

# Whatever a Sun Will Always Sing

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It was always Lyra, even when it wasn't. Even when it wasn't allowed - maybe especially then. Timing was never on our side - there was never really an "us" to speak of. And yet, she was the first woman I ever loved, the first person who helped me see who I truly was, the first person I came out to.

I shifted uncomfortably on the train station bench and looked down at my watch. 4:50. Ten more minutes.

It's funny the way life repeats itself - we met because I accidentally signed up for a class that she TA'd - Shamanism In Modern Cultures. Accidentally, or absent-mindedly, stubbornly - whatever you want to call it - as I intended to take a statistics course, but clicked the wrong link during registration. I have a bad habit of glossing over the subject lines of articles, emails, whatever - so didn't notice the error until I opened my schedule to look up the room number on the first day of class. I was overwhelmed with embarrassment when I walked into the classroom, knowing I was in the wrong place, feeling like everyone would see me as an outsider. But it was that stubbornness that drove me to go - I had never missed a day of class before and despite the mistake, I wasn't going to miss this one.

At first, Lyra's eyes were what drew me in. She had the most defined crinkles around her eyes, despite only being a couple of years older than me. When she looked at me, I could feel kindness radiating from her and it wasn't just that I felt warm - I felt safe, welcomed. Later, it was in the way she built a community of love around her. She would talk about the power of community during her lectures, her eyes igniting. She taught us that even a Shaman, often misunderstood to be an isolated individual, was in fact surrounded by spirits - was made whole by their connection to realms beyond our understanding. It was this otherworldly community that gave the Shaman their power to heal.

And she taught me that even a queer kid who grew up misunderstood, resistant against her own truth, was connected to a community of countless individuals who were fighting to find each other, to find their home.

There would never be an us now, a fact I had accepted years ago. I was only at the station as a form of closure, the end to my grieving. After today, I would untangle myself from her memory. After today, I would be able to think of her fondly, but not as someone whose heart I carried with mine. I would sit on this bench, watch the clock hit 5pm, and then go on to live my life.

Except, as I looked down at my watch, it was 5:30.

Three years before we were supposed to meet here - Lyra was in a car accident. I was eating lunch when I found out. It was such an ordinary day, I was back stateside. I happened to grab a newspaper - saw the article title, saw the picture of her car, the rainbow bumper sticker. How do you prepare for news like that?

We had already lost touch by then - it was my fault. I had drafted a few texts to her after I got back, but part of me was waiting for her to reach out first. We had decided it would be romantic to wait, to make a commitment to come back to each other. So I stubbornly told myself that by not reaching out, I was doing the right thing.

I didn't lose her first, I lost my phone. I lost pictures, texts, her number.

Typical me. The data wasn't recoverable and after changing carriers, I lost my number. But I could have found her. I could have, but I hesitated. And then, it was too late.

Losing her was unquantifiable.

I don't remember what her lips felt like, but I pretend to. I close my eyes, Lyra is in her office, laughing while she kicked her legs up onto her desk, sipping black coffee from her elephant mug. Her first two fingers are curved around the trunk shaped handle, her thumb pointed outward expressively. I picture her hair - too short to tuck behind her ear. I tried once, I reached across her desk and drew my fingers behind her ear - the look of surprise in her incandescent eyes.

She kissed me first that day. I don't know why that's important, but it always has been. She kissed me and I unravelled. I try to freeze on that moment, try to let the spirit out of my remembering body, travel through time to feel that kiss just once more. I try so hard not to remember what came next.

It's 5:45, now. Why is it 5:45?

The problem was that we were both on scholarships. The bigger problem was that neither of us had anywhere else to go if we lost those scholarships and the university had an unbending rule on relationships between students and instructors.

Lyra kissed me first, but she pulled away before I could kiss her back. I opened my eyes, searching for her lips and saw that the crinkles in her eyes were gone and she was afraid. She wasn't looking at me. I turned to follow her gaze. There, in the doorway, was Lyra's supervisor.

He could have said nothing. It would have been so easy for him to just forget the moment, move on. We thought he liked Lyra well enough.

But we were notified the next day - an academic warning pending an investigation. We were forbidden to speak and I was removed from her class. Later, when the school deemed us sufficiently punished and our scholarships were safe once more, we made a promise. I was graduating soon and making plans to move to Tanzania for the Peace Corps, Lyra was staying to complete her Masters and then her Doctorate. There just wasn't time to resolve what was going on between us. What's five years? I said. Lyra smiled, and I felt cold.

But it was 6pm now. Five years and one hour since we last spoke. Five years and one hour since we hugged goodbye. Four since I lost my phone. Three since I lost her for good.

Too many days spent loving a ghost. It's 6:01 now. I stood up, what else was there to do but go?

But then -

"Changed your mind?" An impossible voice said. A spirit.

My body froze, my heart pounded against my chest, my fingertips grew ice cold.

"Estee." The impossible voice said. Her voice.

I turned.

There she was, Lyra, with her crinkles. My body thawed at the sight of her.

Her hair was so long now, so curly. And the wheelchair. What happened? Black shapes started to cloud my vision and I all but collapsed back into the bench.

"Estee." Lyra's voice said again with concern. She wheeled her chair closer and reached her hand out to mine and squeezed. She was real. Lyra.

"How are you here right now?" I managed.

"You made me promise! That and they have ADA ramps." Lyra laughed, so whimsical and light. But self-conscious too; her fingers tapped nervously against the wheels, as if waiting for judgement.

"But...you died."

“Says who?”

“The car accident - I saw an article, a picture of the wreck...” I was rambling now, did it even matter?

“Oh, Estee...” Her eyes darkened and I could feel her grief. “I, I wasn’t driving that day. I wasn’t the one who died...I got lucky.” She gestured to the chair. “The reporter got it wrong and I wasn’t really up for correcting them.”

Her other hand was still on top of mine. I squeezed it.

“You’re here.” I stuttered through tears. “You’re here. I’m so sorry. You’re here.”

Lyra pulled my arm towards her. She kissed me and all I could taste was salt. I kissed her back and pressed myself closer. We kissed and cried and I couldn’t believe I had ever forgotten the way her lips felt. Then the tears became too much and we were hugging, clinging to each other's clothes, needing to fill the gap of all this time apart.

I opened my eyes and looked down at my watch, 6:04pm.

“You still came.” Lyra whispered into my ear.

“I made us both promise.” I replied, hoping she felt the weight of my words.

“I tried calling you.” Lyra said, hesitant.

My fingers felt icy all over again and I loosened my grip on her back.

“I lost my phone a while ago and had to change my number.”

“But then...why were you leaving?” Lyra backed out of our hug, she looked at me shyly, glanced down at her chair again, then leaned her forehead onto mine.

“I mean, you weren’t supposed to be here. I wasn’t planning on waiting this long.” I was here to give you up for good, I thought. My throat tightened and my head swirled with so many conflicting emotions. How could I have let myself lose hope?

“This long? How early did you get here?” Lyra asked, her palms held my face as her thumbs brushed some of my tears away.

“I got here just before 5, like we promised. You’re the one who is late.” I whispered.

Lyra burst out laughing. Tears were still streaming down her face but she was so bright. I watched her joy, curious, taking in every inch of her face then tucked a curl behind her ear.

“You said to meet here at six, or did you forget?” Lyra finally said.

My mouth was open, speechless. Six. I said to meet here at six.

“Typical me.” I replied as I leaned in to kiss her again.