

Berries for Summer

Part I. Watermelon June.

Being in self-imposed isolation during quarantine has turned my thoughts into a gush of overflowing, sweet, sweet punch.

The tiny desk. The couch. The endless streaming shows humming in the background like air-conditioning. None of them really distract me. They merely provide scenery for whatever mental film is already playing inside my head.

So, when summer began creeping in and sunscreen became less of an option and more of a survival tactic, I started taking longer walks around the neighborhood my parents happened to buy our house in. Busy streets. Loud cafés. Apartment balconies dripping with laundry and stale Cedars cigarettes. A deeply urban area trying very hard to look alive, the upper middle class flaunting its best.

During those walks, I began finding memories splattered everywhere.

That's the strange thing about streets — their objectivity. Their refusal to care. The same corner where you once got a sloppy blowjob might also be where soldiers cracked open a protestor's skull 3 months earlier. Cities hold everything without discrimination. Desire. Violence. Shawarma wrappers. Revolutions. Teenagers in love. Men dying alone in ambulances.

It puts things into perspective in the most unsettling way possible.

Mostly, this summer, I've been thinking about possibility.

What if?

What could have been?

Why not?

There is one summer I keep circling back to during these walks. Mind you, I am rarely sober while taking them. The pills crushed into my coffee keep my thoughts spiralling beautifully and dangerously, like a pink and white carousel with loose screws.

Maybe quarantine finally cornered me into confronting myself. No more distractions dressed as metaphorical healing sessions disguised as figuring things out.

Is this the part where I become a man?

And if so, does anyone have the fucking manual?

I remember the summer I spent with her.

It was hot in every possible dimension.

She lived close by. I was in college with too much time on my hands and not enough emotional maturity to deserve the freedom I had. I liked wine. She became the same. I liked witty arguments. She tried her best. I liked excess, late nights, loud bars and expensive-looking things neither of us could continue to afford. She accommodated all of it with alarming tenderness.

She was kind.

I was not.

Back then, I didn't understand how important that distinction would eventually become.

At the time, I believed commitment was essentially love dressed for a cult meeting. Once two people got serious, I thought love put on its Nike Decades and covered itself with a purple cloth. I told her that once, half-joking, fully serious. We were all trying so desperately to be emotionally objective back then. Detached. Rational. Like if we intellectualized intimacy hard enough, we could somehow avoid being destroyed by it.

Our summer started in her kitchen.

She wore a ridiculous tiger onesie. I was dressed like every mildly narcissistic twenty-something guy who thinks half-tint sunglasses indoors make him look mysterious instead of emotionally avoidant.

She cooked some yoghurt-based lunch while I sat on the kitchen counter pouring rum and coke into plastic cups. Beige cabinets. Brown countertops. Sunlight hitting her face through the window blinds. She moved around the kitchen with the kind of casual domesticity that immediately makes emotionally damaged men nervous.

We talked about love.

Commitment.

Families.

The future.

All the things people discuss casually before accidentally ruining each other.

"Have you ever thought about your ideal partner?" I asked her.

I wasn't even flirting. I was genuinely curious about everything that had to do with her.

"I have an idea," she said carefully. "Why?"

I laughed.

"I actually have a list."

"A written list?"

“Yeah.”

“You’re a weird guy. Check.”

I started listing the qualities I wanted in someone and slowly realized, with growing discomfort, that she fit almost all of them.

Almost.

“You’re short, though, not check.” I joked.

She rolled her eyes dramatically.

“Well,” she replied, trying very hard to sound casual, “my ideal guy probably has most of those qualities too.”

Then, after a pause:

“He has to fit in with my family.”

The way she said, man...

Fuck romance, it just sounded so sincere.

“Yeah,” I said. “That matters.”

I think something began there.

Not love.

Not yet.

But curiosity with a flame underneath it.

June became ours very quickly after that.

