove
Accelerating to catch
Hands on the clock
And flying blindly
With no repose

The dashboard knew me better than a diary
From all the confessions I'd spoken

And our hands intertwined on the console
Overpowered gravity

But as expected,
Eventually,
We ran out of gas
And I became a stranger in my refuge

Terse conversation filled the space
Until we were choking on all the words we'd said
Our drive was not aimless
You were retracing our regular routes
And rewinding history we'd written

When you dropped me off at home
For the last time
I had almost gotten myself to believe
That after this ride
You would no longer be mine

*I hope you failed every exam
You took that week
Because you couldn't stop thinking
The answer to your problems
Was not A or B or C
But me*

What if I am just an empty space?

You seared your mark in so many places
It's difficult to collect
The pieces of myself that
Remain unscathed

Now I cringe away
From the most integral parts of myself
As if my cells were swapped for another's
As if they didn't remain at all

I don't know how to feel beautiful
Or smart
Or strong
Because the only time I ever believed
I was any of those things
Was when I was hearing
Your velvet praises
Pressed into my tender neck
And seeing my own value
Reflected in your pining eyes

You loved me more
Than I ever could
And now I don't know
How to be enough anymore

Hello? Operator?

You never left a voicemail
On my phone
And part of me is glad
I can't dial your voice
Late at night

I wonder how it would sound
Pressed beside my ear
Insidious and intimate
Snaking past the stapes, incus, and malleus of my inner ear
Rumbling my skull

Would your words sound detached?
Like the stiff dialect of anonymous speech
Teaching me Spanish through school headphones

Would your tone be harsh?
Biting like the snowflakes
Sizzling on my raw cheeks

Would the sweetness of your dialect
Hang heavy over my skin
Like a sticky coating?

Maybe it would be better for me
To dictate your digits to my phone
Allow myself to hear the impersonal rejection
Of your own voicemail box
So the electronic beeping can overwrite
Lingering thoughts of your timbre

I wonder if your GPS ever leads you back to me

For years,
My soul was your favorite driving route
Like the back roads of our small town
You could trace from memory
On the expanse of my back

Now it's been months since we've spoken
And I think you'd get lost
In the detours
My grieving mind has constructed

Although my territory is unfamiliar
You are not yet a foreigner

It's been too long since
The sonance of your name
Has rung in my ears
The syllables that once sounded
More natural than my own
Now feel alien on my tongue

In some ways,
It feels like
You were never here

I pull my curtains shut
Every morning
As if they will block out
The daily thoughts of you
As well as they block out
The glare of the overzealous sun

But, I see fleeting fragments of you
In the periphery of my vision
And in the forefront
Of my unconscious
A realm much happier than this one
Where we still exist somewhere

Other than my memories

I can't move

From this perdition

For my gears are stuck

Somewhere between reverse and neutral

I've become a bricklayer

I get so lost in my own head,
Fortified like a garrison,
I forget
There is anything outside

The configuration of my atoms
Which you helped foster
Has since rearranged
Into something built up
By layers of asperity

I don't know how to handle
The erupting emotions
Festering inside me
So I strip away the segments
That remember what it's like to feel

My memory only functions
To make me an amnesiac
Because I must block any recollection
From my mind
In order to keep the rest of my body systems
Running

You cannot wound a person
Even with the sharpest of arrows
If they cannot be reached at all

You destroyed me
And this is the only way
I know how to get better

A bang or a whisper?

You told me
I would shut down
When you left

Because I have a tendency
When things go wrong
To implode in the fashion of a dying star
A stellar-mass
Pulling in negativity like a storm surge
And obliterating any remaining light

Do you ever wonder
If I fulfilled your prophecy?
Or do you choose to believe
You inflicted no harm?
Because I refuse to show you
The wreckage you've created

If I go silently
Will it be as if I never existed at all?

