

Forever?

I watched some people set up a proposal the other day.

We were there for my grandma's garden club event, and we were just cleaning up. But here they came, to set up. They brought so many roses. Roses in vases, roses on a large gold ring, roses in petals to scatter all around, rose clusters. A giant bouquet of *white* roses to sit in the middle of a crimson rose petal heart.

Roses are classic. Too classic. Why would he pick roses?

It had just been raining here. The lake extended beyond the elevated shelter in an expanse of hazy gray. Little mountains, little trees. "He still wants to propose," they said. So they set up roses in the drizzle.

As white roses sat starkly against red, so excitement sat with anxiety inside of me.

The proposal wasn't about me, so I shouldn't have put my own worries into it. But they were there. If you attend a Bible college for long enough, you see people pair off one by one, get married after a matter of months, find their forever when it feels like you're incapable of feeling.

I had a dream the night before the proposal. I dreamed my ex told us he was getting engaged to his girlfriend. Apparently I knew before a lot of other people did, and in spite of my fear and loneliness, my dream self hugged him, joy as the sun breaking through the haze over the lake. He told me he couldn't have gotten where he was without me. I felt remembered. Seen. Seen in an odd dream. Seen despite my own fear ending my first relationship, and my terrifying lack of feeling ending the second.

What does it mean to love? What does it mean to be at the driver's seat of my life, making decisions based off of my own fickle feelings, saying goodbye to wonderful people

based on inklings and doubts? What does it mean to only be comfortable with daydreams, fear consuming whatever chances to come true?

The proposal was taking shape, now. They always found something new to add. More petals between the vases, more petals along the heart. Candles, of course. He'd show her this spot after a nice dinner. He'd be arriving soon.

Oh, beautiful. The sun parted the clouds but the rain continued to sprinkle. "I hope the rain stops before they get here," a lady said. "Isn't it more romantic this way?" I countered.

I write romance all the time, whenever a good story pops into my head. But it's not typical romance. It's about two good friends who have all the chemistry they need, but they don't talk about it. They just care for each other.

Perhaps that's the kind of situation in which someone would say "when you know, you know." I hate that phrase. It's usually used by Christian couples who've been dating for a few months and will likely break up in another month. I've seen Christian couples break up, but not the couples who've used that phrase. Not yet. So I don't have any proof. I just sit back and guess if they'll last.

I've seen marriage after marriage fail. He was cheating. She fell out of love and couldn't find it again. He was drinking. Whatever the story, the commitment ends, and starry-eyed college kids try and tell me it's a sin. Wait till your own parents get divorced. Wait till you hear the ins and outs you can barely explain. Wait till there are two people you love and have loved forever, and they do what they think is right, and you believe it's right, too. Then tell me it's a sin. Then tell me "when you know, you know." Then pretend your four-month-long relationship was ordained by God to last forever. Then think, really *think*, about whether or not you're able to promise forever at that altar.

Here they come, the family buzzed, pressed against the back wall of the shelter. *Let's hide*. I was unduly excited. So excited that I hid with them, all selfish-like, back around the corner, camera out, hoping I wasn't in their way. There came the couple, hand in hand. She smiled big but didn't cry. He pulled out a white ring box, got down on one knee. She said yes, yes in the rain, and he slid the ring onto her finger, and the family had three different cameras going at once, and the couple hugged. What was she feeling? How wild it must be to be so in love with someone that you're able to commit to forever. What *I* felt in that moment, despite my lack of romantic luck, was joy.

Why doesn't the woman ever propose? It must be fun to set up an intricate display and show your love to someone. Feelings come rare for me, but they're there. For people who feel rarely, the chances are ever lower. Ever lower.

"Your day will come," said my grandma as I gazed at the couple taking pictures.

"Sometimes I doubt it," I said. But deep down, I didn't. Not yet. I held a futile hope that I'd feel, and he'd feel, and we'd love, and maybe it really would be forever. Would I even want it to be forever?

For now, I walked through the dashes of rain to my little white car, and I sent the proposal to my parents, and I put on my music, and I drove home alone.

Perhaps being alone is better. Perhaps I could write romance all my life, alone in my little house, filling my head with fantasy and feeding off of stories I'll never live. A parasite to my own imagination. Perhaps fiction is better than the real thing. Perhaps my fragile ego and strong will aren't cut out to share my forever with anyone but myself. Is growing worth the pain?

Perhaps I'll never know. But on that rainy day, in my little car, I had my music. I had my stories. I had my freedom to do whatever I wanted to do, be whoever I wanted to be, go wherever

I wanted to go, and invent an infinity of stories to take me there. And those few golden things—for now—would have to be enough.