We spent entire weeks bar-hopping through the city, leaving clubs drenched in sweat and perfume and reapplied deodorant. We drank more rosé than water. We ordered food we barely touched. We built ourselves a glossy little bubble made entirely of attraction, alcohol, humidity and denial.

And throughout all of it, I remained fully convinced that I did not actually like her.

Which is hilarious now.

The most convincing liars are often people trying desperately to deceive themselves.

June was pink, white and red.

Watermelon on the beach.

Coconut oil.

Salt on skin.

The strangely comforting warmth of cold shower water after coming back from the beach.

Wet hair.

Shared strawberry shower gel.

Long drives with all the windows down and her car's AC on blast.

Once, we decided to make sangria together.

I'm thinking about that now while standing beneath her old building during one of my walks. Told you she lived close. I swallow another pill dry and keep moving.

Anyway, the sangria.

What mattered wasn't the drink itself. It was the fact that we wanted everyone there. Our friends. Loud music. Summer spilling across the apartment. She loved creating little temporary families around herself. Looking back, I think she desperately wanted stability and mistook me for someone capable of giving it to her.

Poor girl.

At the supermarket, we laughed constantly.

I accidentally shattered the first bottle of rum I picked up.

She ran away while I chased her through the aisles with the shopping cart, trying to hit her ass with it. She threw Kinder Eggs at me. We made fun of everyone around us: exhausted mothers, screaming children, old men aggressively tapping watermelons like they contained spiritual answers.

At one point, I nearly dropped another bottle.

She grabbed it from my hands carefully and placed it into the cart.

Then she touched my wrist absentmindedly.

She was always touching me.

Small touches.

Nothing dramatic.

The kind that slowly rewires your nervous system before you realize it's happening.

And gradually, somewhere between supermarket fluorescent lights and rosé-soaked nights, my curiosity about her transformed into desire.

Not raw physical desire either. Something softer and far more dangerous.

I wanted to exist inside the strange little world we were building together, the watermelon-colored one where everything felt sunlit and suspended and temporarily immune to consequence.

What I remember most now is how much she cared about my happiness without performance or strategy. She paid attention to what pleased me with almost frightening sincerity. Even during something as stupid as grocery shopping, she kept trying to predict what would make me smile. What I'd want. What I'd like.

She wanted me happy.

And maybe that terrified me more than anything else.

Back at my tiny desk, I lie down and groan at the ceiling, wondering why memory insists on behaving like this. What exactly are we supposed to learn from replaying ourselves over and over again?

Do people eventually start living more vividly inside old summers than inside their actual present lives?

Is that adulthood?

Jesus C. F. Christ.

I open an Instagram page full of fake-deep spiritual quotes posted over blurry sunsets.

Rumi appears on my screen like an algorithmic hallucination.

"How did you people survive love without completely losing your minds?" I ask him internally.

The imaginary version of him smiles patiently.

"By surrendering to it before it turned into ego."

"That sounds emotionally expensive."

"It was."

"And writing helped?"

"No," imaginary Rumi replies. "Writing was just what remained after feeling became too large to contain quietly."

I stare at the ceiling.

"So what happens if you never surrender?"

"Then," he says gently, "you spend years trying to intellectualize what your heart already understood immediately."

I laugh to myself.

“Okay,” I whisper. “That one was annoyingly good.”

Outside, the city glows beneath the heat of an approaching sunset.

I continue walking through it with a sweaty coffee mug in my hand and her memory dissolving through my bloodstream like fruit juice mixed with vodka.

And somewhere between nostalgia and self-disgust, I find myself wondering:

How many times have people genuinely wanted me happy without me realizing it until much later?

Part II. Blueberry July.

What if?

What could have been?

Why not?

Dangerous questions, honestly. The kind that fire up the group chat. My four closest friends and I could stretch those questions across entire weeks if left unsupervised. At this point, the chat is basically a collective life-support machine during lockdown.

And now that I’m revisiting that summer with her, another thought keeps pushing its way into the room:

How durable are the relationships we build?