QuickCheck is now the source of my anxiety

After last night,
I wondered what made me feel that way,
You or the coffee

Because my unstable hands spilled
The contents of my cup
Over the long grey sleeve of my sweater,
And I could feel my palpitating heart
Beating too hard
Against the brittle bars of my ribs

It felt like intoxication,
Seeing you,
But the blood pumping through my system was clean
Neither substance considered a drug
Yet each had the most addicting effect

I felt alive for a moment
Under the luminosity of the moon
And naively believed the feeling would last

All night was spent coughing
But the tickle in the back of my throat was you
Struggling to leave my lungs

And the sickness in my stomach was dread
Because I knew you well enough to know
When morning came
You'd disappear again

I planted your seeds

You ripped your roots
Out of the garden I tended
And thought you could grow
Without the nutrients
You forgot I provided

But when you extracted the bits of soil
That serve as my memory
You found more barren parts in yourself
Than you had anticipated

You haven't found a way to be satisfied
With the salt of those
Who hope for you to wilt
When you can't give them what they need

My rainfall became your sustenance
And now you come back to beg for drops
Sapping me of what little I have left
Because you know I was never able
To leave you unfulfilled

You know your place in my garden remains upended
And so, we are fated to repeat
This growing cycle
Every year
At the changing of the sun

A new organ has since replaced my heart

This time
I love you
In a bitter kind of way
Unfamiliar to me

I rid myself of feelings
So you can't see my unprotected parts;
Without the traces of vulnerability
You won't know where to jab your poisonous barb

There's a monster inside my chest
Scraping at the tissue
And waiting for its opportunity to destroy you
Make you just as broken as me

Now I can't stop wondering
If I spent too long viewing you as the enemy
To ever let you be my partner again
And I question why we're doing this

Is this what coming home feels like?

My heart hurts
And for the first time
In a long time
It is because you are not
In bed with me tonight
And not because
You feel a galaxy away

In a few weeks
We will see
If our love is stronger
Than just nostalgia
Or if giving this another try
Is simply a consolation prize

The hardest thing about our story

Months ago you told me
Love isn't always enough
That's my line
But I never truly believed it
Until the words were escaping your unapologetic mouth

Still, I can't help but think
Ethereal fates are working with us
Because of how
We keep getting pulled to one another
Lost in the strength of each other's gravity
No matter how far we've distanced ourselves

Maybe one day
Things will be different
And we will be
Exactly what the other is seeking

Right now
You're too selfish to care about anyone
More than you care about yourself
And I'm too weak to make tough decisions
Especially when it comes to you

I've found closure
In the impossibility of us reconciling our differences
But I still haven't found a way
To find happiness that isn't tied to you

I never did have your appetite

Do you want to grab dinner?

What could be the harm?

This time we'll break bread

Instead of illusions

And maybe share secrets with only our looks

Finding intimacy that comes along

With public places and a familiar crowd

I thought it would be nice to catch up

Like I don't already know

The words forming in your mouth

As if they were carved into the planes of your face

Right in front of me

You'll be surprised by how well I still know you

Because you were busy looking away

Every time I paid attention

Why don't you order dessert?

We may as well drag out

The courses of this meal

Like we did our relationship

Staying until long past due

You picking up the check

Can't settle the debt between us

Our history hangs like stuffy coats

Across the back of broken chairs

Nevertheless I'm sat here

Ordering another round of drinks

Because of unceasing curiosity to see

If there is yet another way

To sabotage what's left of you and me

*I wonder:
Will we always be stuck
In this endless orbit?
Never quite able to keep each other
Or keep ourselves apart
Both left with feelings
That will only cause us pain*

This is me letting you go

It's quiet
And that's strange
Because this place was made for noise
For blowing whistles
Cheers rippling through a crowd
And the thud of colliding bodies

Uninhabited
This place feels like something else
A sacred place
Where I am finally understood
By silence of the night

This is my favorite place
Where I feel the rhythm of heartbeats not mine
And I am more than just one
A pinpoint of light in a faraway constellation

Memories of an earlier time flood my mind
The first of November three years ago
When the world around us swayed on its feet
And the only thing still standing was you

We were different people then
And, in visiting this worn out ground,
I realize there is a reason
We don't put broken things back together

Still,
It's nice to think that,
Like the long dead stars still burning in the sky,
We exist somewhere
In this very spot
So long after our light has been snuffed out

Seventy-two will always remind me of you.

Caitlin Gaudio is an undergraduate student at Marist College in Poughkeepsie, New York. After graduating with honors, she plans to pursue a career in the health sciences. Caitlin has a lifelong passion for literature and various forms of creative writing. She resides in the Northeast region of the United States.