Because if I could miss her this deeply, this suddenly — if I could still remember the physical urge to abandon everything just to sit beside her on the orange couch and touch her slowly, absentmindedly, not even sexually, just lovingly — then how did I also find it so easy to end things the way I did?

And if I could do that to her, could I eventually do it to anyone?

My friends included.

Jesus Cunt F. Christ.

This is Act II.

July was more intense.

Once two people build a bubble around themselves, they eventually begin digging deeper into it. June had been surface-level sweetness. July was excavation. I wanted the

berries in her mind. The brown softness of her stomach. The strange little details no one else got access to.

She wanted more.

Actually, no.

Let me be fair for once.

She acknowledged what she wanted. I denied wanting the exact same thing.

That's more accurate.

July was violet sunsets and deep orange skies bleeding into city windows. Lana Del Rey's **Florida Kilos** through bad car speakers. Her hand inside mine during traffic. Long drives where neither of us really cared where we were going as long as the gas burned.

Eventually, after enough alcohol and enough tension and enough pretending not to notice what was obviously happening between us, we kissed in the car outside a bar.

Eleven beers had finally dissolved whatever remained of my resistance.

It was long.

Hot.

Messy.

Windows fogging.

Kind of kissing that leaves you sitting there afterward staring ahead and heaving like you've just run a 10K.

I still think about it more than I should.

July itself felt short, though. Isn't that always how it goes? The happiest periods in your life move with frightening speed, like they know they're temporary, so they might as well just get done with it.

We spent entire afternoons collapsed into the orange cushions eating tortilla chips and watching terrible movies and Game of Thrones when it was still good. The couches survived everything: sweat, wine stains, tangled clothes shoved between cushions during rushed sex, whispered promises made after midnight that neither of us fully understood yet.

One time, I asked her for a condom and somehow made the moment awkward enough to become memorable forever.

Another time, drunk beyond coherence, I asked her why she wasn't officially my girlfriend.

Honestly, if heaven exists, I hope there's a section where people gather in circles and casually confess the humiliating emotional nonsense they inflicted on each other while young. Eternity needs entertainment somehow.

July was blueberry sweet.

Blueberry sour, too.

July was lying beside her under blankets that trapped heat between our bodies until our skin stuck together uncomfortably. It was long conversations that drifted nowhere and somehow everywhere at once. She told me she liked my back. I told her I loved the color of her skin during golden hour. She told me about the family she wanted someday. I told her about my dreams in the vague narcissistic way twenty-something men describe ambition before their career humbles them properly.

I told her blueberries were my favorite fruit.

She told me hers.

I forgot which one it was.

Knowing her, it was probably something expensive and organic.

The problem was that I was still resisting everything.

Denial is an ugly river, but it comes with an incredibly effective self-protective dam.

Because when I allowed myself to be honest, every emotional road led back to her. The terrifying thing about intimacy is how quickly someone begins colonizing your thoughts without permission.

She became familiar to me in dangerous ways.

Her obsession with natural products.

Her hatred of the heroin-chic aesthetic.

The way she immediately disliked every girl vaguely orbiting my life.

The way she wanted me specifically.

Not casually.

Not temporarily.

Me.

And I think that's when I started panicking internally.

Because wanting someone is exciting.

But being genuinely wanted by them?

That's... exposure, responsibility. That's suddenly becoming visible.

So instead of stepping closer, I climbed down from the pedestal she'd built for me and watched her desperately try to pull me back onto it with emotional rope burns across her hands.

And what did I do?

I ate blueberries in the sun wearing half-unbuttoned linen shirts and expensive sunglasses, pretending I wasn't directly contributing to her unravelling.

Round of applause for the emotionally avoidant pretty boys, everyone.

One night in July, we ended up on the isolated terrace of a rooftop bar her best friend had gotten us access to. Two bottles of wine disappeared between us slowly while the city exhaled hot wind against our skin.

I remember watching her talk.

Not even the conversation itself.

Just her.

The movement of her hands.

The softness in her expression.

Alcohol made everything inside me tender back then. It dissolved the performance. Stripped away the cool-guy detachment I spent so much energy maintaining.

At one point, she started telling me about her grandfather.

The way she described him broke something open in me quietly.

And sitting there beneath violet July skies with wine-stained lips and sweat painting my collars, I realized something terrifying:

I wanted to be with her.

Not temporarily.

Not sexually.

Actually with her.

Unfortunately, realization and emotional capability are not the same thing.

Because the moment intimacy began feeling real, my defence mechanisms put on their riot police uniform.

The walls went back up.

Walls embroidered beautifully with selfishness, ego, fear of commitment, emotional avoidance and the endless search for newer distractions. More bodies. More validation. More temporary people who asked nothing meaningful from me.

Dating apps.

Late-night “you up?” conversations.

Pixelated dick pics.

The exhausting choreography of:

Hey.

How you doing?

Got a place?

And inside all those repetitive interactions, I found absolutely nobody.

No one else ever told me stories about their grandfather while making me look at them like they were the only stable thing in the room.

Back at my tiny desk, I stare at the ceiling again wondering why I’m even writing any of this down.

To soothe myself?

To confess?

To romanticize my own emotional failures?

Or maybe because memory feels safer than present reality.

I reopen the fake-spiritual Instagram page.

“Any advice tonight?” I ask imaginary Rumi.

This version of him looks exhausted by me already.

“Young men like you,” he says, “mistake emotional distance for wisdom.”

“Ouch.”

“You stand outside your own feelings pretending observation is the same thing as understanding.”

I take another sip of laced coffee.

“So what was I supposed to do?”

“Feel something fully before trying to analyze it to death.”

“That sounds unstable.”

“It is,” he replies. “That’s why people write poetry afterward.”

I laugh despite myself.

Outside, July continues glowing in memory exactly the way all dangerous months do — beautifully, falsely, forever suspended before the collapse.

And somewhere inside that violet haze, I still see us exactly as we were:

young,
sunburnt,
slightly drunk,
emotionally doomed,
and beautiful enough to mistake temporary happiness for permanence.

Part III. August Kiwi.

In recalling August, this pandemic-stricken August, my memory begins blurring at the edges.

You can probably guess why.

I lie on my bed now, drifting somewhere between sleep and chemical sedation, dreaming in pale green tones and supermarket fluorescence. My thoughts move slowly through aurora-colored fog, trying to reconstruct that summer into something meaningful instead of merely beautiful.

Maybe reminiscence is only an attempt at redesigning emotional damage into narrative.

The caffeine and Xanax in my bloodstream seem to agree. They guide me gently toward the uncomfortable center of things.

Because the truth is, my story with her remains important for one reason above all others: it revealed something deeply wrong with me.

I get bored too quickly.

I crave novelty too intensely.

I romanticize instability.

And eventually, everything meaningful begins suffering diminishing emotional returns inside my head.

That’s what happened with her.

That’s what happened with almost everyone after her too.

I built my identity around movement, ideas, possibility, flirtation, fantasy, all the sparkling things that disappear the moment someone asks you to stay still long enough to be loved properly.

In half-conscious flashes, I still see us that August.

Dancing in her room.

Hiding from her roommate while half-naked and laughing too loudly.

Looking at each other across the couch during Oscar acceptance speeches as though we were both secretly imagining future versions of ourselves.

One night, she wiped tears off my acne-riddled face while I drunkenly sang Beyoncé's *Halo* with the liberty of a man who absolutely could not process his own feelings sober.

I filmed her constantly back then.

For projects.

For memories.

For myself.

I see her exactly as I've tried describing her to you:

warm,

attentive,

emotionally brave,

slightly chaotic,

far too willing to love me honestly.

And all of it ended because I did not know what I wanted.

Or worse, because I did know and lacked the courage to admit it.

Sometimes, lying in isolation with chemically softened thoughts floating around me like dust particles in sunlight, I imagine impossible alternate lives for us.

Versions where we survived each other.

Versions where we moved into some ridiculous house made entirely from recycled kiwi cartons, pink and green against golden sunsets, absurdly happy in the kind of way only emotionally unstable people fantasize about.

That imaginary kiwi house has become important to me.

Not because it's realistic.

Because it represents the version of myself that almost crossed the border between self-preservation and love.

Almost.

But not fully.

August itself was pale green and lukewarm.

The cooling-off month.

The month where intimacy became too real and therefore immediately threatening to me.

I started feeling smothered by how close we had become. Her body stopped giving me that immediate electric rush, not because she became less beautiful, but because my brain had already started protecting itself through emotional withdrawal.

August felt like washing sacredness off something.

Chlorine thrown over old gravestones.

Like a drag queen removing makeup alone after a beautiful performance. The glitter remains around the sink, but the illusion itself is already over.

We started trying to behave more formally with each other after that.

More controlled.

More casual.

I realized I was unfit for the kind of stability she wanted. Unfit for love might be dramatic.

But at twenty-something years old, drama often feels more emotionally accurate than moderation.

I liked denial too much.

Denial was spacious.

Reality asked things from me.

Reality wanted permanence.

Reality wanted accountability.

And I preferred fantasy because fantasy never demanded consistency.

Like kiwi peel, difficult truths are technically digestible if you commit hard enough.

There's your fun fact for the day.

Still, despite all my distancing, all my emotional choreography, all my pretending not to care — I completely lost my mind when she kissed my best friend at a party.

Funny.

The emotionally unavailable guy suddenly discovering emotional availability through jealousy.

I still remember walking toward her afterward.

Still remember the rage moving through me like overheated electricity.

Still remember saying it.

“I love you.”

And the worst part?

For twenty seconds, I think I meant it completely.

Her face softened instantly.

Hope arrived too quickly in her eyes.

Then I destroyed it.

Because immediately afterward, I started spitting venom like a frightened animal cornered by its own feelings.

“Someone I love wouldn’t hook up with my best friend for attention.”

The sentence escalated.

Violently.

Cruelly.

I called her things I knew would wound her permanently because wounded men often become desperate little architects of destruction.

She grabbed her purse, charger and phone with trembling hands and left.

And just like that, August ended.

What haunts me now is not the cruelty itself.

It’s the possibility that the first three words were honest before fear contaminated them.

Back at my desk, I stare at the ceiling fan rotating slowly above me.

“Who the fuck did I think I was?” I ask imaginary Rumi.

This version of him doesn’t answer immediately.

Finally, he says:

“Someone trying very hard to avoid surrender.”

“I hurt her.”

“Yes.”

“I think I loved her.”

“Yes.”

“Then why did I ruin it?”

“Because some people would rather destroy tenderness than risk depending on it.”

That one sits heavily inside me.

Outside, the city glows softly through the window.

Cars passing.

Balconies lit.

Someone laughing in the distance.

Everyone carrying their own little emotional apocalypse through summer nights.

I lie there thinking about swipes, rent, minimum wage, digital exhaustion, ego, sex, loneliness and the strange tragedy of becoming emotionally fluent while remaining emotionally incapable.

A generation raised on intimacy simulators.

And somewhere inside all that noise sits the kiwi house:

pink,

green,

sunlit,

impossible.

A place where maybe I became softer before it was too late.

I wonder now whether love had actually tried to save me back then and I simply rejected the concept because salvation sounded too much like surrender.

Maybe that's what adulthood really is: realizing some people arrived in your life offering genuine tenderness while you were still too busy performing invulnerability to recognize it.

My eyes begin closing. The room softens.

And in that drifting state between sleep and memory, I imagine Rumi floating beside me holding out her number on the glowing screen of his iPhone.

I peeled that kiwi.

I can't undo that.

The only thing left now is wondering whether there's still enough sweetness inside me to salvage once all the skin finally comes off.